Weekly COVID-19 Housing & Homelessness Call

Wednesday, July 22nd, 10-11:15am via Zoom

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| Time | Topic | Lead | Notes |
| 10:005 minEmily | Welcome & Settle in | Rachael Myers, Housing Alliance | * Goal to troubleshoot practices, hear what’s happening in communities, want to make sure advocacy is responding to those needs
* We have otter.ai which is a live transcription service
* Be as clear as possible in your speaking, stay close to mic, try not to use accronyms
* Have questions? Make use of chat function
* Rundown of agenda
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| 10:055 minKiki/Emily | Poll Questions |  | Q 1: Where are you joining from today? Q2: will do later on …. cant get it to work right now |
| 10:1010 minKiki | Updates on state housing and homelessness response during COVID-19 | Kathy Kinard, Dept. of Commerce | * Getting ready to launch new eviction rent assistance program in a matter of day s- starting august 1 and thru December 31. Cares act expires then
* After governor announced it would be coming to commerce – draft period with comment period. Received over 150 comments from local gov, non-profits, landlords, public advocates. A lot on access for marginalized communities, seniors, folks with disabilities. Impact on prices eligibility and landlords. Spent last few weeks reviewing them and reaching back out to folks for comments. Continue to build “y and for” list. Close to about 60 entities. Outreach strategy to make sure that these organizations know about the services
* Organization that are operated “by” and “for” the communities they serve. Controlled/managed by individuals from the population they serve
* Requiring grantees for this. Using previous grantees for this – consolidated homeless (will need to contract 5% of funds to by and for organizations to do targeted outreach and bring them into the program.
* When we release the application and all the documents next week, will include that by and for list. Link to WA non-profits website. Working with another stakeholder to send to BIPOC EDs across the state – goal is to make sure people know about this program and that grantees are connecting with those communities, and so that the folks most vulnerable in housing received services..
* August 1, grantees incurring cost as early at that date. At 15%. Operations does not cap. Rent must be paid directly to landlord or to a friend or family to whom the applicant has a financial obligation
* One last thing about thing about this can only allow for 3 months of rent. Looking to change that as soon as possible. Going to be a change to what people saw just a couple weeks ago
* While this application goes out next week -staff receiving new 40 mil shelter grant. Deadline extended to 31. Processing those applications. Executing the housing and essential needs amendment. Grant application for the first for the emergency grant for covid dollar. Trying to amend for second – all while launching the 100 million rental assistance.
* Commerce is going to amendment
* Grant managers making this all happen. No way elegant or at a pace we want it
* Wanting to figure out how we can do better
* Questions: is it allowable to combine that assistance maxed at 3 months with other sources to get to 6 months?
* Q: Kathy, can you explain why you are currently capped at 3 months total of rental assistance?
* Not what we planned – technical issue. The receipt was written and that’s what we’re stuck with
* Q: Kathy - is landlords receiving 80% of the rent debt and forgiving all fees still a requirement?
* Is the issues refusing or having to take 80% of the fees
* Yes that is moving forward
* Q: Kathy you stated that the Admin is 15% and staffing is an allowable expense?
* Admin is at 15% and there will be an operations category at 18%
* Q: With the ESG grant amendments, is that with more funds? or just extending the contract end date
* ESG – more money or just extending the contract end date 2 federal rewards for. Second for $46 mil that will be added to those dollars
* Otter a.i has stopped
* Q: Do we have until the end of December?
* Originally we thought that grantees would have to spend the money by end of october, but these particular cares act funds can be paid through december 31. Cant pay january’s rent though
* Commerce staff down to 4 days a week – furloughed
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| 10:2010 minCaroline | Updates on the Red Lion Hotel shelter  | Daniel Malone, DESC | * DESC has operated congregate emergency shelter for adults with behavioural health conditions which have been quite crowded with bunkbeds and rooms with lots of people
* With Covid we were concerned about rapid spread of the virus
* We closed down most crowded shelter and moved them to a hotel in Renton that King County leased so that people would be in separate rooms
* Along the way we experienced what we expected – since it is more housing like people are more satisfied, much fewer interpersonal conflict, no significant problems form the virus
* Zero positive cases in this environment, not true from some of our smaller congregate shelters
* We’ve had another outbreak in one of those shelters
* Our hope is to continue this and never go back pre-covid
* We are working on a strategy for providing emergency shelter, we think these kinds of settings are appropriate for this
* Are there properties that can be acquired and converted into PSH and properties with additional space to build more PSH
* We don’t have resources identified
* This is the approach we are taking
* Having problems with City of renton
* County has property leased until the end of August, and it should go longer than that due to Covid
* City of Renton has said that property is not zoned for this and we don’t have a business license for that are
* That is making things more challenging for now
* Q: How are you thinking of hotel/motel as different from SRO or PSH?
* PSH – units are standard housing units with a kitchen, but there are a lot of similarities – there may be something to this idea; main difference is the expected time that people are normally in them
* Shelter is an emergency fallback for people – I'd like to get out of the business of shelter when possible
* Q: How are meals handled?
* Restaurant nearby is creating pre-packaged meals and these are delivered to their rooms; so there isn’t a need for people to go out
* Q: Patty Kuderer – has been in touch with them about the Red Lion and the AG needs more info
* Thank you! I will do that
* Q: Did the Red Lion you leased maintain their existing staff or was there a way to avoid hotel workers losing their jobs?
* Hotel did not retain staff and when we came in it had stopped operating, I don’t know what happened there. It is our staff doing all of the work including janitorial work
* Q: What processes have you identified for permanent future use?
* We don’t anticipate that this property in Renton will be used in future
* It’s somewhat larger than we use
* However we do this, we will pay attention to these issues, and think about zoning etc. My thought is that emergency shelter and hotel use is similar; intent for people to stay there temporarily
* I would think that this zoning, at least in spirit ought to meet the need for shelter; but we’re seeing that one municipality is not in agreement
* Q: What can we do?
* I don’t know other than promote the general idea that as long as we need shelter then they are better and more conducive environments; it would help the cause to promote that kind of thing; no specific advocacy right now; but should that materialize we will share it out and ask for help; I appreciate the interest.
* Lots of appreciation in the chat
* Thanks so much for all for the support and questions
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| 10:3010 minEmily | Clark County updates on use of hotel/motel vouchers  | Melissa Baker, Council for the Homeless | * CFH is coordinated entry access point for Clark County
* When pandemic began and we were learning about potential for folks experiencing homeless were more likely to contract the virus (hygiene, inability to physical distance)
* We have an existing program that we have year-round for issuing motel vouchers
* Have 5 partner hotels spread throughout the county
* All the police jurisdictions provide these vouchers after hours, normally contacting our housing hotline
* Ramped up the program to help ppl who live outside
* The need outpaced the existing funding, but we’ve received a lot more funding
* We had a prioritizing process, screening tool to determine potential vulnerability, this would help to determine how many nights to put someone in a hotel
* Put them in a hotel in whatever region of the county that they resided in primarily
* Clark County food bank started providing food boxes, between food bank, council for the homeless, and a couple of other orgs, we’d deliver these food boxes to ppl. This provided food to folks without making them go out into the community
* Being in a hotel gave them a fixed phone number
* Also asked ppl with they would benefit from additional resources, if yes someone from SWATCH (Southwest Washington Accountable Communities of Health ) would speak with them and offer up services
* Began effort in middle of march,
* Able to provide 663 ppl with motel vouchers, 3,300 nights translating to almost 6000 individual bed nights,
* Average amt of nights was 7-8
* Handful of folks who were vouchered the entire nights, some others who were only vouchered a few nights
* Clark county response used a similar process as DESC
* Leased out motel 6 in Vancouver, provided shelter beds as well as quarantine/isolation beds
* Expanded shelter extended ability to shelter folks in non-congregate settings
* Ppl in non-congregate settings did better than those in congregate
* Council for the Homeless played the role as referral agent
* Contracting COVID level cleaning providers, so rooms are safe for next guest
* A few things that came up, our screening tool
* Transitioned messaging to open ended questions like “what are your health concerns?”
* Another issue: billing, invoices weren’t coming in as quickly as we produced vouchers, they billed in different cycles. Put on breaks quickly when we were at our max. Solution: used (Homeless Management Information Service)  HMIS , helped out ability to track, determine need, better manage program
* Q: Did the hotels give you a “deal” or did you pay full price? What was the maximum length you would allow someone to stay in a place and what did you do after their time was up?
* A: didn’t give a deal, but partnered with hotels that gave affordable rates
* Q: Max time is 2 months?
* A: Funded through that
* Q: What happened after the 2 months?
* A: A lot of folks transitioned to expanded shelter, transitioned to leased hotel. Tried to provide wrap around services.
* Q: Can I follow up after?
* A: Will offer contact info in follow up email
* Q: Who is staffing the Q/I hotel room?
* A: county employees are staffing. The hotel was in preparation of selling. Staff wasn’t retained, but they were already in the process of being laid off due to the hotel’s closure
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| 10:405 minKiki | Federal Advocacy Update | Rachael Myers, Housing Alliance | * Been talking about the importance of federal advocacy – scope is too big for states to address with out federal support
* Been important to reach out to members of congress since this began, but especially right now in the next two weeks. Senate in session after recess, and house is in session. Senate meeting yesterday to hammer out what they were going to put forward within own caucus
* House passed the HEROs act – senate hasn’t taken it up yet.
* Expect the senate package will be different. Talking about $1 trillion, but the house had put forth about $3 trillion. Also include all the support around housing – rental assistance, funding for homelessness, uniform eviciton moratorium in addition to another 13 bill in housing and more in support for landlord struggling
* Folks already supportive are hearing from their constitutent. There will be things that fall away and not included in the final package – we have to make sure that housing and homelessness are not one of those things that fall away
* New action alert on our website – encourage everyone to take and share: <https://housingalliance.salsalabs.org/rentisdue>. Can tailor as you want. Please send link to folks in your network. If other states – action alerts on NLIHC website
* Spread the word – this next two weeks is the most critical we’ve seen yet
* Once taken action, tweet at and tag members of congress with #RentReliefNow.
* Sen. Murray: 1-866-481-9186
* Sen. Cantwell: 1-202-224-3441
* Send calls to Murray and Cantwell (who is 1 of 5 Dems who haven't signed on)
* Updates and negotiations that will take place
* Which members of congress?
* Senators for sure – otherwise every member of congress.
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| 10:4515 minEmily | The Housing Alliance’s agenda-setting process | Michele Thomas, Housing Alliance | * Housing alliance is a state wide org
* Almost every year we do listening sessions to help set agenda
* We go across the state (this year via zoom)
* We also do surveys to get additional feedback, we read every response
* We compile it all together and bring it to our public policy committee (PPC)
* This is a group of people of our members
* Looking to expand the PPC to be more diverse from different communities across the state, by race and by gender
* This committee has a conversation, then with the housing alliance staff we recommend an agenda
* we have a lead agenda and a support agenda
* Lead: things we are the primary decision makers on. Things that will have a state wide impact (i.e. tenant protections, homelessness resources.)
* Support: policies we believe in, but other orgs are taking the lead on
* This year the legislative session will start in January, don’t know if it will be virtual or combination, but they are required to meet
* This will be the beginning of the new biennium
* Both budgets will be set: Capitol and operating
* Operating has things like TANF
* The cuts that the legislature will have to do will come from the operating budget, which is home to where all the human services are
* 8.8 billion cut will disproportionately impact homelessness, also disproportionately impacting BIPOC Washingtonians
* Other important budget is capital budget
* Really want you all to be involved, make sure your voices are heard
* Survey is a bit more detailed, coming out in about a month
* Poll Questions
	+ If you could ask for one thing from state lawmakers, either policy or spending, to make a difference in reducing and preventing homelessness in your community what would it be?
		- 54% Massive Investment into building deeply affordable homes
		- 22% Improve tenant protections to increase access to housing, prevent evictions/termination of tenancy
		- 13% Massive new investment into homelessness prevention (rapid rehousing, etc)
		- 10% Other
	+ What specific racial disparities related to housing and homelessness are experienced in your community? Pick all that apply.
		- 62% Housing discrimination makes it harder for tenants of color to get into housing
		- 44% Landlords treat tenants of color harder
		- 44% Weak tenant protections particularly undermine housing for tenants of color
		- 62% Barriers to affordable housing for people of color
		- 40% People of color have a harder time accessing homelessness resources
		- 35% Tenant screening is used to screen out tenants of color
		- 81% High cost of housing has a disproportionate impact on tenants of color
		- 59% Structural barriers to homeownership for households of color
		- 9% other
	+ What is the most pressing housing/homelessness issue in your community?
		- 85% Lack of affordable homes
		- 3% Lack of shelter beds
		- 1% Lack of homeless prevention resources
		- 9% Lack of tenant protections
		- 1% other
	+ Are you interested in engaging in advocacy to help pass housing and homelessness related policies and budget investments? If so, which of the following are you most interested in?
		- 60% Housing and Homeless Advocacy Day
		- 18% Legislative District (LD) Leads Program
		- 24% Resident Action Project (RAP)
		- 37% Housing Alliance Public Policy Committee
		- 25% Housing Alliance Action Fund
		- 28% Homelessness Advisory Committee
		- 16% Other
* We can go to Olympia with the most ambitious agenda, but we’ll get nothing without an engaged base to help advocate.
* Discussion about the “other” category additions that were in the chat
	+ Other - need someone at the state level to take ownership of understanding the state wide need for homeless services, affordable housing, and rent assistance - then determine the resources needed to meet those needs - and then figure out how to get those resources - from the feds, state, private donors, etc. No one "owns" homelessness in Washington State - we need that coordinated, state-wide approach.
	+ We just need more affordable housing built in general.
	+ It is currently legal to discriminate against people with criminal histories. I think the lack of connection between and amongst tenants hurts us, as we're then forced to deal with landlords and rental organizations as individuals, rather than a class of people. Needless to say, we need more power for the tenant's union and more tenant unions.
	+ Important issue from Michele: Just Cause state wide will provide protections to keep people. in their homes.
	+ Homeownership is generally the most stable and secure form of housing. We know historically lack of homeownership has contributed greatly to wealth disparities for POC.
* If anyone on the call has personal experience with being impacted by the value of affordable housing, discrimination based on criminal history, or no cause eviction, please reach out to share your story. Even if you want to remain anonymous
* And if you’d like to schedule a specific listening session with residents/folks who access your services with the Resident Action Project you can email me at kikis@wliha.org
* Affordable housing is considered an asset for 40-50 years, we support it being that long so we keep housing.
* Also need to keep currently affordable housing affordable, a lot of USDA housing is expiring. Going to try to fight for a renewal of that investment in the capital budget
* Q: Why are we building when we have empty units?
* A: We really do need more affordable homes, some communities have extremely low vacancy rates. Also, “affordable” on its own isn’t a helpful term. We need more homes that are affordable to ppl with low incomes
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| 11:0015 minCaroline | Q&A |  | * Ran out of time – addressed these above
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| 11:15Kiki  | Wrap-up & Adjourn |  | * Reach out if you have thoughts for what you would like to hear on future calls
* Apologies for the tech issues
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