# Project Roomkey: A Critical Evaluation of California's Emergency Shelter Program



**Project Roomkey: Evaluating California's Emergency Shelter Program for the Unhoused**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, California established an emergency housing program named Project Roomkey. The initiative aimed to provide shelter for unhoused individuals by repurposing hotels and motels. This program was launched with the dual goal of protecting vulnerable populations from the virus and easing the strain on healthcare systems.

A recent study by Abt Global, funded by the California Health Care Foundation and the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, evaluated the efficacy of Project Roomkey. The research involved surveys and interviews with service providers and clients across various counties. The study concluded that Project Roomkey succeeded in its initial objectives, notably reducing the spread of COVID-19 among unsheltered populations and alleviating pressure on healthcare facilities.

At its peak in October 2020, Project Roomkey provided over 16,000 hotel rooms statewide, eventually accommodating approximately 62,000 individuals across 50 counties and four tribal jurisdictions. However, the program faced challenges in its later stages, particularly in transitioning participants from temporary shelter to permanent housing. The study found that only 22% of those sheltered under Project Roomkey secured permanent housing, while a significant portion either moved to other temporary shelters or remained unaccounted for.

The results highlight the ongoing difficulty California faces in addressing homelessness, particularly the state's struggle to effectively track and utilize funding to ensure long-term housing solutions.