

FEBRUARY
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DONOR CONNECTION

Code Blue

The scariest time to be on the street.

Living on the streets is never more precarious than in wintertime. Frigid temperatures, especially overnight, can lead to frostbite and other serious health issues. When the mercury drops below 26 degrees Fahrenheit between 4 p.m. and 8 a.m., it's officially **Code Blue** status—the worst time of all to be unhoused.

For Pittsburgh Mercy and Allegheny County's Department of Health & Human Services (DHS), Code Blue means a quick mobilization of staff and resources to ensure that those experiencing homelessness have immediate access to shelter care.

Ensuring a bed for everyone

The first step is getting the word out. Pittsburgh Mercy puts up signs throughout the city, in English and Spanish, announcing a Code Blue and giving instructions on where to go. Pittsburgh Mercy's Street Outreach Team scouts the camps and downtown areas for people living outside and helps get them to Second Avenue Commons, the 'hub' for Code Blue operations. If the Commons is at maximum capacity (92 beds in the shelter and 40 in the Overflow location), we partner with DHS staff to transport individuals to other shelter locations.

January saw an eight-day Code Blue period, an unusually long stretch of bitter cold. When Ammon Recreation Center (the City of Pittsburgh shelter that's only open during Code Blue) was full on January 13, we extended the Common's Overflow area and even housed people overnight in the Engagement Center.

Extra challenges, extended hours

During Code Blue, Pittsburgh Mercy extends the Engagement Center hours to 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. and opens the Center on weekends. Code Blue is an especially challenging time. Many unhoused people are not comfortable entering buildings, so it takes extra effort and patience to bring them to shelter. And once inside, other needs become apparent.

"The shelter staff and street medicine team work diligently to provide not only a warm place to stay, showers, and food, but also medical care," said **Danielle Schnauber Jones**, Operation Safety Net Nurse Practitioner. "Frostbite and trench foot are big issues, but we also treat a range of medical needs such as cardiac conditions, skin disorders, diabetes, and urgent care needs. Some of the individuals we see haven't had medical care in years. We are fortunate to be trusted with their medical care and have the support of the UPMC clinic providers."



Caring for our furry friends

Living on the streets endangers pets, too, and Second Avenue Commons is the area's only 'low-barrier' shelter that allows cats and dogs to stay with their owners.

With a steady flow of pets arriving this winter, Pittsburgh Mercy was fortunate to receive a grant to pay for leashes, food bowls, food, and other items. For medical care, the Street Dog Coalition partners with local vets to keep our furry friends healthy.

Would you like to help?

Area shelters are always in need of blankets, winter boots, and warm clothing. *But before you head to the store, **consider this:** the best way to help is a cash donation earmarked for those items.* "We're truly grateful for any and all support, but it makes more sense for our staff to do the buying," explained **Jacqueline Hunter**, Senior Manager of Homeless Services. "We know what's needed—like a men's size 16 shoe, for example, for a particular guest—and it's not efficient for us to sort and store lots of donated items."

To make a donation to support homeless services, click [here](#).

Thank you!



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