

Ask Each Other Anything: COVID-19 Response (5th session) September 23, 2020
Q&A from Webinar Discussion amongst MNPHA Members

Operations

Unit Inspection: “we have been postponing unit inspection, but we can’t do this forever.” Are organizations doing unit inspections right now, and what is your protocols?

Winnipeg Housing: we minimize going into units and limit inspections to tasks that have to be done, such as concerns for hoarding. Our staff have a checklist to go through. We don't have a written protocol, but staffs are required to wear masks, wash and sanitize hands between units, and practice social distancing.

Visitor protocol: Any good practices?

Winnipeg housing: tenants, delivery personnel and contractors still frequent our corporate office. It's mandatory for the front desk staff to wear masks, but for the rest staff it's optional. We have to clean debit machine constantly.

Contractors need to go into the office to get keys. We now require contractors coming into the office wear masks. It's been a challenging to require compliance.

Visitor Sign-in

Western MB Seniors Housing Co-op: providing a signage and a sign-in sheet creates an expectation for visitors.

CMHA Winnipeg: we use a contactless guest sign-in system called SwipedOn. It's a sign-in system you can use on a tablet - a simple App and quick and easy way to input information. It would take the visitor a bit longer to put into information (address, phone..) for the first time, but the system remembers you and made subsequent visits faster. We actually have two ipads to cover both our upper and lower level. Website is <https://secure.swipedon.com/>

“Their chat is very useful. We use SwipedOn to know who is in the building, in case of emergency evacuation, the ipads can be taken out easily as well our specific site can be obtained via phone. It is an excellent tracking tool though. The front staff will sign guests in and out. The system records time in and out. Staff will also sign in and out. It also helps us to keep an eye on the number of people who are in the building to assist us in keeping the numbers at 50.”

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Common Rooms Management

Winnipeg Housing: we have additional cleaning schedules; and our programs have capacity limits. But there's no way we can clean everywhere, so we educate tenants to take up responsibilities for social distancing. Most tenants are compliant, but a handful who are careless make our job a bit more challenging.



Staff and Volunteers

Sick leave protocol

Winnipeg Housing:

- We take a cautionary approach: if staff have symptoms, we encourage them to stay at home. We are not limiting the days employees are away, and typically staff have a sick bank that they use.
- Our sick leave has increased 40%. We have seen an increase in costs – even though we don't replace the staff like other health care facilities, but the work is falling behind.
- We applied for a small amount of funding through the federal program (via the United Way as a charitable organizations) and put it towards a special COVID fund, using it to cover sick time costs. If the leave will be longer than 2 weeks, we encourage staff to apply for EI.
- So far the top management has been making the judgment call on a case-by-case basis. It would be good to know if other organizations have a written policy to guide decisions, however it's impossible to say no to staff when they claim they have COVID-related symptoms. There might be 5% of staff potentially taking advantage of the situation. What to do about it in the long run?
- In addition, it's also hard to quantify workload, especially when you support tenants. We are trying to develop a checklist for *Managing staff at home*.

MNPHA: there are more materials coming out on "Managing remote employees and teams". It will be a common HR need.

Supplies

Winnipeg Housing: we are preparing a busy Fall, so we've stocked up on supplies.

Brandon: Lysol wipes are still challenging to get. Everything else is fine. We got discount masks on Amazon.

Arrears/Advocacy

Are there any advocacy-related issues MNPHA should be aware of?

MNPHA: rent increase are permitted as of Oct 1st, and eviction hearing ban has been lifted as well. Let us know if there are issues with RTB, or anticipated rise of case load with October 1 resuming.

Winnipeg Housing: COVID hasn't made issues a lot worse among our 1,900 units. We always deal with 15 tenants on a monthly business. We require first a meeting between the tenant and the Tenant Resource Coordinator to figure out a payment plan. We try quite hard to work with them. We can go through their taxes for outstanding payment (under sponsor management agreements).

Kinew: our arrears situation has actually improved. Out of 400+ units, only 7 people have taken advantage of the situation. We continue working with tenants through mediated agreements. One unique situation for our tenants is that they are responsible for their utilities, and we've seen some substantial water bills. The water company is not turning off water as it's essential to clean and sanitize. After 45 days the company starts to charge tax on Kinew. So tenants who are not paying water bills end up with RTB.

