

# Medical students help homeless people stay safe from COVID-19

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People experiencing homelessness are especially vulnerable when it comes to possible exposure to COVID-19. Unable to stay home and in many instances forced to congregate with others at homeless shelters and food kitchens, there is vast potential for the coronavirus to spread among this population.

In recent months, a group of medical student AMA members at George Washington (GW) University School of Medicine and Health Sciences has worked to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among homeless people in Washington, D.C.

"We really wanted to serve the D.C. homeless community," said Nicolas Leighton, a second-year medical student who is president of the medical student AMA chapter at GW. "They are being hit hard by COVID."

Find out how medical-student led projects are making a difference during the pandemic.

## Proper supplies

Helping people experiencing homelessness during the pandemic required an understanding of the need. To do that, students worked with organizations that interact and serve people without homes in the nation's capital. Through speaking with representatives from organizations such as Unity Health Care, a local network of community health centers, the medical students learned what supplies could help fight the pandemic.

From there, the students secured funding for COVID-19 care kits that would include supplies such as face masks, hand sanitizer, adhesive bandages and hand wipes. A portion of that funding came from an AMA grant offered to medical students looking to aid in the COVID-19 recovery.

That initial round of funding was enough to help assemble 50 COVID care kits. The group has since partnered with GW Hospital and raised money through community support for another 150 kits, distributing them through Unity Health Care and Miriam's Kitchen, a local organization committed to ending homelessness. The next round of COVID Cares Kits will include information on how people experiencing homelessness can get their COVID vaccines through the DC Department of Health.

Learn about five ways the pandemic may transform medical education.

## Adapting to new realities

COVID-19 has created a challenging reality for many medical students. In the earliest days of the pandemic, medical students were pulled from all direct patient interaction. While students have since moved back to the wards, pre-clinical students such as Leighton have seen restrictions on patient contact limit their ability to contribute. That's why projects like the one he and his classmates are engaged in matter so much.

"I'm really proud of our chapter and our members for adapting to the pandemic and continuing to find impactful ways to better serve our community through this trying time," Leighton said.

The AMA student chapter at GW plans to expand the program to offer additional goods and services to homeless people in Washington.

"We really wanted to create something that is sustainable—that is a pipeline to give back to the D.C. homeless community that can go past COVID," Leighton said.

The AMA has curated a selection of resources to help residents, medical students and faculty during the COVID-19 pandemic to help manage the shifting timelines, cancellations and adjustments to testing, rotations and other events at this time.