MEMORANDUM

DATE: January 27, 2022
TO: Shelters and Behavioral Health Service (BHS) Sites
FROM: Health Officer of San Francisco
RE: Change to Shelter/BHS Admission Policies

Background

- Throughout the pandemic, and based on internal guidelines, admissions to shelters and Behavioral Health Services sites have been paused when the site has positive COVID-19 case/s. There are no California Department of Public Health guidance documents that specify a requirement to pause admissions in these scenarios.
- In order to balance Omicron high transmissibility and low disease severity with the health and wellness of San Franciscans requiring access to congregate residential programs and the shelter and treatment these programs provide, pauses of admissions to residential congregate settings due to COVID-19 cases are no longer recommended.
- To date, there have been no COVID-19 deaths or hospitalizations among behavioral health program or shelter residents since December 1, 2021, thanks in part to increasing booster vaccinations, well-fitted masks, ventilation, distancing, and other measures. San Francisco hospitals and congregate settings need to continue to offer appropriate levels of care and to respond to COVID-19 and non-COVID-19-related emergencies and acute illnesses.

SFDPH Guidance Change
Eliminate pausing of admissions to residential congregate settings (shelters and BHS sites) due to COVID-19 cases or outbreaks during the Omicron variant surge. Congregate sites should continue to admit new guests as long as there are available beds in zones where there are no COVID positive individuals being housed. Institutions may need to make internal decisions to continue pausing admissions due to key staffing shortages.

The best way to prevent severe outcomes of COVID is to be up to date on COVID vaccinations. Shelters and behavioral health service staff should work to ensure that clients are either provided vaccination or linked to vaccine resources.