At Newly Converted Motel, Governor Newsom Launches Project Roomkey: A First-in-the-Nation Initiative to Secure Hotel & Motel Rooms to Protect Homeless Individuals from COVID-19

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State is securing thousands of isolation rooms in hotels and motels for extremely vulnerable individuals experiencing homelessness to help flatten the curve & preserve hospital capacity

California is the first in the nation to secure FEMA approval for 75 percent federal cost-share for this life-saving mission & create a model for other states

National Alliance to End Homelessness: "Project Roomkey sets a strong example"

Chef José Andrés's World Central Kitchen to provide meals to individuals experiencing homelessness living in some hotels

SACRAMENTO – Today, Governor Gavin Newsom announced that California has become the first state in the nation to secure FEMA approval to provide safe isolation capacity for tens of thousands of people experiencing homelessness in California in order to protect them and the state from COVID-19.

The state's effort, Project Roomkey, has set an initial goal of securing up to 15,000 rooms for this purpose and county partners have moved 869 homeless individuals most vulnerable to COVID-19 off the street, out of shelters, and into isolation.

Today's announcement means state and local governments will receive up to 75 percent cost-share reimbursement from FEMA for hotel and motel rooms, including wraparound supports such as meals, security, and custodial services. Essential behavioral health and health care services will also be provided by the local governments and community partners, as needed.

These emergency protective measures will protect public health by isolating the medically vulnerable, thinning out the shelter population for social distancing, slowing the rate of spread of COVID-19 and, in turn, flattening the curve.

"Homeless Californians are incredibly vulnerable to COVID-19 and often have no option to self-isolate or social distance," said Governor Newsom. "By helping the most vulnerable homeless individuals off the street and into isolation, California can slow the spread of COVID-19 through homeless populations, lower the number of people infected and protect critical health care resources. We're working hard with our county partners to get these hotels up and running as rapidly as possible."

The National Alliance to End Homelessness praised the project.

"Through Project Roomkey, California has taken the lead in protecting homeless residents from COVID-19," said Alliance president Nan Roman. "This initiative sets a strong national example of how state leaders can leverage their dollars with FEMA, HUD and other federal funds to address the needs of the most vulnerable homeless populations in this crisis and protect public health. The National Alliance to End Homelessness applauds Governor Newsom and the State of California on this innovative commitment."

California is pioneering a different approach to this emergency by working collaboratively with the hospitality sector with a goal to bring more than 15,000 hotel units online as quickly as possible.

Through this effort, the state will provide dedicated support teams to counties, including assistance in identifying hotels, negotiating and executing operating agreements, and providing the local providers technical assistance in keeping the records necessary to receive federal reimbursement. Local governments are able to utilize the $150 million in emergency homeless aid that Governor Newsom and the Legislature made available to combat COVID-19.

Project Roomkey will target hotels in counties with significant homeless populations that are also experiencing high concentrations of COVID-19 transmission. Local governments to date have secured 6,867 hotel and motel rooms for this purpose.

Every hotel/motel within Project Roomkey will include essential wraparound services, such as custodial, laundry, security and support staff. The Governor also announced a partnership with Chef José Andrés's World Central Kitchen, which will provide three meals a day to select Project Roomkey hotels through a statewide contract to support local efforts as needed.

To provide safer options during the COVID-19 pandemic, Project Roomkey isolation units serve three critical public health purposes:

- Prioritize individuals experiencing homelessness who are asymptomatic, but are at high risk, such as people over 65 or who have certain underlying health conditions, and move them into motel or hotel units where they can more safely self-isolate.
- Provide isolation capacity for individuals experiencing homelessness who have been exposed to COVID-19 (as documented by a state or local public health official, or medical health professional) that do not require hospitalization, but need isolation or quarantine; and
- Provide isolation capacity for individuals experiencing homelessness who are COVID-19 positive, but who don't need hospitalization. Without these isolation units, their only choice is to return to a congregate shelter setting or back to an encampment – both of which would lead to further spread of COVID-19.

The local governments are responsible for identifying which shelter clients or encampment residents are selected for these hotel isolation placements and transporting them to the hotels for intake.

The Governor's ongoing efforts to deploy 1,305 trailers to local governments continues to progress. Trailers, purchased by the state and operated by the local governments, serve the same function as the hotels and complement the efforts of Project Roomkey. The state has purchase orders in place, and executes them and delivers the trailers as local governments provide deployment locations. To date, the state has purchased and deployed 584 trailers. The Governor also announced today the state will receive an additional 28 trailers through philanthropic support in partnership with Homeful, a California-based nonprofit focused on eradicating homelessness.

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