

Beyond Recovery Starts Today

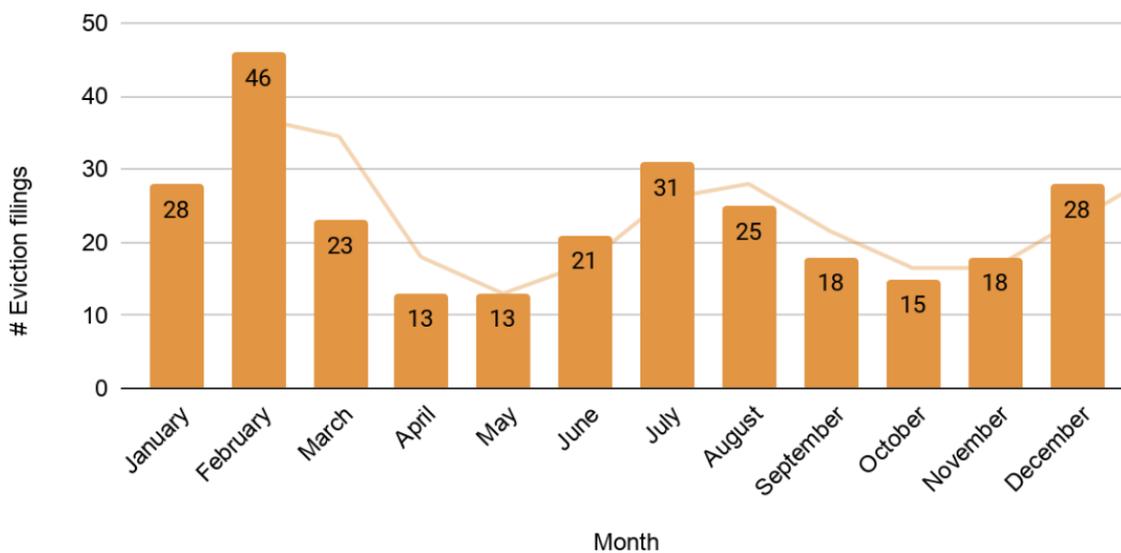
Santa Feans are hurting from the Covid-19 crisis. As the pandemic progresses, a looming eviction tsunami is approaching. Chainbreaker has partnered with several local and national organizations, as well as City of Santa Fe staff and policymakers to create a series of reports on evictions in Santa Fe. The first two reports have been released and focus on identifying the scope of the eviction crisis. The third report will be released this summer with PolicyLink and will include detailed policy recommendations based on the findings of the first two reports.

Time is of the essence and some actions cannot wait for the third report to be completed. We have prepared this short document with a list of actions that government and philanthropy can take today to both meet the immediate needs for Santa Fe renters and invest in long-term, equitable recovery that addresses the structural roots of our housing crisis.

Read the first two reports at: humanimpact.org/hiprojects/santa-fe-evictions

- Report 1: [*Evictions in the Covid-19 Era: A threat to family and community health in Santa Fe*](#)
- Report 2: [*Eviction in the Covid 19 Era: Successes and limitations of moratoria to keep people housed and healthy in Santa Fe*](#)

Santa Fe Eviction Filings by Month 2020



Source: New Mexico Administrative Office of the Courts.

City Policy Recommendations

1. Strengthen and extend the Emergency Order and moratorium on evictions to protect public health

The eviction moratoria have been critical in staving off mass evictions in Santa Fe. A mass eviction event is a public health emergency in and of itself even after the threat of Covid-19 subsides. Keeping this protection in place for as long as possible will save lives, keep people housed and allow time for deliberate and thoughtful transitions to recovery and beyond. Therefore, we recommend the City of Santa Fe take the following immediate actions for the moratorium:

1A. Work with policymakers on the state level to keep the state moratorium—and by extension the city moratorium—in place for as long as possible. There should be a plan for a phased lifting of the moratorium based on data directly related to Covid-19, such as infection and vaccination rates, as well as risk of eviction and other social determinants of health including demographic information and economic indicators. Data should be disaggregated to the census tract level to keep protections in place for as long as possible for high-risk areas, while allowing earlier transitions for lower-risk census tracts.

1B. Strengthen enforcement mechanisms for the existing moratorium. The current moratorium is an emergency order and must be enforced by local law enforcement, with tenants initiating the process by requesting to file a report. The city should create a civil enforcement mechanism that shifts the burden from police onto more appropriate city staff, such as building and health inspectors. These positions should be resourced through current budget allocations. This should include protections for renters against retaliation for reporting.

2. Create a landlord licensing and rental registry program for better data, outreach, and policymaking

Registries are powerful tools to gather data about renters; cities with rental registries have been able to better track challenges renters are facing during this crisis and target outreach and assistance efforts. The city should establish a rental registry and create a licensure program for landlords to close data gaps, target outreach and program interventions, and open the door to longer-term solutions that can incentivize helpful practices and disincentivize bad actors. The costs to establish and manage this can be revenue neutral through ongoing, low-cost fees. It would be beneficial to renters and landlords by creating a communication channel for education and information about laws and regulations and could open the possibility of further support for landlords by allowing them to receive small business grants.

3. Improve existing mediation programs to avert evictions

Mediation programs are available through New Mexico courts, but these voluntary programs are available only for “money due” complaints, and only if a legal filing has already taken place. The city could institute a similar mediation program available prior to the need for legal filing and for other types of landlord-tenant disputes, such as health and safety violations and minor lease issues. The City of Albuquerque and Bernalillo County have such programs in their courts and can be looked to as models. The City of Philadelphia created an eviction diversion program amid the Covid-19 lockdown in which [91 percent of participants](#) were able to reach an agreement and avoid eviction.

4. Institutionalize direct cash assistance to target resources to people in most need

The city's eviction prevention fund has been highly successful in overcoming equity and accessibility issues and ensuring that assistance makes it into the hands of people in most need who might otherwise face barriers to access. The city should consider passing a resolution that ensures this model remains the process by which the city distributes future assistance whenever possible in the future.

City Budget and Funding Recommendations

The American Rescue Plan Act provides nearly \$50 billion in housing assistance, including rental assistance, homeowner assistance, utilities assistance, and resources for people who are unhoused. Additionally, the City of Santa Fe is receiving \$15 million from the federal government for Covid-19 relief and recovery efforts. The city should dedicate no less than 20 percent of federal relief funds for equitable housing relief and recovery. The current infusion of relief funds must be used wisely in ways that outlast the pandemic and bring Santa Fe beyond recovery. The city should use these funds to:

1. Extend emergency rental support with direct cash assistance by funding community partnerships

Through close partnership between the city and community-based organizations, the first round of eviction prevention and economic relief funds helped thousands of families pay their rent. However, thousands more are still in need of assistance. The city should provide funding to distribute eviction prevention support through direct cash assistance. CONNECT has proven to be an invaluable model to help distribute this and other forms of assistance; the city should include funding for CONNECT to hire appropriate staff to meet the need for assistance effectively.

2. Forgive city water utility debt

Utility precarity and debt arrears are the “canary in the coal mine” of evaluating a tenant’s risk of eviction. The city-owned water utility should forgive debt and ease pressure on tenants.

3. Fund eviction prevention/tenants rights hotline and outreach

The need for ongoing outreach and organizing around renter’s rights and eviction prevention will last long after the Covid-19 emergency subsidies. Funding for outreach should include direct community engagement to areas most vulnerable to eviction. Additionally, the city should invest in translation and interpretation services to ensure equitable access to city services, outreach, and assistance.

4. Invest in long-term equitable housing solutions

The city should invest in long-range neighborhood stabilization, such as community land trusts, to help insulate vulnerable areas from displacement resulting from the dramatic market shifts expected after the Covid-19 emergency subsidies. The city can also create pilot programs that keep people housed and prevent displacement in the future. Pilot programs to explore immediately should include right to counsel and universal basic income for residents of the most vulnerable census tracts.

Long-term solutions will require ongoing resource allocation, and current city staffing may need to increase in order to meet the needs of the community. In particular, funding will be necessary for civil enforcement of the eviction moratorium, setting up a landlord licensing and rental registry program, and improving mediation programs. Federal funding will not last forever and ongoing funding streams will need to be secured that continue to keep Santa Feans housed and healthy past the pandemic and beyond recovery.

Recommendations for Philanthropy

Philanthropy plays a critical role in supporting vulnerable populations and can significantly contribute to the mitigation of the upcoming eviction tsunami. Partnerships between government, philanthropy, and community organizations will be absolutely necessary to move Santa Fe through the crisis and beyond recovery. Philanthropic organizations and individuals should consider investing their support in the following ways:

1. Center equity in investments

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought to light the health equity disparities of our systems and has resulted in a disproportionate impact for people of color and people living in areas with low access to social determinants of health. Investments should focus on equity and funding distributed such that the highest levels of support are given to those with the highest need. Support for housing work in particular should incorporate a health equity and racial justice analysis with an upstream focus on eliminating the health disparities created by inequities in the built environment. Utilizing the model of direct cash assistance is a critical step in overcoming equity disparities.

2. Partner with government to avoid duplicating efforts

Philanthropy should coordinate with existing governmental programs and contribute meaningfully to all the efforts listed above in partnership through the same distribution channels. Centralizing assistance funding helps individuals access them easier, potentially relieves burden from service providers, and minimizes duplication of work. Acting together, philanthropy can help governments leverage funding, creating even greater and longer lasting impacts.

3. Invest in upstream community organizing led by those most impacted

Whereas the need is great for direct cash assistance to help slow the eviction tsunami, there will never be enough money available to stop it completely by debt payment assistance alone. Therefore, philanthropy should invest in organizations who are organizing the people most impacted by this crisis to build power for renters in their communities in the long-term. These investments should prioritize leadership of those directly impacted and people of color, women, people living with disabilities, low-income people, and LGBTQAI+ people. Philanthropy should not be afraid to invest in new organizing opportunities created by the pandemic.

4. Invest in anti-displacement and neighborhood stabilization projects

Moving Santa Fe beyond recovery will require preparation for and mitigation of a new wave of gentrification and displacement. Philanthropy should invest in projects that work to stabilize vulnerable neighborhoods against mass evictions and ongoing displacement. Investing in strategies such as community land trusts as well as policy campaigns that protect against gentrification and mass evictions can help mitigate the coming waves of eviction and displacement.

The following partners contributed to this series of reports: [Human Impact Partners](#), [New Mexico Health Equity Partnership](#), University of New Mexico School of Law, City of Santa Fe Office of Affordable Housing, Santa Fe Department of Community Health and Safety Department, [PolicyLink](#), and [Right to the City Alliance](#).

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