

MEDIA ADVISORY

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Preble Street is open, serving more people than ever before, and looking forward with three new programs

To meet the obstacles faced by Mainers who are experiencing homelessness and hunger — during the COVID-19 crisis and beyond — Preble Street is working with partners to create solutions

PORTLAND, ME (July 29, 2020) — In response to urgent crises such as a pandemic, independent nonprofit Preble Street continues to follow its mission to provide services that fill gaps in available public resources including shelter, affordable housing, and food; and to meet the urgent needs of people who are experiencing homelessness and hunger and cannot find help anywhere else. Since 1975, Preble Street has developed over a dozen programs as these needs expanded, and today looks forward with three new initiatives: **Mobile Food Services**, **Wellness Shelter**, and **Street Outreach Collaborative**.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic presented in Maine in March, and in continuing to make every effort to safeguard the public health of the community, Preble Street has sought input from and closely followed the guidance of epidemiologists from Maine CDC, infectious disease specialists from a local hospital, and the recommendations of the federal Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for providing services to people experiencing homelessness.

Preble Street continues to operate its housing, teen, anti-trafficking, health services, and advocacy programs as usual. In order to protect clients — many of whom are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 — the Resource Center day shelter and soup kitchen service model has been adjusted to meet CDC guidelines and advice. Instead of hundreds of people coming in and out all day at that location, Preble Street, like many social service providers around the country, has transitioned from offering site-based services at 5 Portland Street to an outreach model that mitigates the transmission of COVID-19.

By providing services at strategic locations around the City, rather than in congregate settings, Preble Street is adhering to the recommendations of the CDC to “(d)iscourage clients from spending time in crowded places or gathering in large groups, for example at locations where food, water, or hygiene supplies are being distributed”¹ and to HUD’s guidance to utilize outreach workers to “support households living outside by distributing supplies including: water for drinking and washing, hand sanitizer, food items, information about how to limit infection and where to seek medical care.”²

Adherence to this expert advice has resulted in the modification of services provided by Preble Street at 5 Portland Street:

- The Resource Center Soup Kitchen is now **MOBILE FOOD SERVICES**, a permanent food production and distribution facility. 100% of food goes out to people — they don't have to come to a soup kitchen. **By switching to an all “to-go” model in response to COVID-19, Preble Street is reaching more people than ever before — more than 100,000 meals a month.** The agency will utilize a mobile pantry to distribute emergency food boxes to families, seniors, and New Mainers.
- Plans are at the ready to transform the Resource Center day shelter into a 24/7 full-service **WELLNESS SHELTER** for 40 people. Social work professionals trained in de-escalation and clinical assessment skills will provide comprehensive services, and meals, laundry, and other basic needs/services will be available on-site.
- Recognizing that there are more unsheltered people in Portland now than ever before, the new client-centered **STREET OUTREACH COLLABORATIVE** (“social work without walls”) provides people with food and much more: outreach workers provide casework services, PPE and other basic necessities, and facilitate access to critical resources, including information about COVID-19, emergency shelter, housing supports, medical and behavioral health care, and substance use treatment. This service model aligns with public health and homeless services experts’ recommendations to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19 by allowing people who are unsheltered to remain where they are, rather than travelling to access food, basic necessities, and other services.

In addition to providing emergency services including food, new shelters, the Joe Kreisler Teen Shelter and Teen Center, and the Florence House Women’s Shelter, Preble Street continues to operate three Housing First programs — Logan Place, Huston Commons, and Florence House apartments — as well as case management and housing support with our Anti-Trafficking Services and Veterans Housing Services.

¹U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Interim Guidance on Unsheltered Homelessness and Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) for Homeless Service Providers and Local Officials. Atlanta: U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2020. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/homeless-shelters/unsheltered-homelessness.html>

²U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development. Infectious Disease Toolkit for Continuums of Care: Preventing & Managing the Spread of Infectious Disease for People Experiencing Homelessness. Landover, Md.: The Cloudburst Group, 2020. <https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Infectious-Disease-Toolkit-for-CoCs-Preventing-and-Managing-the-Spread-of-Infectious-Disease-for-People-Experiencing-Homelessness.pdf>

Preble Street is a nonprofit human service agency serving the most vulnerable people in Maine since 1975 through innovative, best-practice, client-centered programs. In addition to the largest direct service emergency food program in northern New England, Preble Street operates low-barrier programs throughout Maine providing 24/365 services for individuals and families, including homeless youth, women, veterans, and survivors of human trafficking, driven by its mission to meet urgent needs, empower people to move beyond the crises in their lives, and advocate for solutions to homelessness, hunger, and poverty. PrebleStreet.org

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