



Mission

We strengthen our community for current and future generations by helping people make a difference in the lives of others.

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To: Karen Harkness - Director of Economic and Community Development, City of Appleton
 From: COVID-19 Community Response Fund Committee

<p>United Way Fox Cities: Peter Kelly, CEO Anthony Gonzales, VP Community Development Suzanne Brault, Director, Community Development & Public Policy Rhonda Hannemann, Community Development Program Officer Lisa Severson, Community Development Program Officer Rachel Podoski, Research and Evaluation Coordinator</p>	<p>Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region: Curt Detjen, CEO Tammy Geenen, VP Community Engagement Ann Englehard, VP Donor Services Carolyn Desrosiers, Community Engagement Manager Jenny Krikava, Community Engagement Manager</p>
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Date: Friday, April 24, 2020

Subject: Responding to Coronavirus – Ensuring Housing Stability During a Crisis

Situation

In the last month, the already daunting shortage of affordable, accessible housing in our area has evolved into an emergency. The coronavirus outbreak has caused unprecedented unemployment and put thousands of people at risk of being unable to pay for housing and other basic needs. Our housing organizations are scrambling to respond with programs that house people experiencing homelessness and help others stay in their homes.

Background

The COVID-19 Community Response Fund was established by the Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region and United Way Fox Cities, with additional contributions from the community. Grants from this fund support nonprofit and other community organizations engaging in immediate basic needs relief, short-term response and longer-term recovery in Outagamie, Calumet, Shawano, Waupaca and the Neenah-Menasha area of Winnebago counties impacted by the COVID-19 public health emergency. During Phase One of the fund’s grantmaking, priority is being given to community-based organizations providing basic needs services to people who are immediately and disproportionately suffering from this crisis. This phase includes proactively identifying potential grant recipients and using input, guidance and research from organizations and others in the community to make grant decisions.

Since the fund launched on March 17, 2020 the Fund has received 11 requests from agencies throughout the region whose primary mission includes housing individuals and families. The housing these agencies provide ranges from emergency shelter and transitional housing to housing for individuals living with a disability or in recovery. As of April 23, \$130,000 in funding (nearly 1/3 of the total grant dollars awarded to date) has been granted specifically to support housing and shelter. Additionally, \$110,000 has been granted to agencies providing financial assistance.

Assessment

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic poses a clear risk to people experiencing homelessness as well as service provider organizations. Access to stable housing, especially during times of emergency, also helps eliminate many of the barriers to gaining and maintaining health and safety. In order to follow public health guidelines and help ensure people's safety, some shelters in the Fox Valley region are being forced to reduce services, restrict admittance, or close entirely. A number of agencies, such as Pillars and Harbor House, have been proactive in their responses to COVID-19, restructuring the bedding layout of shelters, and have moved some shelter residents and case management services to hotels. However, these and similar organizations don't have the resources to fully meet current needs.

Housing-insecure Patients Pose Challenges for Hospitals -Besides facing increased risk for COVID-19, high-acuity patients who face housing insecurity pose challenges to caregivers at essential hospitals. These patients often have comorbid mental health and substance misuse conditions and frequently lack advance care planning and surrogate decision-makers. Without options for safe discharge, hospitals are forced to admit patients who might not otherwise meet admission criteria, including patients with minor symptoms and patients under investigation, which could pose problems for crowded hospitals.

Financial Assistance - With a record number of people filing for unemployment amid the pandemic, the number of renters who need help meeting their basic needs is likely to skyrocket. And without financial assistance, these renters face the risk of homelessness or overcrowding in the homes of family or friends—situations that carry severe health risks during a pandemic. A majority of the agencies in our area requesting support for their financial assistance efforts are already reporting an increase in clients reaching out for assistance.

Recommendation

To address housing stability in our community as a result of the COVID-19 health emergency, our committee makes the following recommendations:

1. Prioritize permanent housing placements for individuals and families.
2. Provide resources for emergency shelters and access to isolation centers.
3. Increase outreach and assistance for unsheltered individuals.
4. Increase access to rental assistance and eviction prevention - A moratorium on evictions, on its own, is not enough. Rental assistance is required to avoid creating a financial cliff for renters when eviction moratoria are lifted and back-rent is owed, and to ensure the continued viability of essential affordable housing infrastructure.

Response

It is important that multiple systems, such as public health departments, legal agencies, housing assistance programs, and nonprofit organizations, are given the resources to work together to address needs. Philanthropy along with government and private sector entities must work together to collectively support our non-profit partners as they meet the short and long-term needs as a result of this public health crisis.