

**Contact:**

Joint Information Center  
[ECCJIC.Activation@snoco.org](mailto:ECCJIC.Activation@snoco.org)  
425-388-5170

## **Snohomish County Forms SAFE Team to Expand Emergency Outreach During COVID-19**

*A joint community effort is underway to better engage people experiencing homelessness and reduce community spread of COVID-19*

**SNOHOMISH COUNTY, Wash., April 17, 2020** – Snohomish County is expanding outreach efforts to people experiencing homelessness throughout the county through a new pilot program, the SnoCo Agencies for Engagement (SAFE) team. The SAFE team is composed of physicians, community paramedics, social workers, and law enforcement officers. The SAFE team is visiting encampments and areas where people are known to congregate to assess individuals for COVID-19 symptoms and connect them to services as needed. These efforts are part of the coordinated efforts organized by the Snohomish County Department of Emergency Management to slow the spread of COVID-19 in our community and save lives.

People experiencing homelessness may be more susceptible to negative health outcomes. Dr. Gary Goldbaum, the former Health Officer for Snohomish County and Co-Medical Director at the Snohomish County Isolation and Quarantine Facility, said the SAFE team “can do a lot to prevent the coronavirus from spreading in big ways and from having outbreaks occur.”

This expanded effort aims to reduce barriers to health care by bringing the health professionals and social workers directly to those vulnerable to COVID-19. The Snohomish Health District has reported fewer than five positive COVID-19 cases among people experiencing homelessness, but this may be due to a lack of access to medical care, testing, and knowledge of how to access resources. Dr. Eric Cooper, the Medical Program Director for Snohomish County Emergency Medical Services and one of the Medical Directors for the Snohomish County Isolation and Quarantine Facility said the SAFE team’s main goal “is to help identify people who are sick, get them screened, and provide access to the isolation and quarantine site as appropriate.”

Team members, equipped with personal protective equipment (PPE), are engaging with individuals at encampments and areas of congregation to identify individuals with symptoms consistent with COVID-19 and/or other underlying serious health issues. Individuals with symptoms consistent with COVID-19

will be offered a referral to the County's Isolation and Quarantine Facility at Angel of the Winds Arena in Everett for further testing or will be offered transportation to seek other medical care if needed.

At the isolation and quarantine site, individuals will be tested for COVID-19 and provided a safe, comfortable place to await their results. If they test positive, a bed in the isolation unit will be made available for up to seven days from the onset of symptoms or until they are not experiencing fever for 72 hours, whichever is longer. For clients with pets, services are available through Snohomish County Animal Services and Everett Animal Shelter to keep their companion safe while they recover.

As an expanded effort to protect the health and safety of the community's residents, social workers through the County's embedded social worker program will help create pathways to safe and stable housing. The SAFE team uses a coordinated and personalized services framework when providing outreach to residents who are experiencing increased barriers to accessing basic needs during COVID-19.

Numerous agencies are participating in the SAFE team effort, including Snohomish County, Everett Police Department, Everett Fire Department, South County Fire, Snohomish County Fire District 7, Lynnwood Police Department, Washington State Patrol, and Sea Mar Community Health Centers, and Northwest Ambulance Transport.

In addition to the expansion of outreach through the SAFE team, efforts to shelter people continue throughout Snohomish County. Within one month of the emergency sheltering program launched by Snohomish County and Providence Institute for a Healthier Community (PIHC), over 300 people have been sheltered through motel/hotel vouchers and at the Carnegie Resource Center.

People experiencing homelessness are encouraged to dial 2-1-1 for help.

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