

NAEH COVID-19 Webinar Series: Understanding & Planning for Federal Funding

Key Takeaways: Think strategically, act accordingly!

1. The CARES Act includes funds that communities can use to address the coronavirus pandemic for people experiencing or at-risk of homelessness. Most importantly:
 - a. \$4 billion for homeless assistance through the Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) program. This funding will be flexible for communities and must be utilized from a Housing First orientation. It will be released in two waves, the first (up to half the total amount) according to existing ESG formula within 30 days and the second according to a new ESG formula that takes into account state and local differences during the pandemic.
 - b. \$5 billion for Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) for state and local governments. Communities should use this flexible funding to help homelessness response systems keep people experiencing homelessness safe and healthy during the pandemic.
 - c. Much larger financial resources are available to communities and to people experiencing homelessness via the Coronavirus Relief Fund (\$150 billion) and individual payments (\$1,200 per person with incomes under \$75,000 annually). Communities should advocate to make those resources available for people experiencing homelessness.
2. It is imperative to begin planning for how to spend these funds NOW. To that end, the Alliance offers a framework for how to focus planning efforts:
 - a. Prevention
 - b. Unsheltered homelessness
 - c. Shelter
 - d. Stabilizing households in existing RRH/PSH programs
 - e. Permanent housing for homeless people
 - f. Post-pandemic period
3. The entire planning framework should be implemented through the lens of racial equity. Communities should use tools like those developed by the [Racial Equity Network](#) to assess racial disparities in your system and to ensure that all facets of the COVID-19 response framework are implemented in a racially equitable manner.
4. To begin planning, communities should:
 - a. Begin by assessing current resources and assets to ensure they are aligned.
 - b. Seek to leverage other existing funds, public and private as well political capital (where and if needed) to address both the immediate health care crisis and to support community-based, non-homeless-system funded prevention efforts for those at immediate risk of homelessness.
 - c. Strategize on how to use new funds to significantly impact the immediate health crisis of people experiencing homelessness and create pathways to permanent housing.

5. Target your prevention funds and bring them closer to the front door of the homeless system. Deploy aggressive problem-solving strategies such as diversion and dedicate the majority of these funds only to people whose homelessness is **imminent**.
6. When addressing unsheltered homelessness, the primary goal must be to promote the health and safety of people who are unsheltered by getting them quickly into a safe and appropriate indoor space that also includes a path to permanent housing. Assess whether existing operational funds and organizational assets can re-directed to support outreach staff. Seek political commitment to expand mobile health care services, provide places for basic personal sanitation services, stop encampment sweeps, and open up public facilities for overnight use.
7. On shelter, the goal should be to expand and improve temporary housing options to come into compliance with CDC guidance for separation, isolation, and quarantine. This will require new resources, but communities should also assess whether all their existing temporary housing spaces (shelter and transitional housing) are shifted to a lower-barrier, 24/7 model to increase utilization rates. Communities should also begin planning for and implementing shelter protocols like [those developed by the state of California](#).
8. Recognize that people in exiting housing programs funded by the homeless system (i.e., RRH, PSH) will likely be even more vulnerable due to the economic shocks of the pandemic, reduced homeless program staff, and less access to public services that normally provide for their needs. Ensure stability in these programs by utilizing progressive engagement to “flex up” case management for people who are experiencing the greatest distress and “flex down” case management for those who are more stable.
9. To stop the spread of coronavirus and to increase system flow, communities should be strategizing to move as many people as possible, as quickly as possible, from sheltered or unsheltered homelessness into permanent housing. Increase flexible funding for “rapid exit” services from shelter, and make sure that all staff in all programs are trained in problem-solving, rapid exit strategies. Communities should also advocate with local political leaders to make sure that **all** available public housing units and subsidies are easily accessible, including by implementing effective teleworking practices to expedite paperwork approval.
10. What can we learn from what we are experiencing now? How should we think about assessing, leveraging, and strategizing to **end** homelessness moving forward and not get stuck in crisis mode? Contribute your ideas for how to find silver linings in this awful catastrophe to the Alliance on [upcoming webinars](#), as part of our Twitter conversations at #COVIDWebinar, and on our forthcoming platform for community sharing.