

## Introduction

COVID-19 has now been confirmed for over 8 million Americans and caused more than 220,000 deaths. This virus spreads easily from person to person and symptoms range from mild to very serious. People become infected by coming into close contact with someone who has the virus, meaning that the best prevention measures include avoiding contact with others: staying home, avoiding public transportation, social distancing, wearing masks and gloves, and practicing good hygiene. However, all of these simple strategies are difficult to put into practice by people experiencing homelessness. Getting people into affordable, permanent housing is a critical step to controlling the virus, and yet costs are prohibitively high for those trying to become rehoused. Shared housing is a cost-effective arrangement that has many social and psychological benefits and makes efficient use of existing housing stock.

### *What is Shared Housing?*

Shared housing occurs when more than one person or household agree to share a permanent rental housing unit and the costs of living in that unit for the mutual benefit of all inhabitants. In essence, shared housing is two or more independent households agreeing to become roommates. This is a particularly useful strategy when a community does not have enough affordable housing, or when the cost of housing exceeds residents' ability to afford rent without assistance. Shared housing can refer to settings where people have their own rooms or living areas but share bathrooms or kitchens with others who are not members of the same household. For the purposes of this document, shared housing does not include congregate shelters, transitional housing, dorm rooms, or staff housing.

### *Shared Housing in the Time of COVID-19*

Engaging in a shared housing situation during a time when the number of people infected with COVID-19 is still on the rise means taking extra precautions. Residents of shared housing often gather for social and recreational purposes as well as for chores and may have challenges with the social distancing needed to prevent the further spread of COVID-19. When possible, roommates should discuss their plans for avoiding COVID-19 so they can assess their risk individually and collectively.

The following are a few tips for staying safe while seeking and accessing shared housing.

Individually	Collectively
Wash hands often with an ethanol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60 percent ethanol or wash with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.	All parties should be tested for COVID-19 prior to the move. Consider wearing masks indoors for the first two weeks to ensure neither party is infected. Agree to use cough and sneeze etiquette.
Refrain from visiting others' rooms, invite only essential visitors, and stagger mealtimes to reduce crowding in the shared eating area. Do not share dishes, glasses, cups, or utensils.	Restrict non-essential visitors; post signs asking visitors to stay away if they have symptoms such as fever, cough, or sore throat.
Limit the amount of time away from home and share shopping chores.	Clean common areas at least once a day: clean heavily used surfaces more frequently (e.g., doorknobs, handrails).

For more information, view Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidance on [living in shared housing](#).

## **Community Examples**

[Collier County Hunger & Homelessness Coalition](#) is coordinating the housing, shelter, and related services addressing homelessness in Southwest Florida. Since May 2020, Collier County Hunger & Homelessness Coalition has placed nearly fifty individuals experiencing homelessness, mostly living in unsheltered encampments, into rapid rehousing using shared housing. They highlight the following strategies to be critical to their successful implementation of shared housing within the pandemic.

- Honor self-identified groupings: Shared housing has been successful for people living in tent encampments and cars grouped in parking lots. These individuals were already spending a lot of time together and grouping them in shared housing did not increase or change their COVID-19 risk.
- Clean and prepare the space: The organization partners with a community-based organization, Beverly's Angels, Inc., that cleans the shared living space to prepare for the individuals to move in. They also gather donated furniture and even stock the fridge to make sure the move-in is safe and comfortable for the individuals.

[Shared Housing Services \(SHS\)](#) offers low-income individuals and families an innovative, affordable solution to prevent homelessness and foster independence. Services include case management and connections to vital community resources. This nonprofit organization is in Tacoma, Washington. Their mission is "Connecting people and fostering independence through innovative and affordable housing, because everyone needs a place to call home." All SHS programs provide for basic human needs and promote self-sufficiency for vulnerable members of the community. SHS aims to reduce and prevent homelessness by providing low-income individuals and families with safe, stable, and affordable housing. They seek innovative, individualized ways to address homelessness, reduce dependence on public funds by providing low-cost housing alternatives, and help struggling families and individuals (including youth) by connecting them to vital community resources.

The [Shared Housing Center, Inc.](#) is a Dallas, Texas program that offers housing options and supportive services to provide and foster independence, empowerment, and self-worth in a multicultural, intergenerational population. They serve critically at-risk populations including older adults, single parents with young children, non-traditional families, and people with special needs. This program offers the chance people need to leave homelessness or imminent homelessness to reach self-sufficiency. The Shared Housing Center facilitates arrangements between people who have housing and those who need it. These efforts contribute to those involved, but also build the community by preserving homes and promoting alternative housing solutions.

## **Safety First**

### **Client Choice**

This document will discuss many of the benefits of shared housing but, regardless of the benefits, it should always be the client's choice to participate in a shared housing arrangement. Many clients may want to live with one or more other people, but other clients may prefer to live alone.

### **Separate Leases and Security Deposits**

Each member of the shared housing must have a separate lease. This allows each person to take responsibility for maintaining tenancy and allows for one person to remain in the unit if one housemate chooses to leave. Each member of the household must pay a separate security deposit and each roommate covers only his/her own portion of the full rent.

### **Roommate Agreements**

Some roommates may benefit from having a written roommate agreement that covers such things as quiet hours, chores, how shared costs not included in the lease will be split, and who is responsible for caring for shared space. Roommate agreements are not required for shared housing but should include input from all roommates (see a [sample Roommate Agreement](#)).

For more information on shared housing, please see [Shared Housing: A toolkit for Supportive Services for Veterans Families \(SSVF\) and Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing \(HUD-VASH\) Programs](#).

# Sample Shared Housing Application—Finding the Right Match

Shared Housing: Sample Interview Form (to be completed by prospective matched tenants)

*Note: This can be completed during a call or virtual meeting.*

## Introduction

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone #: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Current address: \_\_\_\_\_

Current living situation: \_\_\_\_\_

Preferred start date: \_\_\_\_\_ How long do you want the arrangement to last? \_\_\_\_\_

What are your long-term plans? \_\_\_\_\_

## Personal

Are you employed? \_\_\_\_\_ If yes, where? \_\_\_\_\_

What do you do for fun/recreation? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you smoke? \_\_\_\_\_ Are you okay living with a smoker? \_\_\_\_\_

Are you a social drinker? \_\_\_\_\_ Are you okay living with a social drinker? \_\_\_\_\_

How often do you expect guests? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you expect overnight guests and if so, how often? \_\_\_\_\_

What times do you go to bed/get up? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have your own television? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your tolerance for noise? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you like to play loud music? \_\_\_\_\_

What kind of music do you like? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have a vehicle? If yes, add make, model, year: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have your own furniture? \_\_\_\_ If yes, what will you bring/provide? \_\_\_\_\_

Are you willing to share (circle if yes): Bathroom Car Kitchen Utensils/Cookware

Other living space Internet Computer Laundry machines

Do you have difficulty with stairs/do you need accommodations? (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have pets? \_\_\_\_\_ If yes, please describe: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you okay living with pets? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have any food allergies? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you maintain a special diet? \_\_\_\_\_ If yes, please describe: \_\_\_\_\_

Would you be interested in sharing some groceries/meal preparation? \_\_\_\_\_

**Cost**

Cost for rent (month): \_\_\_\_\_ Cost for utilities: \_\_\_\_\_

Other expectations (e.g., companionship, services)? \_\_\_\_\_

**References**

Please provide 3 references with names, relationship, and phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_