



## SAFER GROUND HOTEL VOUCHER PROGRAM

In response to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) public health crisis, Alameda County officials in concert with federal, state, and city officials have initiated emergency protective measures to help homeless individuals in Alameda County to obtain short-term or emergency non-congregate sheltering (NCS) resources. Safer Ground is a program that serves asymptomatic high-risk individuals needing physical distancing as a precautionary measure, such as people over 65 or with certain underlying health conditions. The Safer Ground hotel voucher program is part of this initiative. Information about other COVID-19 sheltering resources can be found at the following website: <http://www.acphd.org/2019-ncov/isolation-housing.aspx>

The Safer Ground hotel voucher program requires that eligible households and their service provider(s) identify a non-congregate living situation that can provide emergency housing for the household. The housing site must provide for a private room and bathroom. The site must also be willing to accept payment from the County via a mailed check or the service agency can provide payment and the County can reimburse the agency via a mailed check. Please note that you cannot verify that a household will receive assistance from this fund until you have received written approval from Alameda County Health Care Services Agency (HCSA) staff. The fund does not pay for holding deposits, damages or incidentals, and the household will be responsible for any charges beyond the nightly rate, including associated taxes and fees. Service providers must agree to provide support to Safer Ground hotel voucher program recipients for the duration of their participation in the program.

Safer Ground hotel voucher program resources are approved for up to 30 days at a time for eligible households. Extensions can be granted on a month-to-month basis depending on the status of the public health emergency and the needs of the individual household but no more than 90 days of assistance will be provided. If an extension is required, please send a written request at least 7 days prior to the current stay ending to [COVIDHOUSING@acgov.org](mailto:COVIDHOUSING@acgov.org). The nightly rate must be reasonable for the market in which the hotel is located and cannot exceed \$130.00 per night, including taxes and fees. We encourage service providers to negotiate discounts for longer stays.

### Program Eligibility

- Referrals must come from an eligible service provider working with an eligible household or individual. Eligible service provider is defined as any person who works for an organization that provides services to the eligible population and who agrees to provide support to the household throughout their stay;
- Service provider and eligible household must identify an appropriate housing site willing to accept the applicant;
- Service provider must agree to provide ongoing support to the household throughout their participation in the Safer Ground hotel voucher Program;
- Household agrees to shelter-in-place during their stay, including:
  - Maintaining a distance of 6 feet or more from people not in the household
  - Refraining from having any visitors
  - Refraining from congregating in public spaces
  - Engaging in regular and thorough hand-washing
  - Remaining in their room except for essential trips
  - Wearing a face covering outside the room and during essential trips

Eligible households must meet criteria in BOTH Category A and B below:

### *Category A – Residential Criteria*

At the time of referral, the applicant(s) must be sleeping in one of the following locations –

- On the street or other places not meant human for habitation;



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- Emergency shelter;
- Transitional housing program for individuals experiencing homelessness;
- Exiting a health care or other institution with no identified residence at time of discharge;
- In a congregate living facility for less than 90 days with no way to self-isolate AND was sleeping in one of the above categories prior to entering the facility

### *Category B – Clinical Criteria*

At the time of referral, *one or more* members of the household must document that they meet one or more of the following medical statuses by providing medical documentation or by providing written self-certification of eligibility using the Individual High Risk Certification form. Participants approved based on self-certification must provide medical evidence to continue in the program beyond the first 30 days.

- 65 and older
- Chronic heart disease, i.e., heart failure, coronary artery disease, congenital heart disease, cardiomyopathies, pulmonary hypertension
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, emphysema, chronic bronchitis
- Type 2 diabetes mellitus
- Immunocompromised from a solid organ transplant, blood, or bone marrow transplant, immune deficiencies
- Sickle cell disease
- Obesity – Body Mass Index (BMI) >30
- Chronic kidney disease
- Poorly controlled HIV infection with a CD4 count <300 or not on HIV treatment
- Chronic steroid use or immune weakening medications
- Moderate to severe asthma
- Obstructive sleep apnea
- Active cancer diagnosis in treatment or not
- Chronic liver disease

### Clinical Documentation Requirements

When applying for the Safer Ground hotel voucher program, service providers must indicate the method of clinical documentation used for their application. For providers using the applicant self-certification process, they must obtain medical documentation of eligibility within the first 30 days of the program. Information related to helping individuals access primary care in Alameda County can be found at [www.accare.org](http://www.accare.org).

### Program Application Process

The application should be submitted by the service provider on behalf of the household seeking assistance. In order for an application to be complete, it must include all of the materials listed on the checklist below. Complete application packets should be sent to [COVIDHOUSING@acgov.org](mailto:COVIDHOUSING@acgov.org) by encrypted e-mail. Providers can expect to receive a response indicating whether or not the application has been approved within two business days. If initially denied, HCSA staff will indicate what is needed for the application to be complete, provided the applicant meets the eligibility criteria.

HCSA staff can provide written verification of the approval, which can be shared with the hotel operator. Payments can be made directly to the hotel operator or to a service agency as reimbursement for initial payment. If the service agency makes the initial payment via credit card or some other means, the vendor forms below should be completed by the service agency. If the request is to pay a hotel operator directly, the



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vendor forms must be completed by the hotel operator. Please note that you cannot verify that a household will receive assistance from this fund until you have received written approval from HCSA staff.

Once approved it can take up to 3 business days for the check to be mailed. If a service agency is seeking reimbursement, invoices should be sent every 30 days invoicing for the prior 30 days that the participant stayed at the shelter site. Program applications should be submitted to HCSA in advance in order to obtain verification that the applicant is approved, as payment is not guaranteed without written approval from HCSA staff. For applications requesting that the hotel or provider be paid in advance of the stay, payment for up to 7 days can be invoiced in advance. In this case, if a client is approved for 30 days, the service provider should submit a new invoice every week for the following week, allowing 3 days for the check to be mailed.

### Checklist of required application materials:

- Safer Ground Hotel Voucher Application Form
- Signed HMIS Release of Information
- Completed HMIS Client Profile Form (a dated printout, marked "updated" and signed by the provider will also suffice)
- Completed HMIS FEMA Intake Form
- Clinical documentation showing evidence of a qualifying medical status for any applicants under 65 years old. The birth date on the application will be used to verify clinical eligibility for applicants age 65 and older. All types of documentation should include the applicant's full name and date of birth. One of the following types of documentation is required for applicants under 65 years old:
  - o Medical records indicating a diagnosis listed above
  - o Signed documentation from a qualified healthcare provider (MD, NP, DO or PA) indicating a diagnosis listed above (see template)
  - o Individual High Risk Certification form at initial submission, with additional documentation submitted within 30 days (see template)

### Vendor forms required at time of application:

- Business Vendor Add/Update Form (for new vendors only)
- W-9 Form (for new vendors only)
- Invoice completed by the Hotel or service agency. Invoices for reimbursement should be submitted every 30 days. No more than 7 days can be paid in advance; for advanced payments invoices can be submitted weekly and should allow for at least 3 business days for the check to be mailed.
  - o Detailed receipt from the hotel must be attached if the invoice is from a service agency

We encourage providers to contact us with any questions related to eligibility, the application materials, or the requirements of the program prior to completing the application at [COVIDHOUSING@acgov.org](mailto:COVIDHOUSING@acgov.org) or by calling 510-567-8007.

Information about other COVID-19 resources can be found at <http://www.acphd.org/2019-ncov.aspx> or <https://www.achch.org/>.