COVID-19: Pandemic Response Guide

Housing practitioners across the country have responded to the rapidly evolving COVID-19, or Coronavirus, outbreak in a variety of ways. This document provides a brief overview of the strategies localities have been utilizing to keep their communities safe during the novel coronavirus pandemic. Click here to access a full list of resources.

Reducing the spread of infection among residents, tenants, and employees.
Tenants, property managers, and those providing housing services are implementing personal hygiene, sanitation, and social distancing practices to mitigate the virus’s spread. According to the NYC Department of Health, property managers should pay special attention to cleaning and sterilizing common areas (i.e. laundry rooms, playrooms, etc.) as well as frequently-touched surfaces, such as door handles and light switches. If a property manager becomes aware of a sick tenant, landlords and/or property managers should contact local authorities about proper infection-containment instructions, plans, and resources.

Helping people stay in their homes.
Financial hardship brought on by the economic effects of this pandemic puts many low-income families at risk of foreclosure, eviction, and homelessness. As such, localities across the country have stopped serving evictions and begun issuing tenant protections to prevent homelessness and overcrowding. For example, New York City’s Department of Housing Preservation and Development is automatically extending housing vouchers that are set to expire. Furthermore, the Federal Housing Administration has announced mortgage payment assistance to distressed borrowers as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Protecting individuals experiencing homelessness.
People experiencing homelessness are particularly vulnerable. The NYC Department of Health recommends that homeless service providers protect their clients by conducting simple screenings at intake, creating staggered mealtime and bathing schedules, and rearranging beds to provide more space between them. Additional suggested practices include separating those with respiratory illnesses and implementing prevention strategies to minimize exposure. Many localities have also begun sheltering homeless individuals in hotels.

Maintaining business operations.
Housing providers, like other businesses, must continue operations throughout the pandemic. If a building owner is not able to fulfill their obligations to tenants, they may face legal ramifications. As such, landlords and property managers should create disaster plans in anticipation of possible service interruptions, supply delivery delays, and labor shortages.

To prevent the spread of the disease, property management firms and government agencies have been shifting towards remote work and generally restricting interactions between residents and staff. Landlords and property managers should encourage tenants to pay rent electronically or through the mail. For essential and/or emergency operations, workers should practice proper hygiene and infection prevention strategies.

Communicating with transparency.
During this time of uncertainty, maintaining ongoing communications with tenants and service providers is critical. Property managers and housing practitioners should consider establishing a communication protocol to inform residents, employees, suppliers, and other stakeholders of the steps that are being undertaken to maintain business operations while addressing the severity of the pandemic, as well as what steps they encourage tenants/residents to take. Materials should be offered in multiple languages and through a variety of media to ensure inclusivity and access.