

# CORONAVIRUS CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS CAMPAIGN

THE COLORADO APARTMENT ASSOCIATION



## OUR CHALLENGE :

No one imagined that coronavirus would dominate the headlines of 2020. But in a matter of a few weeks in March, the pandemic swept the nation and Coloradans found themselves at risk of infection, quarantined at home until further notice, and furloughed or laid off from their jobs. For renters who experienced coronavirus job or income loss or illness, a primary financial concern became paying rental housing costs, and they looked to Colorado's housing industry for answers. With no precedent for handling a global pandemic, the Colorado Apartment Association (CAA) was thrown into housing and communications crisis on a national scale.

## OUR SOLUTION

Novitas Communications launched a crisis communications effort on behalf of the Colorado Apartment Association to address the needs of both Colorado residents and Colorado housing providers during COVID-19. The initiative was and still is a balancing act of showing compassion, flexibility, and aid to renters, while also encouraging personal responsibility to pay rent, among all utilities, so that housing providers and the housing ecosystem are protected. Novitas began by positioning CAA as the leading voice for the housing industry through earned media including in **print, online, TV and radio**. Colorado renters, housing providers and reporters were full of questions and concerns over rental housing, so CAA **released statements** and **conducted media interviews** almost daily from mid-March through today about how coronavirus developments would and are impacting the 700,000 residents who rent in Colorado.

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CAA rallied a task force by Monday, March 16 of over **100 housing provider members** throughout Colorado to discuss the best means of handling this crisis. With no previous guidelines on rent adjustments or payment plans, Novitas rapidly produced a financial aid resource document for renters with more than **400 resources** available for renters who needed help paying April rent, and, now, May rent. Novitas also compiled a guide for housing providers with resources available through the CARES Act among other resources.

By March 20, the COVID-19 Resource Center was created and it contained **federal, state and county-specific financial aid resources for residents in both English and Spanish, COVID-19 FAQs, information on unemployment, and government aid options**. Additionally, the resource center provides more than 40 resources for housing providers including **financial aid resources, employee and resident response plans, information about small business loans, and templates for revised leases, demand notices, and essential travel letters**.

Novitas also worked behind the scenes to **correct misinformation** on rent moratoriums in the media and **quell potential rent strikes**. Much of the media required education on the many ways housing providers use rent payments, and how halting rent completely would have disastrous consequences on the entire housing ecosystem. Novitas researched and monitored rent strike groups in Denver and prepared strategies of action as the groups planned an April 1 and May 1 rent strikes.

To further assist renters, Novitas guided CAA to partner with the **Resident Relief Foundation** and join their rental assistance relief program to provide rental relief to as many residents in Colorado as possible. In just over 24 hours, Novitas organized a related campaign, drafted donation letters to CAA members, Governor Polis and Colorado Mayors, and prepared a press release for the launch of the fund. The effort is expected to take off in mid-April to help with May 1 rent payments. The fund will continue to support renters through at least July 1 payments.



## OUR RESULTS

From March 12 through April 25, CAA has received **167 media mentions** relating to coronavirus for a total earned media coverage of **\$576,000** and the numbers are growing each day. CAA's resources and messaging has reached more than **1.7 million people** so far through the media and Colorado Governor Polis mentioned in his executive order the Apartment Association of Metro Denver's "relief guide" which is the resources for renters that Novitas created. Additionally, while rent has been a hot topic throughout March and April, the Colorado Apartment Association has been on the forefront of the conversation through the COVID-19 pandemic and garnered a **positive sentiment overall** from news story mentions.

When it came time for April rent payments, **over 91% of Coloradans paid rent**, which is only slightly less than the average of 92% from January and February of 2020. Novitas contributed by encouraging residents through the media to take personal responsibility and pay rent to the extent they are able. For the residents who did need help due to COVID-19 job loss, Novitas worked with housing providers on creating payment plans and resource options for residents.

Novitas has been in contact with the National Multifamily Housing Council and the National Apartment Association, both of which have praised Novitas for their work in Denver and Colorado.

The COVID-19 Resource Center has also become a prime source for residents and housing providers seeking help and assistance and is continually updated with relevant documents and information. From March 18 through April 27, there have been **15,202 organic page views** on Resource Center landing page, **12,228** of those are unique visitors and **938 clicks** on Resident Frequently Asked Questions article.

*CAA's COVID-19 initiative is far from over and the results will continue to unfold in the coming months. Coronavirus is still greatly impacting the Colorado housing community, and CAA will remain a strong voice of leadership to residents and housing providers during this time of economic uncertainty.*