



OFFICE OF COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY RESOURCES AND SERVICES

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COVID-19 RESPONSE AND THE HOMELESS SYSTEM

WEEKLY CALL: FRIDAY, April 3, 2020

Staff: Jackie Scott, Cheryl Mattis, Stephanie Abide, Rose Burton, Jennifer Corcoran, Liz van Oeveren, Keisha Benjamin, Colleen Baumgartner, Cara Baumgartner

Partners: Jen Broderick, Melissa FitzGibbons, Stephen Liggett-Creel, Cheryl Rowe, Darlene Jolly, Josh Bombino, Kelly Cimino, Kim Eisenreich, Karen Booth, Jenn Pollitt-Hill, Fran Trout, Bill Salganik, Sam Tucker, Peter Engle, Tina Field and Simone Blanchard.

Guidance, Information & Updates:

Liz van Oeveren gave an update on State DHCD call. Maryland will receive four million dollars in ESG funds. These funds will be limited to COVID-19 response. These funds will not be part of the HSP application. Amendments will be used instead. They released a new COVID-19 manual, which will be added to the Howard County website.

The HUD mega waiver was also discussed. Besides the role of shelters, they want to focus on RAP. Rehousing people more quickly with now limited resources. This will move people out of shelter so they can shelter in place in apartments. Governor Hogan has stated we can still do rehousing and new leases for homeless people. Use video tours of apartments instead of in person tours.

Jennifer Corcoran updated us on Federal response. The HUD mega waiver will have 17 waivers that apply to HUD programs. This will loosen restrictions to help people be housed as quickly as possible.

Federal call has moved from basics of social distancing and shelter management to dealing with the money that is coming to communities. 1.5 billion dollars were distributed in response to the recession, they will be distributing 4.5 billion dollars in response to COVID-19. HUD is recommending maxing out RAP.

NAEH is doing webinars on the CARES Act. ESG income limits are normally 30% of AMI, but will be increasing to 50% of AMI. There will be two waves of funding, the first will be at 50% AMI and the second will be built around new standards. This is to deal with the newly unemployed and under employed that normally would not qualify for assistance.

Federal government is trying to find alternative ways to get homeless people their relief checks. They are less likely to file taxes, have a direct deposit account of file, or have an address to send physical checks to.

FEMA is releasing COVID-19 funding guidelines. State and local governments will have to work with FEMA to receive funding. First priority is medical care and then rehousing.

Equity lens will need to stay in place during the pandemic. Already seeing low income and minorities having worse outcomes from the virus. Testing centers are being placed where more

affluent and white people are living. Howard County needs to be sure to avoid this kind of discrimination.

Keisha Benjamin gave an update on HMIS and website. The COVID-19 information page for providers is up. Survey results have been entered in HMIS. This information will be used to find clients at greatest risk for the virus. Allow providers to help those most in need.

Rose Burton – Essential employees will need letters from their employers. Rose will send the state guidance on what format to use when writing these letters. The Health Department has issued non-congregant shelter letter. Shelters can still accept new clients but will not be operating at full capacity. The county is looking for alternative bed options for the unsheltered.

Cheryl Rowe – Corrections and Street Outreach

Cheryl requested an update on using hotels and alternate shelter for people that are still unsheltered. Rose Burton said DCRS is working with the county, but it is difficult because county buildings are being used for childcare for essential workers' children. DCRS is trying to find other spaces that may work and funding for more hotel rooms. Cheryl replied that is very hard for unsheltered right now and that they feel like they are being forgotten or left behind. Jackie Scott requested that when people are difficult to place to please bring it to the attention of the team. She also said that restrictions are being waived or loosened for people like pan handlers who would normally not qualify for shelter. Cheryl Rowe said some people are banned from shelter or on sex offenders registry and asked if these people will be able to be housed as well. Jackie Scott stated that they will be housed but have to find alternative locations for them. She requested that street outreach compile a list of these clients and contact information so arrangements can be made. A follow up call with street outreach was planned. Josh Bombino requested forming a street outreach workgroup. Rose Burton agreed that a workgroup was a good idea. It was stressed again that data needs to be put in HMIS so that we can track services administered and correctly plan for surge to the system.

Josh Bombino and Cheryl Rowe – Street Outreach

Street outreach has been contacting people listed by Jennifer Corcoran and Melinda from Grassroots. This helps them know who is calling the hotline for assistance and then they start the in-person contact. They have been delivering food and resources and helping them to connect to deliveries from Cheryl Rowe and the Day Resource Center. The biggest concern is finding temporary shelter.

Showers have been cut back to once a week at North Laurel, Mondays from 9 am – 11 am. Corrections has been distributing food twice a week and then supplementing when they can. Corrections and Humanim are working on compiling lists of street outreach so they do not duplicate work.

Melissa FitzGibbons and Tina Field – Grassroots

No changes since last week. Grassroots is working with the county to move families from shelter to hotels. Biggest concern is being a congruent setting and what would happen if staff start getting sick. It is difficult to keep people at a six-foot distance in shelter. Doing temperature and risk screening at the door of the shelter. Checks at least once a day for all staff. Monitoring everyone's temperature and sending them home or quarantining if temperature is too high.

Hotline is getting food resources to people. Melinda is in quarantine, so Kathy is filling in for food drops.

Calls are up to Hotline. Coming from around the state and suicide prevention lines. Seeing calls taking longer because when people are in crisis they need to talk longer. This is causing strain on Hotline staff. Grassroots is working on how to support staff.

Jenn Pollitt-Hill – HopeWorks

No change from last week. Would like to thank the Health Department for PPE supplies. Very much appreciated. HopeWorks filled out the Health Department survey and were given supplies.

Karen Booth and Josh Bombino – Permeant Supportive Housing (PSH)

Getting food and supplies to clients. Humanim has also received PPE from the Health Department and would like to thank them. No specific challenges at this time. Landlords are under pressure from not receiving some payments from other tenants. Humanim is still paying client rents. Holding steady.

Jen Broderick – Bridges to Housing Stability

Have been giving gift cards for those able to get to stores for food. Delivering food to clients who can't go out. PSH seems fine. Clients mostly have issues with fear and anxiety. Bridges is connecting them with Telehealth and other mental health resources.

Simone Blanchard – Leola Dorsey Housing

Have made first food donations to residents. Some hot food from restaurants and some non-perishables. Deliveries are twice a week. Getting clients use to not having staff on site and how to communicate remotely.

Stephen Liggett-Creel – DSS

DSS is now doing an emergency SNAP program. Clients will receive the maximum amount, regardless of income, if already receiving SNAP. Increase will happen in April and May. Still leaning all the options to get food to people that are unable to leave their house.

Closing – Jackie Scott and Rose Burton

If can move people from hotels to perm housing, it will free up space to use hotels for hard to place people. Please keep that on your radar. Looking to working closely with Housing

Commission. We have questions about eligibility criteria. Would like to talk about on next week's call with Peter Engel.

We think a new street outreach committee is a good idea. Looking at all funding opportunities and will try to make as many options as possible. If you hear about what other jurisdictions are doing or funding we aren't aware of, please tell us. We are committed to not leaving anyone behind.

Next Call: Friday, April 17, 2020 – 12:00-1:00PM; WebEx