



HOPWA/COVID-19 Office Hours Responding to COVID-19 Surges

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Webinar Topics

This HOPWA Office Hours webinar is intended to address ways in which HOPWA programs can prepare for and respond to COVID-19 surges and continuation of the pandemic. Topics will include:

- Introduction of a new HOPWA resource: Responding to COVID-19 Surges
- Review and discussion of key activities for expanding client support and care efforts
- HOPWA/COVID-19 Guidance Updates and Resources
- Participant Q & A



Submit Your Questions

Please submit your questions at any time throughout the webinar by entering them into the **Q & A box** located on the lower right side of your screen.



Responding to COVID-19 Surges

With COVID-19 rates expected to surge during the 2021 winter season and beyond, HOPWA programs should plan and prepare for the coming months. As grantees and project sponsors are rolling out HOPWA CARES Act-funded housing assistance, they must be aware that the growing impact of the virus can cause greater or renewed housing crises among persons living with HIV/AIDS and their families. HOPWA programs must ensure they are implementing housing and service responses designed to get and keep households stably housed and safe.



New HOPWA TA Product

“Responding to COVID-19 Surges: A 2021 HOPWA Program Resource Guide”

This brief guide provides updated guidance on key activities and best practices for addressing client safety and stability needs during the continued pandemic, including:

- Expanding Client Support and Care Efforts
- HOPWA/COVID-19 Program Activities Overview and Update
- HOPWA/COVID-19 Key Program Operation Information
- Additional COVID-19 Resources

Download the resource guide at:

<https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/6262/responding-to-covid19-surges-a-2021-hopwa-program-resource-guide/>



Expand Client Support and Care

The risks of housing instability, evictions, homelessness, difficulty in accessing food, medications and medical care may rise as the pandemic continues. Key activities to help ensure support for HOPWA households include:

- Set housing security as the top program priority
- Increase client outreach and engagement
- Provide safety education and PPE
- Educate on vaccinations
- Address safety challenges in HOPWA facilities and community residences



Housing Security: Top Priority!

Be aware that increased numbers of HOPWA households may not be able to pay for rent and other expenses. Ensure that households at risk are quickly identified and connected to all possible resources. Some suggested responses include:

- Assess client households more frequently
- Target STRMU (CARES, waiver, regular) to those at risk of eviction or foreclosure
- Use hotel/motel vouchers for emergency housing when needed
- Access emergency rental assistance through ESG-CV, CDBG-CV, Ryan White
- If budgets allow, add eligible households to TBRA or Master Leasing
- Quickly process recertifications when clients have income losses
- Use PHP for placement in new housing when needed

Remember that the availability of eviction moratoriums does not mean rental assistance should be delayed!



Increase Outreach & Engagement

As the pandemic continues and surges, outreach and engagement becomes increasingly important. Look at ways to identify issues quickly, including:

- Use remote methods to engage clients on a regular basis
- Check in about housing, finances, food access, ability to reach medical appointment, ability to pay for rent/utilities and on emotional well-being
- You may adapt and use this [Wellness Checklist](#) as a guide for outreach
- Include wellness checks during regular case management
- Also reach out to client who do not regularly interact with program staff



Safety Education and PPE

Lack of access to protective equipment and cleaning supplies can greatly increase the risk of COVID-19 transmission. Make sure that clients receive updated information about infection risks and that they have access to PPE supplies. Remember that PPE can be purchased for client households as outlined in previous HOPWA/COVID-19 webinars and guidance:

[HOPWA-COVID-19 Supportive Services Q&A](#)

[Webinar and Slides-HOPWA Supportive Services as COVID-19 Response](#)

[HOPWA COVID-19 Activity Eligibility Chart](#)



Vaccinations: Education & Access

Access to COVID-19 vaccinations is important to everyone at this time, and especially those who are immune-compromised. Program staff should become familiar with vaccine information and local plans for vaccine roll-outs:

- Expect vaccine hesitancy and provide information on importance of COVID-19 vaccines
- Review resources such as [Answering Patient Questions](#) (CDC) and [Multicultural Vaccine Confidence Guidance](#) (ISDA), [FAQ - COVID-19 Vaccines and People with HIV](#) (HIVMA)
- **Follow HUD's COVID-19 Homeless System Response:** [Vaccine Planning and Distribution](#) page on the HUD Exchange for updates on preparing staff and clients, interaction with public health authorities and vaccine access
- Learn about your state's plan for vaccinations: [State Vaccination Plans](#)



Safety in Facilities

HOPWA facilities may continue to face some safety challenges similar to those seen in shelters, group homes and other congregate housing. Program staff should remain diligent about safety protocols to ensure that residents and staff stay safe. For more information, guidance and assistance in developing safety protocols see:

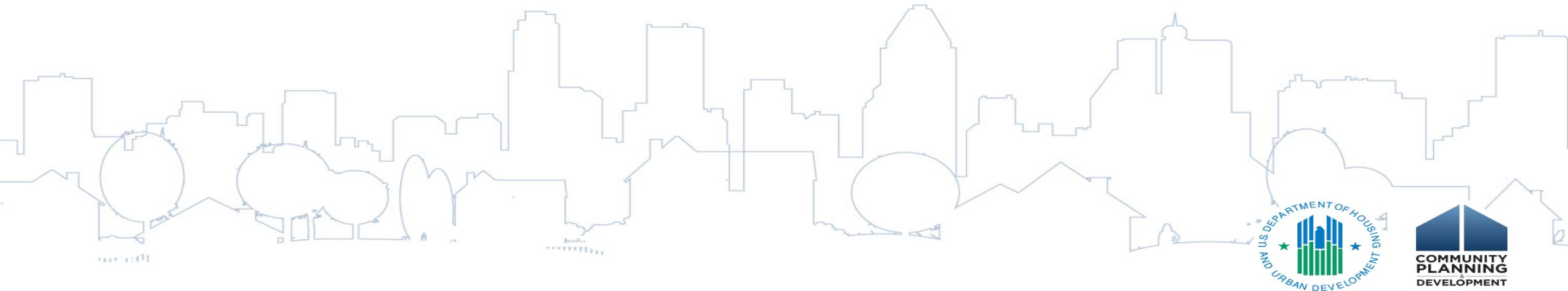
[CDC Guidance for Group Homes](#)

[CDC Guidance for Homeless Shelter Providers](#)

[Preparedness Checklist for Shelter Facilities](#)



HOPWA GUIDANCE UPDATES



Transportation to Vaccine Sites

NEW

Q: Can regular HOPWA funding and/or HOPWA-CV be used to transport HOPWA-eligible household members to vaccination events, including by renting/hiring buses for that purpose? Also, could HOPWA be combined with ESG so that CoC and HOPWA providers could transport individuals collectively to mass vaccination events?

A: Yes, both regular HOPWA and HOPWA-CV funds may be used for this purpose. The costs of hiring any reasonable type(s) of transportation to and from vaccination sites, including the hire of buses and drivers, would be eligible costs under HOPWA Supportive Services when such vaccination events are the best option for HOPWA-eligible persons and their household members to obtain COVID-19 vaccinations.



Transportation to Vaccine Sites

NEW

Continued...

Shared Costs and Cautions:

If such costs are shared between ESG-CV (or other programs) and HOPWA for this purpose, organizations should ensure that the proportion of costs charged to HOPWA is based on the proportion of HOPWA-eligible persons transported.

When providing such transportation during the pandemic, grantees and sponsors are advised to put in place all appropriate safety measures such as PPE and distancing as recommended by local and national public health officials.



Gas/Food Gift Cards - Update

What types of gift cards may be given to client households for purchase of gas and/or groceries?

While there are no absolute restrictions related to the type of gift cards allowed, cards specific to grocery store or gas station chains are the preferred option, with built in restrictions for what items may be purchased whenever possible. Cards for other stores or chains – such as “big box” or similar stores – that sell gas and/or groceries are also an option.

More general pre-paid debit cards (VISA, etc.) could possibly be allowed in cases where the preferred options are not available in a particular service area. However, **cards such as these that do not easily lend themselves to limiting purchases to food and/or gas should only be used as a last resort and only with strict controls and verification processes in place.**

Agencies may also consider alternatives to gift cards, such as food/grocery delivery, ordering groceries online for delivery to clients, etc.



Gas/Food Gift Cards – Implementation/Tracking

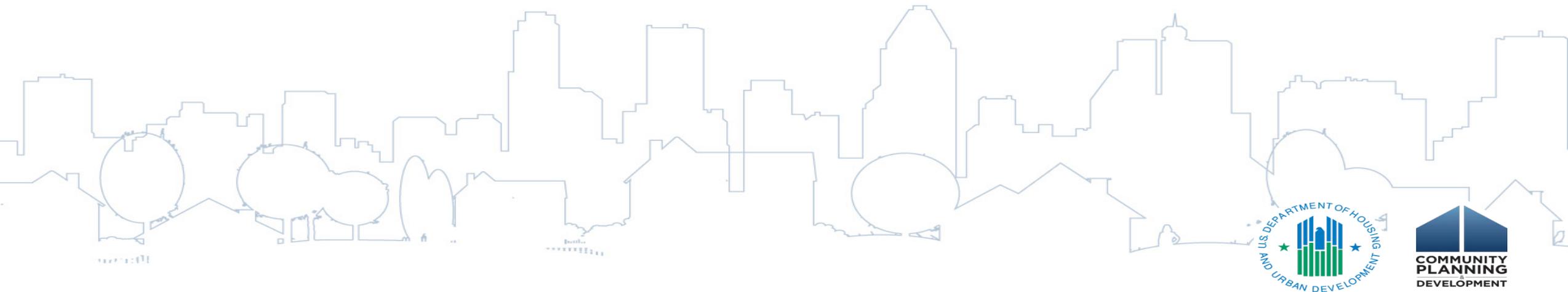
The following are HUD recommendations on implementation and tracking of gift cards:

- Procedures should include strict measures taken to secure these “same as cash” cards at each organization. Security recommendations include: keep cards in locked cabinets; allow only certain assigned staff to access them; maintain written logs of card numbers/staff members/clients to receive them when cards are distributed;
- If unable to obtain cards that can only be utilized for food or gas, agencies are strongly advised to implement a form for clients to sign acknowledging they will only utilize the cards for these purposes and explaining any additional rules or requirements;
- Require that all clients receiving **general gift cards (such as VISA)** provide receipts verifying their purchases, and implement a procedure to review these receipts prior to issuing additional card(s) to the same individual;
- Card value and identifying numbers should be recorded in each client’s case record.



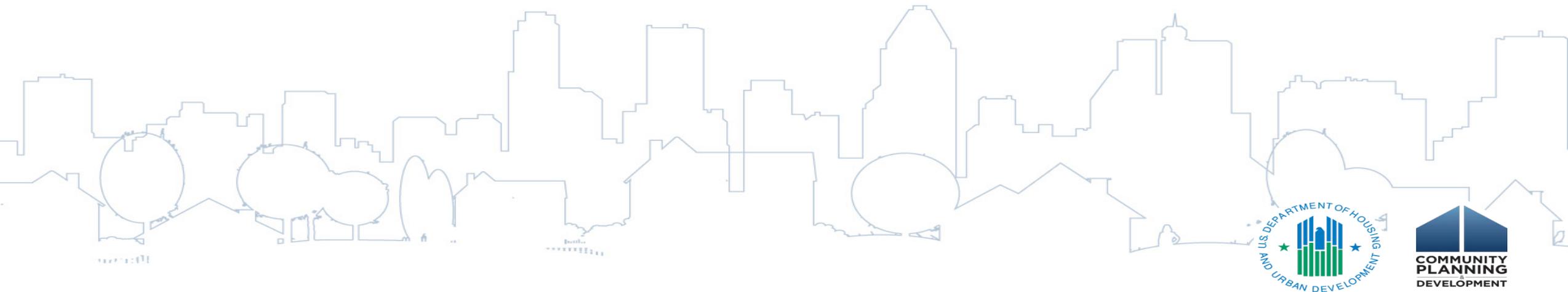
Gas/Food Gift Cards – P&P

HUD is providing grantees and sponsors the flexibility to use gift cards in a way that will benefit clients the most while putting protections in place to help ensure the cards are used appropriately by both agency staff and clients. Controls should be implemented to limit purchases to allowed items to the greatest extent possible. Policies & procedures must be developed for this activity that are reasonable, applied equally, and clearly demonstrate the due diligence of the grantee and project sponsors to avoid fraud, waste or abuse.



OFFICE HOURS

QUESTIONS!



AAQ and TA Requests

GET ANSWERS!

GET ASSISTANCE!

Answers:

Grantee and Sponsors may ask program, policy and COVID-related questions through the HOPWA AAQ:

[HOPWA Ask A Question \(AAQ\) Portal](#)

Technical Assistance:

HUD is making additional technical assistance (TA) available to grantees to support HOPWA/COVID-19 planning, program development, problem-solving. Those needing TA assistance in managing COVID-19-related program issues may submit an online request through the HUD Exchange at:

<https://www.hudexchange.info/program-support/technical-assistance/>



Stay Informed

- All guidance for HOPWA grantees and project sponsors related to infectious disease preparedness and response and COVID-19 will be sent to the HOPWA Mailing List: <https://www.hudexchange.info/mailinglist/subscribe/>
- To subscribe, enter the requested contact information, select “HOPWA – Housing Opportunities for Persons With AIDS” then select Subscribe.
- Updates on HOPWA Guidance for COVID-19 is also available on the HUD Exchange and HUD.gov: <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/hopwa/covid-19/#resources-and-guidance>

