



# COVID-19 Response and Recovery

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Even before Public Health - Seattle & King County (PHSKC) set up an emergency action center to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak in January 2020, King County was preparing for the pandemic. As the first epicenter in the country, Executive Constantine led unprecedented actions to mobilize a regional response to save lives and fight the coronavirus disease. Federal and state sources have funded the actions below, though much of the funding—including \$262 million from the CARES Act Coronavirus Relief Fund—expires at the end of December 2020. Without additional state or federal funding, many of these programs will end shortly thereafter.

## **PUBLIC HEALTH RESPONSE**

### **Testing and Contact Tracing**

More than 25 free testing sites across King County, in partnership with Community Health Centers, provide testing in communities with limited access to health care. The SCAN Study provides free at-home testing for COVID-19 to help research partners make data-driven decisions. A team of more than 60 dedicated contact tracers in PHSKC works to stop community spread in King County.

### **Health Care System Coordination**

Public Health distributes information and coordinates resources across the health care system, collaborating with the Northwest Healthcare Response Network, Emergency Medical Services (EMS), Community Health Centers, and homeless service providers.

### **Data and Reporting**

Public Health tracks and publishes data dashboards to inform the public and support policy makers to make decisions about whether current regulations and precautions to prevent COVID-19 are adequate, need to be strengthened, or might be carefully relaxed.

### **Ensuring Access to Reliable Information**

King County works with stakeholders across government and the community to assure that people are getting the information they need, while attending to language, health literacy, and cultural sensitivity needs. Public Health also assures that schools, businesses, community organizations, and others have the information they need to safely operate within state and local rules.

## **HOMELESSNESS RESPONSE AND HOUSING RECOVERY**

### **Isolation and Quarantine Sites**

Since March, King County has operationalized four Isolation and Quarantine (I&Q) sites to provide a safe, clean, and comfortable place to stay for people who cannot safely self-quarantine or isolate in their own home, or do not have a home. More than 1,000 people stayed healthy at these I&Q sites between March and August.



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### **Support for People Experiencing Homelessness**

In an effort to slow the spread of coronavirus within an already vulnerable population, King County is working with partners across the region to create additional shelter space and a range of temporary housing options for people who do not have homes. King County has funded individual hotel vouchers for the most vulnerable people experiencing homelessness and shifted entire shelters into leased or newly purchased hotels, moving more than 700 people from congregate shelters to single room housing. The County and its partners have opened modular shelters, added emergency shelter beds, expanded existing shelters to allow residents to physically distance, made space in I&Q facilities for suspected and confirmed cases, and collaborated with Harborview Medical Center to open a center for people recovering from COVID-19 who did not require acute care. Additionally, the County has worked with health care partners and first responders to provide both proactive and reactive testing for individuals experiencing homelessness who are at shelters, hotels, encampments, and other gathering spaces.

### **Protections for Renters**

The King County Eviction Prevention and Rent Assistance Program, which provides emergency housing aid for individuals and families economically impacted by COVID-19 due to illness, lost wages, and unemployment, is expected to assist 7,700 to 10,000 households across the region.

## **ECONOMIC RECOVERY**

### **Support for Local Businesses and Community-Based Organizations**

King County is committed to helping the business community and community-based organizations respond to and recover from the pandemic. Public Health has developed extensive guidance documents to help businesses reopen safely. The County provided grants to cities, local chambers of commerce, and other community-based organizations to support economic recovery programs and the safe reopening of businesses. The Safe Start for Taverns and Restaurants (SSTAR) program conducts outreach and assessment to help restaurants, bars, and taverns increase compliance with the Governor's safe start orders. The County has provided face coverings and hand sanitizer to residents and businesses. In addition, the King County Community Response Fund is investing \$3 million in outreach efforts, including grants to help organizations meet community needs related to COVID-19.

### **Small Business Assistance Program**

King County's Small Business Assistance Program for unincorporated areas provides grant money, language support, and coaching to help small businesses apply for other funds and services to assist them through the pandemic.

### **Support for Arts, Science, Culture Organizations and Music Venues**

King County provided \$2.5 million in one-time grants to science, arts, and culture organizations and independent live music venues disrupted by COVID-19. The program is tailored to organizations that draw tourists and is designed to ease the economic burden of the pandemic while also increasing public health measures.



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### **COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**

#### **Pandemic Community Advisory Group**

The Pandemic Community Advisory Group helps share information and urge action within their respective networks to help slow the spread of COVID-19. The Advisory Group also informs PHSKC on what they are seeing in the community—both challenges and opportunities—to inform mitigation strategies.

#### **Community Navigators**

COVID-19 Community Navigators work in high-risk communities to directly disseminate information and distribute King County grant-funded resources to respond to immediate community needs. They also serve as a steering committee to inform strategies for preventing further spread of the virus.

#### **COVID-19 Health Ambassadors**

King County launched a COVID-19 Health Ambassador Program to offer outreach, education, and health promotion resources to prevent disease transmission. The ambassadors are former Metro bus drivers redeployed to engage neighborhood and community groups on the importance of social distancing, hand hygiene, wearing facial coverings, and observing phase-appropriate business and gathering standards. The ambassadors host mask giveaways at cities, parks, and other transportation stations throughout the region.

#### **Food Security**

Nearly one in 10 King County adults did not have enough to eat in June. King County has provided \$7.7M for those struggling with food insecurity, funding for foodbanks to increase capacity, and grant opportunities for farms to purchase equipment necessary for healthy work environments.

#### **Emergency Child Care for Essential Workers**

King County moved quickly to support the region's essential workers who needed child care services to be able to do their jobs. The emergency child care program is available to essential workers who live or work in King County. More than 700 child care slots were funded in the first three months of the program, and an additional \$4.3 million was provided in September.

#### **Mask Distribution**

King County used its bulk purchasing power to procure more than 25 million cloth and disposable masks at a time when supply chains made it difficult and expensive for residents and businesses to purchase quality and cost effective protective gear. The face coverings are being distributed in partnership with Amazon, Safeway, United Food and Commercial Workers International Union Local 21, chambers of commerce, cities, County Councilmembers, community organizations, churches and faith-based organizations, transit agencies, food banks, child care providers, school districts, senior centers, and other key stakeholders.



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### **CONTINUING SERVICES FOR RESIDENTS**

In addition to the work outlined above, the County made a number of changes to ensure safe operations for employees and ongoing services for residents, including:

- Ensuring physical distancing on Metro buses, suspending fare collections to limit contact, increasing the frequency of cleaning buses, and designing and installing plexi-glass shields to better protect operators.
- Changes to the courts, including virtual hearings for people who have been released pending trial and relocating civil jury trials to the Meydenbauer Center in Bellevue to allow for physical distancing.
- Reducing the population of the jail to allow for physical distancing.
- Providing a number of services online, including records and permitting.