

Impact of COVID-19 on homelessness

March 27 2020, by Jessica Bautista / Adam Smeltz

The coronavirus pandemic is likely to kill more than 3,400 people experiencing homelessness across the United States, according to [new estimates from researchers](#) at Boston University, the University of Pennsylvania and UCLA.

Further, the virus could hospitalize some 21,295 people who don't have housing, or about 4.3% of the nationwide homeless [population](#), the [researchers found in a report](#) that was finalized this week. Of those likely to be hospitalized, nearly 7,200 or more may require [critical care](#).

"This is a population that's advanced in age and already suffering from [poor health](#), including deteriorated immune systems," said Thomas Byrne, a co-author of the report and an assistant professor at the Boston University School of Social Work. "They are vulnerable and at high risk, but for many, it's not too late. Policymakers have a moral imperative to act now and save lives."

Nationwide, there is an immediate need for 400,000 additional emergency accommodation beds to manage the impact of the [coronavirus](#) pandemic on the homeless population, according to the report. The report estimates that the additional capacity needed to mitigate the impacts of the coronavirus will cost \$11.5 billion. It includes a county-by-county breakdown of projected regional needs and impacts.

"The [homeless population](#) faces unique vulnerabilities amidst this crisis," said Dennis Culhane, Ph.D., co-author of the report and professor at the University of Pennsylvania School of Social Policy & Practice. Culhane

is also co-principal investigator at Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy.

"Given that the public health recommendations emphasize isolation of suspected and confirmed cases, and social distancing for everyone else, a deliberate effort is urgently required to create a range of housing options to meet those needs," Culhane said.

Researchers found both U.S. shelter and health systems are ill-equipped to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness amid the pandemic. Their report includes several urgent recommendations, including procurement of new emergency housing arrangements or reconfiguration of existing shelter facilities to accommodate social distancing, as well as close collaboration among government agencies.

Provided by University of Pennsylvania

Citation: Impact of COVID-19 on homelessness (2020, March 27) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-03-impact-covid-homelessness.html>

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