

ADMINISTRATIVE RULE
County-procured and distributed street outreach supplies
April 2025

RULE RECOMMENDATION

Multnomah County will distribute county-procured supplies to street outreach service providers for distribution to people sleeping unsheltered. County-procured supplies will prioritize hygiene and basic first aid, water, emergency clothing, and emergency bedding. During declared severe weather events and enhanced outreach weather events, the county may distribute county-procured tents directly to people who are unsheltered via contracted service providers and those leaving severe weather shelters on the last day of an activation.

Contracted outreach and service providers may use client assistance funds to purchase supplies, including tents, based on the unavailability of an appropriate shelter bed and/or person-specific health needs.

BACKGROUND

Before 2020

Prior to the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, street outreach service providers, including those that contracted with the County's Joint Office of Homeless Services (JOHS), distributed outreach supplies, including tents and tarps, as part of their ongoing engagement with people sleeping unsheltered. Providers received donated items, purchased items with agency funds, and purchased items with flexible client assistance funds provided by JOHS. **An adopted or informal supply distribution policy did not exist.**

2020 - 2024

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit Multnomah County, services and strategies to reach people unsheltered changed. Congregate shelters temporarily reduced capacity by 50%, pod and alternative villages expanded, services closed or shifted to virtual engagement, and the JOHS opened a supply center. The supply center was intended to expand access to life-saving services for people sleeping unsheltered, and increase the ability to procure in bulk and store items for distribution. Jurisdictional partners, service and outreach providers, and mutual aid groups began accessing the supply center and distributing supplies and gear to people sleeping unsheltered. **An adopted or informal supply distribution policy did not exist. Supplies were available via appointment and were distributed based on practice, not by policy.**

During the county's coldest days in winter, Multnomah County works with jurisdictional and service provider partners to open Severe Weather Shelters. These locations are often open for just a few nights, and most often when temperatures dip below 25 degrees or snow and ice significantly impact people without shelter. In 2022, the county and shelter operators began distributing tents to people exiting shelter in winter, recognizing that gear is often damaged or destroyed during severe weather events.

Current

In October 2024, Multnomah County implemented an [interim supply distribution policy](#) that focused on the distribution of tents and tarps. The interim policy defined the materials procured, distribution methods, and data and reporting methods.

CONSIDERATIONS

Supply distribution to people sleeping unsheltered, including the distribution of tents and tarps, often mitigates the poor health outcomes associated with unsheltered homelessness and provides a limited level of safety, security, and privacy, particularly when adequate shelter and housing are unavailable. They also serve as relationship-building resources for contracted outreach providers working to connect individuals with critical housing and healthcare services.

Simultaneously, there is an imperative to increase shelter and housing capacity, and reduce the need for tents and tarps while mitigating the negative impact of the use of these in public spaces as well as their inadequacy to be considered appropriate shelter. As additional shelter and affordable housing capacity becomes available, the community's need for tents should diminish. The goal is to have sufficient shelter and affordable housing capacity to make the distribution of tents unnecessary.

BY THE NUMBERS

	Publicly-funded shelter beds
FY20	1,760
FY25	3,193 (81% increase)

	Tents Distributed
FY24	5,680 (about 473 per month)
FY25 (to date)	2,983 (about 212 per month)

BUDGET

Outreach Supply Center

	FY 2024	FY 2025	FY 2026 Proposed
Personnel	\$444,619	\$604,583	\$428,122
FTE	4	5	3
Materials & Supplies	\$1,563,538.92	\$1,594,549.25	\$918,541.00
Internal Services	\$733,987.00	\$1,070,787.00	\$982,299.00

Total	\$2,742,144.92	\$3,269,919.25	2,328,962.00
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POLICY SCOPE

- **Distribution Warehouse:**
 - Multnomah County maintains two supply warehouses - one operated by Emergency Management (EM) and one operated by the Homeless Services Department.
 - Beginning in FY26, the county will consolidate supply distribution for outreach and severe weather from a single access point at the EM warehouse.
- **Available Supplies:**
 - County-procured and distributed outreach-specific supplies are limited to:
 - hygiene (hand sanitizer, tampons, etc.)
 - basic first aid (bandaids, antibiotic ointment, etc.)
 - water and electrolytes
 - emergency clothing (hats, sweatpants, etc.)
 - emergency bedding (sleeping bags, mylar blankets, etc.)
 - During declared severe weather events and enhanced outreach weather events, the county may distribute county-procured tents directly to people who are unsheltered via contracted service providers and those leaving severe weather shelters on the last day of an activation.
 - Contracted service providers may use annually allocated client assistance funds to purchase and distribute supplies, including tents, based on the unavailability of an appropriate shelter bed and/or person-specific health needs.
- **Distribution Methods:**
 - **Monthly appointments:** The Warehouse will distribute supplies through monthly appointments with street outreach service providers in accordance with this policy.
 - **Eligible providers:** street outreach service providers will use the supplies as part of direct engagement with individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness.
 - **Quantities:** Providers will be able to request a custom amount of supplies each month, depending on the Outreach Zones they plan to cover.
- **Reporting:**
 - A fiscal year-end report of county-procured and distributed outreach supplies will be provided annually to the Homelessness Response System's Implementation Committee.
 - As additional shelter and affordable housing capacity becomes available, the community's need for tents should diminish.