

## SLIDE 1

Hello, everyone, and welcome to HOPWA/COVID-19 Office Hours Responding to COVID-19 Surge. My name is Valencia Moss, and I am the Organizational Learning and Event Planning Specialist for Collaborative Solutions.

We are going to give everyone just about one more minute to log on. A couple of people are joining us from the East Coast and West Coast, so let's give everyone one more minute and then we will start promptly in one minute.

And Hawaii. So, welcome everyone to the webinar. Also, while you guys are logging on, a copy of today's PowerPoint presentation will be emailed to you at the conclusion of today's webinar.

All right. Let's begin.

Again, welcome everyone to HOPWA/COVID-19 Office Hours Responding to COVID-19 Surge. Today's webinar is being recorded and will be made available on the HUD Exchange website, and that information will be given to you at the conclusion of today's webinar.

Also, a copy of the PowerPoint presentation used in today's webinar will be emailed at the conclusion.

If you have questions for the webinar, please use the Q&A box, and we will monitor that throughout today's webinar. If you have tips or just want to say hello to your other colleagues that are joining us or just have information you would like to share, we ask that you use the chat box for that information.

I would like to introduce you to your first speaker for today, Kate Briddell. Kate.

Thanks, Valencia.

Hi, everyone. Again, Collaborative Solutions is pleased to welcome you to this webinar titled HOPWA/COVID-19 Office Hours Responding to COVID-19 Surges. We have a large group of folks with us today on today's Office Hours. Today's speakers are myself, Kate Briddell, and Crystal Pope. Also joining us from Collaborative Solutions are Emily Fischbein and Christine Campbell. From HUD's Office of HIV/AIDS Housing are Rita Harcrow, the Director, Ben Ayers, the Deputy Director, Amy Palilonis, Senior Program Specialist, Shalonda Kelly, Management Analyst, and Stefanie Rhodes, the Community Planning and Development Specialist for the CARES Act.

And to round out our team today, we have Jacob Mihalak from Technical Assistance Collaborative and Heather Rhoda from Cloudburst Consulting Group.

And I forgot to advance the slides. My apologies.

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So, today's webinar topic is intended to address the ways in which HOPWA programs can prepare for and respond to COVID-19 surges and the continuation of the pandemic. Our topics are going to include introduction of a new HOPWA resource, which Valencia mentioned, called Responding to COVID-19 Surges, which is available on the HUD Exchange. We're going to review and discuss key activities for expanding client support and care efforts. We'll provide you with some updated guidance and resource about HOPWA COVID-19 responses. And then we'll get to your questions.

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So, again, as people have said, please submit your questions through the Q&A box that's located in the lower portion of your screen.

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So, on with the topic.

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

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I apologize. I need to now turn this over to Crystal Pope to talk about the new HOPWA TA product.

And she is muted.

Okay. Thank you. And I'm actually going to defer to – to Rita first to – I think she has a few things to say about the whole surge approach and – and where we are right now.

Thanks, Crystal.

Yeah, I just first of all wanted to say a big thank you to everyone out there for joining us today. And also for carrying out the work of the HOPWA program during this ongoing struggle that we've all been enduring. It's impacted us all in so many ways and on different levels, and that includes the families that we seek to serve with the HOPWA program. And we've all been watching the news. We see the dramatic spikes that are happening across the country, here and there. You know, increases in hospitalizations and new cases. And we wanted to have this important discussion with you about how you can further assess the needs and address the needs that might emerge in your communities.

So, we know that during a spike that communities are responding in different ways depending on what's happening and what resources are available. So, when there's a surge or a spike, we – we know that there could be school closures, restaurant closures or restrictions, workplaces might be shut down or limited. So, we can anticipate having clients with lower income, fewer childcare options, health considerations, and – and even people being more likely to need that isolation or quarantine within their own household.

So, through this crisis, our main goal is always to keep people safe. And that means the households that we serve, their family members, and our – our own selves and our family members and staff, too. So, I encourage you all, as we continue to go through this crisis together, to check in with each other, check in with your clients, see what's needed, and see what HOPWA can do to be flexible to meet those needs.

And now I'm going to turn it back over to Crystal.

Thank you so much.

As – as Rita mentioned, we're in a time where there are lots of concerns about the continuing and – and surging pandemic. And those concerns, together with the fact that programs have had to make lots of changes, and absorb lots of new Covid-related program guidance, led to the development of this new brief TA guide shown here entitled Responding to COVID-19 Surges: A 2021 HOPWA Program Resource Guide. It's available now to be downloaded from the HUD Exchange. You can find it on the HOPWA COVID-19 page or directly here at this – this link.

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Basically what this does is it includes some suggested activities and best practices for client services during the pandemic. It also will give you some updates and a listing of resources, kind of all in one place because we know that's all been rolled out over time.

We encourage everybody to review it and check out some of the new articles and resources that might be helpful to you and your program staff.

And I do want to mention an additional reason to reassess how your community is meeting the COVID-19 housing needs for our people living with HIV right now is to be sure that funds are getting to HOPWA-eligible households in a timely manner. As we look at how frequently or quickly people are drawing down funds on the grantee level, it looks like quite a few grantees are drawing them down very slowly. Or, in some cases, not at all yet to date. So, that's something that HUD and some of the TA firms are starting to assess in terms of spending rates just to – and we'd like to get a better picture of why that's happening. I mean, we know a big why is just Covid. And the world. But, in terms of getting money out there quickly, we'd like to see what any of the barriers are. So, throughout the webinar today, if any of you have ideas or thoughts about what the barriers have been in your community, if you would just share those in the Q&A box, that would be very helpful to us.

So, for the webinar today we're going to focus our brief discussion, because most of this is going to be answering questions about this or any other HOPWA issues that you have, we're going to focus on expanding client support and care efforts as the most relevant thing to making program-focused adjustments related to COVID-19. But again we will have – be able to answer other questions.

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And Kate, thank you.

As all of you know, there have been increases in housing instability and evictions in – in most all areas as a result of the pandemic. Not only that, but other difficulties for clients in accessing food, transportation, and other needs. So, as we look at this situation continuing and even worsening in a lot of ways, we've identified five key activities we believe are worthy of consideration by HOPWA grantees and project sponsors going forward. So, we'll just walk briefly through those.

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Thank you.

So, as the pandemic continues, more HOPWA households may experience reduced income and experience inability to pay for rent, mortgage, or utilities, in addition to many other needs. So, programs really should put more emphasis on assessing needs and providing all possible resources to help households avoid housing instability and eviction. What we really think is that housing security has to be the top priority. And I think that's – everybody knows that, and that's what we're here for, that's what programs are here for, but I think this is a good time as we're looking at additional threats and – and surges of the pandemic, it's a good idea to revisit that and look at what we're doing within our programs.

So, how do we do that? And here are some of our suggestions.

First, to assess client households more frequently. The impact of the pandemic really calls for more frequent assessment and contact about their financial status, their ability to pay bills of any kind, obtain food or – or any of those kinds of things.

We want to also make sure that we're targeting STRMU, which is a big part of CARES Act and also our regular HOPWA funds to households that are at risk of eviction or foreclosure. Make sure you're strategically using all of your STRMU options, including regular HOPWA, the STRMU waiver for those who are using that, and CARES Act. This is not a time, I think, to hold back and wait and see what may be needed later. We need to meet the need as it's happening right now.

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Using hotel/motel vouchers for emergency housing when needed. As you know, and we've talked about this and other firms have – have done webinars based on this, that – that hotel/motel rooms can be used for quarantine and isolation, but also for short-term or kind of medium-term, really, housing. And can make sure that HOPWA households don't end up homeless or in shelters. So, if you don't have vouchers as part of your HOPWA funding, which not everybody has, definitely look to your ESG and other providers in your community for help because there are many other programs that do have that as a possible resource.

And also, just overall, accessing any emergency rental assistance, especially in cases where the need is high, you're not able to meet it with your current HOPWA resources, or it's something that you can't pay for, look to some of those other resources within the community and coordinate with them.

And we'd also say, if budgets allow, add eligible households to TBRA or Master Leasing. I know we've said to be careful about using CARES Act money to add people to the Tenant-Based Rental Assistance rolls because you have to look at how you're going to sustain that in the future. So, most people who are using TBRA under CARES Act are using that to – to pay for some of the extra costs that may happen as more of our clients lose jobs and lose income, and so the subsidy costs to the program become higher. But it's worth looking at whether under our regular funding that additional people could be added to TBRA and keep them safe in that way or more able to afford their rent.

It's worth noting, or a reminder, that keep an eye on your recertifications and the changes in income that may be happening in communities with certain clients. And quickly process recertifications when people have income losses so that you can quickly reduce the client portion of rent that's due.

And we don't – we haven't talked about PHP, Permanent Housing Placement, all that much. But it is an important piece of this, and it is allowable as a HOPWA COVID-19 response. So, using PHP for placement in new housing when that has to happen is also a priority.

And we also want to make a reminder that even if people are covered by eviction moratoriums that are out there, they still owe the rent for each month, right? So, we want to make sure that rental assistance is not delayed.

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And this is also part of outreach and assessment because clients really may not understand the – the impact that not paying rent will have on them in the future. And so, keeping up with whether people are behind, whether they are just not coming to you because they think the moratorium covers them, that's something to keep in mind as well.

So, we've talked a lot in previous webinars about the importance of client outreach and engagement. And really connecting with clients at this point is especially important. I think everybody would agree. We want to make sure that any potential financial and social issues are caught as early as possible. So, these are just a few recommendations.

To make sure and use the remote methods that – that you've put in place to engage clients on a more regular basis, maybe a more frequent basis.

Check in with people about not only their housing, but finances, food access, ability to get to medical appointments, and all of those kinds of things that relate to their emotional wellbeing. There's a wellness checklist that HUD has developed that you could use a guide for outreach. The link that's provided here is to a checklist that focuses on client engagement around a whole range of issues including, you know, what impact the pandemic has had on them financially, socially, emotionally, physically, and a number of other issues. So, you know, that may be a – a useful tool.

And we would say, include those wellness checks during regular case management. But also look at whether you can implement something to reach out to clients who don't have that kind of regular interaction with program staff and make sure that they don't fall between the cracks.

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Like all of us, our clients need updated information on infection risks and Covid transmission. So, this is another area where they may need some education or re-education. There's a lot of misinformation out there. I think we all know that because we're Googling things every day to – to try to figure out, you know, what is the latest guidance.

And they may also need help in maintaining supplies like PPE and disinfectants for their homes. A good example that came up when we were all talking about this the other day is the current, or very recent, recommendation from the CDC that people wear two masks which could impact, you know, their supply of masks. People may not know that or may not have heard it. So, I think remember – remember that all of those things are eligible expenses as is outlined in all of the links here, including the Activity Eligibility Chart, I think is a really good touchstone for you if you have any questions about whether something can be covered under one line item or another, and whether it's CARES Act or regular HOPWA or both, that's a good reference tool for you.

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So, also vaccinations are on most people's minds these days. And part of your job in working with HOPWA recipients – or HOPWA households – will be getting information out to people as it develops because that's very much changing right now. And talking with clients, too, about the importance of vaccines. And possibly facilitating getting people to vaccination sites. Or in some cases, working locally with groups that are doing this to – for facilities in particular – to – to be included as places where those vaccinations might happen.

It's normal to expect some vaccine hesitancy, so providing some information to help with this would be important. To that end, we've listed here some resources, and there are more, also, in the – the – the product document. Some general and some specific to people with HIV. So, being familiar with some of that information and being able to translate it to – to folks is an important thing.

Vaccine planning is a focus of an initiative that's going on right now through HUD's COVID-19 homeless programs, which HOPWA is a part of. So, I'm going to turn this to Stefanie Rhodes from OHH briefly to tell us a little bit more about what's going on with those efforts.

Hello everyone. (Inaudible) Planning and Development Specialist (inaudible) Housing, and I'm also contributing to the Federal Partners vaccine discussion. The primary focus of this group is, of course, homeless populations, but it includes partners with CDC, HUD Equity Team, National Healthcare for the Homeless. And really the goal is to help communities, you know, prepare for and respond to COVID-19. In terms of vaccinations, lots of issues, of course, like are coming up, you know, in real time in terms of equitable vaccine distribution. You know, in regards to housing status, race. And really our goal is, of course, like help communities prepare but also to really advocate for equity in terms of ensuring that those in leadership are aware of these issues (inaudible).

Hey, Stefanie, This is Valencia. I'm sorry to stop you. Can you turn your camera on for me for a second so everyone can see you? And I think, also, your sound is a little muffled.

Oh, okay. Sorry about that.

Okay. All right. I tried to turn my camera on earlier, and it was not working for me, so, thank you for letting me know. Can y'all hear me clearly now?

You still have – it's like some background noise, but I think it may be too – I don't know. If – can you speak for me a little bit and let me hear you?

Yes. So, can you hear me now?

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I can hear you. Just speak a little louder, and if you can start over for me, I think everyone can – it would be better. So, if you could just start from the beginning. Thank you.

Okay.

Yes. So, like I stated before, I participate on the federal partners vaccine discussion. This really formed last year with the goal of really helping communities like prepare for and respond to COVID-19. And really prepare for vaccine distribution in particular, and what that might look like, and ensuring that the needs of those, you know, who have, you know, that have questionable housing status, those that are homeless, really have access to vaccines in a way that makes them feel safe. And really having accurate information in terms of helping them make the best decision for them in terms of vaccines. Of course, really getting education out there for providers as to how to speak to, how to talk to their clients about the vaccine, about vaccine safety, and really building vaccine confidence in those populations as well. And a part of that really is also equitable vaccine distribution.

So, of course things are changing rapidly on the ground as, you know, as the nature of the world right now. But really, you know, we discuss topics around, you know, equitable vaccine distribution as far as the housing status, as far as race because there is, of course, an intersection between housing status and race. And really like the metrics that are currently being used regarding prioritization. So, are they fair? Are – is housing status really coming up as – as having a role in prioritization? If not, what can we do to address that?

Those are things that we discuss. Those are really our main goals. But, that's about it for me.

Hopefully y'all could hear that, and it was clear. If not, I'm happy to answer questions in the Q&A as well. But that is all for me for now.

Great. Thank you, Stefanie. And I think the – it says here, follows HUD's COVID-19 homeless system response, and there's a link. And that is a really good site for everybody to be on and sign up for notifications because, I think, as Stefanie has said, this is a work in progress, and it's a very large one that – so this will be a very good place for people to get additional information about vaccines. And especially, I think there's some things from the CDC that are very specific to people with HIV. And so, those will all be, I think, helpful for – for folks.

Yes, definitely. Definitely. So, yes, check out those links. Those are routinely updated. And for those living with HIV, that information, of course, is being routinely updated as well as more information is – is getting out there.

Terrific. Thank you.

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Kate, I think, we had, yes, one final slide.

And we don't want to forget about the challenges faced by some of the HOPWA facilities and want to make sure they have all the information necessary to ensure that residents and staff stay safe. There are a few resources listed here that may be helpful for grantees and – and staff of facilities.

So, that is – Kate, I will turn it back to you at this point and – and also for questions.

Perfect. Thank you, Crystal.

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So, we have some, as I mentioned earlier, some guidance updates.

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And as Crystal mentioned, transportation to – for clients to get to vaccines is important, and so while some – in some areas clients may be able to receive their COVID-19 vaccines at their service locations, such as their housing facilities, or at a congregate setting, or at the agencies where they're receiving services, many communities are hosting mass vaccine events in stadiums and convention centers as their primary delivery method. So, we received this question. Can regular HOPWA funding and/or HOPWA-CV be used to transport HOPWA-eligible household members to vaccination events including by renting or 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?

So, the answer to that is yes, both regular HOPWA and HOPWA-CV funds may be used for this purpose. The cost of hiring any reasonable types of transportation to and from vaccination sites, including the hiring of buses and drivers, would be eligible costs under HOPWA supportive services when such vaccination events are the best option for HOPWA COVID-19 persons and their household members to obtain COVID-19 vaccinations.

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And continuing to talk about this topic, some shared cost ideas and some cautions. So, if such costs are shared between ESG or other programs and HOPWA for this purpose of transporting folks, organizations should ensure that the proportion of costs charged to HOPWA is based on the proportion of HOPWA-eligible persons transported. This is information that you probably already know and use in your daily work. We just wanted to remind you.

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

Anyone from OHH want to chime in on this new guidance?

Okay. On to the next.

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So, gift/food – sorry, gas/food gift cards update. So, one question that comes up is, what types of gift cards may be given to client households for the purchase of gas and/or groceries?

So, there's no absolute restrictions related to the type of gift cards that are allowed. Obviously, cards that are specific to grocery stores or gas station chains are the preferred options because those usually come with built-in restrictions about what items may be purchased whenever possible.

Cards for other stores or chains like big-box stores or similar stores, such as Target or Walmart, or Fred Meyer, that sell gas and groceries are also an option.

So, more general prepaid debit cards like Visa cards can possibly be allowed in some cases where our preferred options are not available. Like in a particular service area, if there isn't a Walmart close by, or if it's, you know, very far from other stores, these cards can be used. However, cards like these don't easily lend themselves to limiting purchases to food and/or gas. And so they should only be used as a last resort. And only with strict controls and verification processes in place.

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

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Because, as you know, gift cards really need to be tracked and treated sort of same as cash. So, you need to make sure that you have procedures in place for that. Security recommendations we have for you are to keep cards in locked cabinets. Allow only certain assigned staff to access them. You should maintain a written log of the card numbers, and the staff members, and the clients who receive them. So, maintain a list of the card numbers, what staff has touched those, what clients are getting those. You should make sure that you're also capturing that information in the client case record.

So, if you're unable to obtain cars – I'm sorry – cards that can only be used for food or gas, like those prepaid gift cards we talked about, you're strongly encouraged to implement a form for clients to sign acknowledging that the intended purpose is to be used for groceries, or PPE, or gas. State the intended purpose and the rules for using those.

You may also want to require that all clients receiving the general gift cards provide receipts verifying their purchases. And implement a procedure to review these receipts prior to issuing additional cards to that same individual. Once again, information about that gift card, how much it was, what the number is, should be recorded in the client's case record.

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So, policies and procedures regarding gift cards. Yes, you should have those. In this case, where 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 that 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 and 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, and abuse.

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Rita, Ben, Amy, go ahead.

Thank you. I did – I did want to add one thing to this topic because I know it's a little confusing and concerning. I was a grantee at one point, and the thought of gift cards is a little bit scary for sure. So, I just want to underscore the message that we encourage the use of other types of support for nutrition and PPE. I appreciate you guys saying that. So, you can think outside the box in – in ways that will hopefully still keep people safe. Like a food delivery service if that's a possibility. Or providing transportation to a local store that might have early hours or that kind of thing. So, in those cases, you would get a receipt, which is the best tracking that you can have.

Store-specific cards, as Kate just said, you know, they're self-limiting in some ways, so that is also an option. When we're looking at food deserts and really desperate situations right now for some people during the pandemic, we have to try to offer this additional flexibility where we can. That – that still means, though, that you have to track and be responsible with the federal dollars that you're getting. So, if you have to purchase things like Visa cards or cash cards, that should be the last resort of – of a way to provide assistance. And even then, making sure that you have policies in place to avoid that waste, fraud, and abuse. I'm just – just reiterating that. Thanks – thanks, Kate.

Sure. Thank you, Rita, for that additional information.

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So, we've come to the end of our slides and now are eager to hear from you all. So, Emily, are there questions in the Q&A box?

Yes. We have received some questions. We have one question that someone has asked. If a client is in the TBRA program and has lost their job, their utilities are not being paid. Can they use CARES Act money to pay the utilities?

What they – Amy, you might want to add something to this, or – or Rita, too, but if – if they have lost their job and you've done a reassessment of their – of what portion of rent they would be paying and what the – the utility costs would be, you know, most of that can be covered just through the program itself but not – not – not for the additional amounts of – of utilities, if – if that's what the person is saying.

Correct. Yeah, it sounds like from the chat we had that is what the person is saying. That they had recalculated the client's income due to the job loss but the utility allowance is still not – not covering all the utilities. And so, you can't use your CARES Act funds to pay, you know, specifically for those utilities outside of, you know, what's provided under the utility allowance. But I suggested that the question asker reach out through the AAQ and provide us some more information and see if there are ways we could sort of try to figure out a solution or workaround for that.

Thanks, Amy. Do you think there will be another round of HOPWA CARES Act funds come through?

Um, so we have not heard anything about that. You know, of course, there's all kinds of news stories, and we hear things the same way that you guys do, so we're watching that. Just circling back to something that I believe Crystal mentioned earlier in the presentation about spending. That is one thing, of course, that appropriators look at as a gauge for do we need additional HOPWA CARES Act funding or – or whatever act it's going to be called. Do HOPWA providers actually need additional resources. And, you know, if they're looking at the amount of funds that have been spent, you know, I'm not sure that – that they would determine that right now. So, again, not heard anything. Just trying to bring that back full circle that, you know, the – the funds that are appropriated should be intended to meet need, and we would need to be able to evidence that need.

Thank you, Rita. We have another question. Should clients with no income be enrolled in TBRA?

Well, I can say that there are no regulatory or guidance restrictions on serving zero-income people on TBRA. Occasionally local programs will put some caveats on that. But absolutely. The, you know, even when you bring people in who have income, into TBRA, we often see them lose jobs or lose income, and become zero-income for a time. So, certainly, the program is designed to help people at any income level within the – the normal limits.

And this is a misconception sometimes on the ground. There absolutely is not a minimum income requirement in order to receive TBRA assistance.

Thanks, Amy and Crystal.

Crystal, we have another – I have a question around the STRMU. Can you clarify the days? The question is, does the 250 days start at the end of the 147 from – or does it extend from 147? So, if you can clarify those timeframes again.

Okay. So, I think the – the numbers are – are wrong.

Right.

To begin with. So, but – but, understandably, it's – it's confusing. There are basically three streams, or types, right now under the current rules for STRMU. And one is your regular STRMU- that is 21 weeks of assistance within a 52-week period. If programs are using the waiver, the STRMU waiver, they can provide up to 12 months, which would be 365 days, of assistance within that 12-month period. If you're

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using CARES Act money, you can provide up to 24 months of – of assistance through CARES Act money. And there is no eligibility period, no 12-month eligibility period. It's a completely separate thing.

You do not have to use one before you use another. Agencies can make strategic decisions about whether to use CARES Act funds or their regular HOPWA funds depending upon what the balances are and what the needs are.

So, I would say, also, use the new document that – that we sent out today, or go back into the – through those links to the HUD Exchange and pull up all of the information on STRMU. We have a STRMU guide in there and previous webinars that – that pretty much map this out.

And, if you have questions about a specific instance and are not sure how that would work, absolutely put it into the AAQ and we will help you individually figure that out and – and get it going in the right way.

Thank you, Crystal.

We have a question. There are a lot – there are still a lot of people that need HOPWA funds, but it seems like finding housing that will accept the funds is hard. Is there any talk, especially with COVID-19 now, of creating housing for HOPWA-receptive housing and other HUD housing programs?

So, I will try – I'm not sure I understood the whole question. But we, of course, acknowledge how difficult it can be to find housing that's within FMR standards, so, you know, there has been waiver flexibility around that.

As far as what's being created or developed, I have not heard of HOPWA programs specifically doing that, but certainly there are other federal funds in play that might be developing housing that could be leveraged for HOPWA.

Thanks, Rita. We have a question about the new reporting forms. And were there updates to those forms and what did those updates entail?

I can try to answer that one, too.

So, the – the email that went out recently just let you know that there had been an extension on the – the forms for Paperwork Reduction Act applicability. So, those are the valid forms that should be used now. There just were minor updates to definitions, wording and that kind of thing. So, I don't know that you would notice anything specific, just updates to the instructions and definitions.

There is another potential round of changes coming, so if you've seen that, those have recently been up for public comment and we'll make sure when there are changes that you might have to incorporate – adhere to something different, that you'll have plenty of notice and training around that. Just make sure that when you are reporting now that you are using the forms that are within the correct expiration date.

Thank you, Rita. We have a question. If a client is living in a unit that is not up to Habitability Standards but does not want to move, are we able to be flexible in providing rental assistance since this person's income is being affected by COVID-19 and they are struggling month to month?

I will try to answer that. So, I would expect that you would be working with that landlord to make those changes and bring that unit up to standard. We would not want to make someone homeless. So, I would suggest applying case management there to see if there is any other option of where to move that person if those updates are not forthcoming. I don't know if anybody else has any other creative or better thoughts on that.

Of course, if you're -

I mean, I understand – . Go ahead.

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I was saying, if you're provided tenant-based rental assistance, the unit does need to meet Habitability standards. That's ultimately what the question is.

Thanks, Amy. In the situation of a TBRA client not being able to pay rent, could they be switched completely over to CARES STRMU?

So, I specifically wanted to answer this live because I think that that is an interesting idea. And creative. I feel like one thing you would need to think about is at the end of the – if you're switching them from tenant-based rental assistance to STRMU assistance, at the end of the STRMU, would they still – if they still were in need of rental assistance, would they still have a TBRA voucher available for them? I don't know if anyone else has any other thoughts on that idea.

I was just wondering why switching them to STRMU rather than keeping them on TBRA and, you know, through a recertification, making adjustment so they're – they're a zero-income household like we were talking about -

I was interpreting it as – sorry. I was interpreting it as, in addition to that question about someone not being able to afford their utilities, like the utility allowance not covering it. Because in that case you could pay their rent and utilities, and there isn't the same requirement that rent be calculated and all that. That was how I was interpreting it. I don't know if that was what the question asked or was building on, but –

Okay.

Okay. Thank you, Crystal and Amy. We have a question here. How can HOPWA providers be provided with the most updated list of open and closed shelters? Many shelters are not providing any updates to providers and are requesting that clients call the shelters.

That's just a localized question, so I'm not sure that I would, on our level at least, would be able to answer that.

So, some of our TA folks who are working with all the other programs might have more input here, but just initially I would think that if you're using the HMIS system locally, that that might be a resource. But if you're saying that they're not able to keep that updated because of the pandemic and local shelters are requesting phone calls, that might be the only route. As Amy said, it just seems like a very local kind of situation. So, if any of our TA folks have worked with the – on the homeless side as well, if you have anything else there, it would be helpful.

Yeah, hi. This is Jacob Mihalak in Seattle. I think in general on the homeless side now, the big – the big concern is overcrowding and getting people into non-congregate settings, not getting people into shelters per se. And so, all of that is being coordinated through the Coordinated Entry System. And if a person is at risk of homelessness, they might be eligible for homelessness prevention funds. Or if they're literally homeless, they would get – they would get eval – their situation would be evaluated through the Coordinated Entry System. And the HOPWA program in every community should already be part of Coordinated Entry. So, directly calling a shelter on – a case manager directly calling a shelter would not actually be the primary strategy here. And I think the person who's asking that question would need to give what the details are, why that is what they're choosing to do rather than working through the existing mechanisms established in each community.

Thanks, Jake. Is there any news about the phasing out of EID tied to this proposed rule -Housing Opportunities Through Modernization Act of 2016 implementation of Sections 102, 103, and 104?

Heather, I am wondering if that is one that you'd like to speak to?

But you may be muted.

There we go. I'm off mute, I think.

There you go.

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Well, I think, you know, some folks at OHH could also speak to this, too, right? We've been, as far as I'm aware, currently Earned Income Disregard still applies to folks who, you know, individuals that are currently on the program, you know, receiving HOPWA rental assistance. If you end up assessing and finding out that they are eligible – that they are eligible for Earned Income Disregard, then it still applies. But as far as when that is going to be officially phased out from the HOPWA standpoint, I'm not entirely sure.

Yeah, I think that was awaiting the final rule.

Yeah.

I mean, it – it – what we've been telling people is that it is being phased out, but it has not – that date has not hit yet.

And so, anyone who is still on it, or eligible for it, you know, can continue on it.

Absolutely. So, people should continue to screen for that, right, as a part of, calculate – right, calculating portions of rent, etc.

Thanks. That's a – that's a question from the before times. So, we're having to – but, I think Ben is going to talk, are you still on Ben?

Because I think you work closely with this rule.

Yeah. I – I just wanted to make the clarification that this wasn't something that HUD was doing that Congress actually struck that authority. Excuse me, I'm so sorry. That Congress actually struck that authority from the Section 8 Act, which is what we lean on in order to provide that type of assistance. That Earned Income Disregard. And so, unfortunately, there's nothing HUD can do about this. But until the rule is finalized and out there, we are able to continue to participate in – in EID, as Crystal said.

Thank you, everybody. It looks like we have one more question. Will HMIS ever be able to match the CAPER? What would be the purpose of asking all HOPWA subgrantees to use or input into HMIS if complete reports can't be run?

So, I'm not sure if I was unclear earlier, but HMIS is not a requirement for HOPWA. So, it's encouraged where you work with homeless populations, but it is not a requirement. And, of course, this is something we've been looking at for, I don't know, ever, about how to use HMIS for reporting or to otherwise automate our reporting. So, that is something that we're still continuing to work on. I don't know if Ben or Amy had anything else to add to that.

And then we had just – a question that just came in that so – someone had mentioned earlier previous funds. Any idea where we'll be able to resume using those? I'm not sure what we're – what they were meaning by previous funds.

So, Crystal, you may want to put that as an AAQ, and we'll – we can get back to you because we need a little bit more clarity on that question.

Definitely, because I – we would need more guidance on – on exactly what's being asked.

So, we're going to toss it back to you, Kate.

## SLIDE 19

Fantastic. Well, we want to remind folks that they can get answers and get assistance. Use the AAQ, the Ask A Question Help Desk. So, grantees and sponsors may ask program, policy and Covid-related questions through the HOPWA AAQ. There are also several consumers, or clients, or potential clients on this webinar who have asked about this, so those of you who are interested in asking about resources in

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your area, please be sure to use the HOPWA Ask A Question portal to input your information, that way we have more information about you and can better answer your questions.

For those grantees who are interested in technical assistance, HUD is making technical assistance available to folks to better support their HOPWA and COVID planning, program development, and problem solving. So, those who need technical assistance in managing their COVID-19-related program issues, you can submit an online request through the Exchange at this address. Again, Valencia had mentioned that we will be emailing these slide decks out to folks, so those links will be in this slide deck.

## SLIDE 20

And you should stay informed. So, all guidance for HOPWA grantees and project sponsors related to infectious disease preparedness and response and COVID-19 will be sent through the HOPWA mailing list.

Also, in addition to the HUD Exchange mailing list, there is also a HUD.gov mailing list. So, please be sure to subscribe to that if you aren't already. Enter your requested contact information with HOPWA as your subject, and then hit Subscribe. Updates on HOPWA guidance for COVID-19 is also available on the HUD Exchange and HUD.gov.

That is it for us today. I want to thank everyone for joining us. And stay well, and we look forward to working with you in the future. Thanks, everyone.

Thanks, everyone for joining us. Again, a copy of the presentation will be emailed to you. And if you, by chance, have a colleague that missed today's webinar, they will have to wait until – it will be uploaded on the HUD Exchange next week.

So, thank you. Have a great weekend. Bye-bye.