



# COUNTY OF YOLO

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## **Yolo County and Community Partners Provide Housing for Hundreds of Individuals Living Homeless During COVID-19**

(Woodland, CA) – The Yolo County Health and Human Services Agency (HHS) partnered with the Cities of West Sacramento, Davis and Woodland as well as eight motels across the County and service providers to serve approximately 390 homeless individuals and house an average of 202 individuals per night through Project Room Key from March 17 to June 29.

In an effort to house and protect individuals experiencing homelessness and vulnerable individuals during the COVID-19 crisis, the State of California launched Project Room Key with the objective of protecting public health, isolating the medically vulnerable and thinning out shelters to allow for social distancing. On April 3, 2020, Yolo County was recognized by Governor Gavin Newsom for leading the way in providing non-congregate shelter for those experiencing homelessness during the pandemic. Yolo County obtained a \$600,000 grant from the County Medical Services Program to cover the initial costs of behavioral health services as well as funding from Dignity and Sutter to cover the costs of mobile medicine. Up to a 75% cost-sharing reimbursement from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) may be available to offset the costs of motel rooms, security, food, and laundry.

To provide essential services, Project Room Key required the teamwork of many local partners, including: two local restaurants, Broderick's Roadhouse, Savory Café; Empower Yolo; Yolo County Children's Alliance; Turning Point; CommuniCare; Love Laundry; Agency of Aging Area 4; and the Yolo Food Bank. Project Room Key participants ranged in age from two to 94, with the mean age of 50 years old. At the peak of the project, 240 rooms were available with the mean length of stay being approximately 59 nights. During their stay, each individual was provided with the following assistance onsite at each motel:

- Aid in applying for Medi-Cal as well as help in understanding their qualifications for various benefits (i.e. CalFresh, CalWorks, and General Assistance)
- Assistance in completing housing applications
- Procurement of medical care, mental health screenings or substance use screening appointments
- COVID-19 testing, as warranted

As individuals exit the program, some will return to emergency shelters or previous dwellings, while others may obtain vouchers or subsidized housing. Whether individuals obtain long term housing or not, many participants have had remarkable experiences.

"I don't know how to thank you all enough for all of what you're doing for us out here. I've been staying at the shelter but got pneumonia back in March and was in the hospital. I have a bad heart, and my kidneys don't work how they're supposed to," said one participant. "We knew with this virus I'd be at risk. Somebody from the

county called me on up and I got this room where I can rest and recover. They've got a doctor and meals and laundry out here, and I get some peace of mind."

"I don't know what I'd do without Project Room Key. I'm on dialysis and have asthma" said another participant. "I lost my home last year and have been staying in my car or at the shelter. This room makes me feel safe so I can stay inside, and away from COVID."

"I've never been in this situation before. I went through a divorce last year and lost everything. I take medications for my heart, and when I was diagnosed with COVID I thought I was going to die in my car," said a third participant. "Project Roomkey got me a room, checked on me daily to make sure I was okay during the worst I've ever felt in my life. You put your own lives at risk to come check on us and give us meals and meds and make us feel like we matter here. Thank you."

Project Room Key continues to be an amazing community driven effort to care for some of the most vulnerable individuals and provides an opportunity for service providers to reach those who may otherwise shy away from assistance. It has been a true demonstration of what can be accomplished when partners come together utilizing a housing first approach in a united effort to protect public health and isolate the medically vulnerable.

HHSA received a portion of the [County CARES](#) allocation to continue Project Room Key through December 2020 and is working with all involved parties to determine appropriate options for sustainable housing and services. For more information on Project Room Key, please email Ian Evans at [Ian.Evans@Yolocounty.org](mailto:Ian.Evans@Yolocounty.org).

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