



Physicians, social workers, nurses, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, care managers, and other health professionals from hospital systems throughout NYC have observed the unfair toll the COVID-19 crisis is having on the homeless population. Over 500 signed a letter to city and state leaders expressing concerns and recommendations.

Below are some of the many comments they left when signing the letter.

“Our homeless population is facing an enormous health crisis during this COVID-19 epidemic, especially when many of them are older and have many medical problems. They need a safe environment to protect themselves and their welfare will help to flatten the curve for the rest of New York City.”

“My patient was COVID positive and placed in a hotel after being discharged from the ED. It took more than 5 days for him to get his medications (both his baseline COPD meds and the antibiotics prescribed to him in the ED) despite the fact that I called DHS operations several times. They seemed overwhelmed.”

“The current process is inadequate and time consuming. Multiple homeless patients under my care with symptoms concerning for COVID-19 become frustrated with the extensive (I've seen up to 12-15hr) waits for placement and simply walk out to potentially infect others.”

“The homeless population was already underserved prior to the Pandemic. I am of the belief that as a society we can pull together to better service the underserved. Indeed it should be an honor to represent those that are unable to advocate for themselves...This is a time for compassion.”

“We are all at risk from the outbreak. Having homeless people by the tens of thousands in congregate housing leaves an opportunity for further transmission and having many more vectors. Our empty hotels should be put to use for our public health.”

“Any of us can experience homelessness at any time. It is everyone's duty to care for and protect ALL citizens in our communities.”

“We need more clarity as to how to help the homeless.”

“I work with many homeless patients that are expressing utter despair and hopelessness.”

“I'm so scared for my homeless patients. They tell me there is no separation from other residents, and if one person gets sick I know everyone else there will too. There isn't enough staff to do proper cleaning, and I worry they won't get adequate nutritious food.”

“Families residing in shelters are having a very difficult time accessing food and have limited internet to complete telehealth visits. Telemedicine not reaching those most in need.”

“Food insecurity is another big issue, people are not able to afford the necessary items to keep them healthy during this crisis.”

“I have a few pregnant patients who are not getting extra support and resources at this time. For example, they still have to take the subway to get to prenatal appointments and aren't being [socially] distanced from others in their shelter.”

“I have serious concerns about overburdening our hospitals due to the lack of swift response from the federal government, which has caused a ripple effect. This has a disproportionately damaging impact on the most vulnerable Americans, especially New York's vast homeless population. We need extra protections in place NOW!”

“We need universal screening for social determinants of health, including homelessness.”

“We really need rapid testing for COVID-19 in our 10 shelter sites. We have no way of separating non-COVID-19 illness from other conditions.”

“There is a lot to write, but the biggest concerns I have are the abuse that people are facing, the neglect from the case managers, the poor communication occurring, the lack of resources for significantly ill clients who already have respiratory issues, the lack of concerns for belongings that clients have when they are being shuffled into quarantine.”

“I see many homeless people on my way to and from work. They do not have masks and are unable to social distance. I also have patients who live in crowded shelters where social distancing is also not possible. We need adequate housing for these folks so that they can stay safe!”

“Masks should have been given to shelter clients and majority have yet to receive any.”

“Many people in the shelter system are powerless and we need to give them back their dignity and respect, let's show some compassion for our people.”

“Extra support for the vulnerable is urgently needed. Disease control in this population is desperately needed to effectively fight this disease.”

“Those who are homeless are unable to socially isolate, they have no health insurance, and therefore have very limited or no resources when they are dealing with COVID-19.”

“There are no safe places to isolate [the] homeless population when they have symptoms of COVID virus. When discharging hospital social workers are bounced from place to place on where to send the patient.”

“We desperately need more help for this population (health care, homes, food and safety). They have nothing!!!!”

“Homeless New Yorkers are suffering from COVID-19 and need help.”

“Still have a fair amount of homeless high utilizers that present to the Emergency Department.”

“How and why would we discharge homeless patients with COVID-19 back to their shelters? Terrible infectious disease decisions and it will make the pandemic worse and longer in NYC.”

“I work in a substance abuse clinic and many patients who are homeless are staying in city shelters and are unable to follow social distancing and other recommendations made by public health professionals. I completely and totally support this effort.”

“I know that homelessness is often linked to mental illness. There needs to be great cooperation between the DOHMH and Dept of Homeless services to get the mental health and case management infrastructure robust enough to manage these public health challenges.”

“People are fleeing homeless shelters out of fear of COVID. What are the steps shelters are doing to help with mental health?”

“We work with the homeless, they need maximum assistance, will be the most vulnerable and also most likely to transmit COVID. They all need masks and a place to stay.”

“The aftercare plans in terms of homeless people who do not have established medical providers is a challenge. The homeless people who are undocumented are also presenting challenges!”

“Our [homeless] population [has] been severely affected by this disease. We must do better for our fellow New Yorkers.”

“Those who are homeless are unable to socially isolate.”

“Gravely concerned for our homeless clients who are homeless and/or in shelters.”

“Homeless people without any medical necessity have been picked up by NYPD and brought to [the] ED where there are high cases of COVID-19 infection, putting them at risk of infection with the virus.”

“I feel like the homeless patients we care for (largely sheltered families, but some homeless street youth) as well have been left largely on their own to figure things out by DHS. There does not seem to be any clear plan, such as getting proper masks for shelter residents.”

“It is incumbent on our elected officials to protect the health of our most vulnerable patients, including those experiencing homelessness.”
