RESPONDING TO COVID-19 SURGES:
A 2021 HOPWA PROGRAM RESOURCE GUIDE

HOPWA RESPONSE TO THE CONTINUING PANDEMIC

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. This brief guide highlights best practices, updated HOPWA guidance, and COVID-19 resources.

Expand Client Support and Care Efforts

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 effective support for HOPWA households include:

SET HOUSING SECURITY AS THE TOP PROGRAM PRIORITY. As the pandemic continues, more HOPWA households may experience reduced income and inability to pay for rent, mortgage or utilities, in addition to other needs. Be vigilant in assessing needs and providing all possible resources to help households avoid housing instability and eviction. *Resources and Response*: Target provision of regular, waiver and CARES Act **STRMU**, **hotel/motel vouchers** for emergency housing and/or quarantine, alternate emergency rental assistance through **ESG-CV**, **CDBG-CV**, the **Ryan White** HIV/AIDS Program and other programs. Increase TBRA rolls when possible and process interim recertifications quickly to adjust client rent portions due to income losses. Use **PHP** for placement in new housing, when needed. Also see Tenant Guidance - Rent Repayment Plans and Tools for Landlords with Tenants Impacted by COVID19

INCREASE CLIENT OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT. Work actively to identify problems early! Use remote methods to engage clients on a regular basis for check-ins about housing, finances, adequate food access, ability to reach medical appointments, pay for rent and utilities, and on emotional and social well-being. *Resources and Response*: Adapt and use this Wellness Checklist as a guide for outreach. Include wellness checks in routine case management interactions, but also reach out to clients who do not regularly interact with program staff.

PROVIDE SAFETY EDUCATION AND PPE. Misinformation about or lack of access to protective and cleaning supplies can greatly increase the risk of COVID-19 transmission. While clients may have initially received information about infection risks and given PPE supplies, the prolonged pandemic may result in relaxed behaviors and safety protocols. *Resources and Response*: Programs are encouraged to revisit COVID-19 public health education with clients and to ensure their access to PPE and disinfecting supplies. *See Supportive Services resources, below.*

EDUCATE ON VACCINATIONS. Expect vaccine hesitancy among clients and be able to provide some basic information about the importance of COVID-19 vaccines. Commonly asked questions and quick answers about COVID-19 vaccines can be found here. *Resources and Response*: Learn about your state's plan starting with this resource listing all State Vaccination Plans. Educate households about COVID-19 vaccination facts by reviewing this CDC resource - Answering Patient Questions, and ISDA's information on understanding vaccine confidence in multi-cultural patient populations: Multicultural Vaccine Confidence Guidance. Find additional resources and sign up for vaccine updates on HUD's Vaccine Planning and Distribution page.

PROVIDE SAFETY EDUCATION TO HOPWA FACILITIES/COMMUNITY RESIDENCES. Some HOPWA-funded facilities may face safety challenges similar to those experienced in shelters, group homes and congregate housing. Program staff should remain diligent about safety protocols to ensure a safe environment for both residents and staff. *Resources and Response:* see the CDC Guidance for Group Homes and CDC Guidance for Homeless Shelter Providers for more information. HUD's Preparedness Checklist for Shelter Facilities may also be helpful in developing safety protocols.

In order to quickly respond to worsening community conditions and challenges, it is essential that grantees and project sponsors understand the rules and up-to-date guidance on HOPWA funding and program operations, the CARES Act, HOPWA waivers and program flexibilities. HOPWA Guidance for COVID-19 can be found on the HUD Exchange. Some primary HOPWA/COVID-19 activities are highlighted below.

STRMU: STRMU assistance is the HOPWA program's principal activity for prevention of eviction, instability and homelessness. During the pandemic, STRMU is a key resource in keeping HOPWA-eligible households safe and its assistance time limits have been significantly increased through CARES Act funding and a STRMU waiver. Grantees and project sponsors can learn how to target STRMU and operate programs using multiple funding streams by reviewing guidance published on the HUD Exchange and HUD.gov, including the following:

HOPWA-COVID-19 STRMU Funding Options

Webinar and Slides-Operating STRMU with CARES and HOPWA Funds

Webinar and Slides-COVID-19 STRMU Office Hours

HOTEL/MOTEL VOUCHERS: HOPWA leasing funds may be used under some circumstances to house HOPWA households – or individual members – in hotels, motels and similar places. The use of such vouchers for temporary housing or isolation can provide for a quick and flexible emergency housing response to ensure client safety. More information and guidance on implementation of this temporary housing option can be found at:

Using Hotels-Motels in Your COVID-19 Response

Webinar and Slides-HOPWA Hotel-Motel Stays for COVID-19 Response

SUPPORTIVE SERVICES: HOPWA Supportive Services can provide an array of assistance that has been expanded through the CARES Act and HOPWA program flexibilities to allow for increased supports to HOPWA households. Key provisions include meal delivery, gasoline and grocery cards, car repairs in special circumstances, PPE and disinfecting supplies, purchase of phones for loan to clients, enhanced case management support and others.

HOPWA-COVID-19 Supportive Services Q&A

Webinar and Slides-HOPWA Supportive Services as COVID-19 Response

HOPWA COVID-19 Activity Eligibility Chart

TBRA: TBRA may be funded with regular HOPWA allocations or using CARES Act funds. Grantees should use caution in adding significant numbers of TBRA vouchers with time-limited CARES funding. However, CARES funding may help programs cover increased TBRA subsidy costs resulting from income losses or increases in rent or rent standards.

PERMANENT HOUSING PLACEMENT (PHP): PHP may be funded with regular HOPWA allocations or with CARES Act funds. This activity can help place households in new housing, assisting with first and last month rent payments, security deposits, and other lease-up costs. PHP may become an increasingly important resource as more households are impacted by evictions, especially as eviction moratoriums end.

OTHER HOPWA/COVID-19 ACTIVITIES: HOPWA funds provided under the CARES Act are intended to be used as additional funding to maintain operations, for rental assistance, supportive services and other activities to prevent, prepare for and respond to COVID-19. These funds may be used to provide any eligible HOPWA activities identified at 24 CFR Part 574.

HOPWA/COVID-19: Additional Key Program Operation Information

HOPWA grantees and project sponsors should keep up-to-date on program rules and regulations as well as important guidance on program operations related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

REMOTE METHODS AND PRACTICES: Ongoing surges in the pandemic require grantees and project sponsors to remain vigilant in keeping clients, program staff and other stakeholders safe. The use of remote methods can help mitigate a great deal of risk.

Remote Inspections Q&A

Remote Methods and Practices

Self-Certification of Income and HIV

Webinar and Slides: HOPWA Intake Certifications Remote Methods

Webinar and Slides: Virtual Inspections

HOPWA Remote Methods Virtual Inspections Intake Certifications

OTHER HOPWA/CARES ACT INFORMATION: Provisions in the CARES Act, waivers and HOPWA program flexibilities come with requirements for new program policies as well as changes in reporting and IDIS setup.

COVID19-Related Policy Development

Webinar and Slides: HOPWA CARES Act Reporting Requirements

HOPWA CARES Act IDIS Setup and Instructions Webinar

WAIVERS AND HOPWA/CARES NOTICE: Specific information to guide HOPWA/COVID-19 program parameters is contained in two mega-waivers and the HOPWA Notice.

Mega Waiver 1 - 4-1-20

Mega Waiver 2 - 5-22-20

CARES Act HOPWA Notice

HOPWA/COVID-19 WEBINARS/OFFICE HOURS RECORDINGS AND MATERIALS: An ongoing series of webinars covering a range of HOPWA/COVID-19-related topics, including slides and associated products, is available for download on the HUD Exchange.

HOPWA/COVID-19 Webinars

IMPORTANT LINKS FOR HOPWA/COVID-19 UPDATES AND ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE:

See all ongoing HOPWA/COVID-19 updates at:

HOPWA Guidance for COVID-19 (HUD Exchange)

HOPWA-COVID-19-HUD.gov (HUD.GOV)

HIV and COVID-19:

HIV and COVID-19 (CDC)

COVID-19 and People Living with HIV (HIV.gov)

COVID-19 Considerations for People with HIV (IDSA – Infectious Disease Society of America)

Workplace and Worker Safety During COVID-19:

OSHA Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19

What Workers and Employers Can Do to Manage Workplace Fatigue During COVID-19 (CDC)

What You Should Know About COVID-19 to Protect Yourself and Others (CDC)

Cross-Program Guidance and Information:

COVID-19 Resource Digest for Homeless Providers (HUD Exchange)

Resources for Renters (HUD.gov)

Treasury Department Emergency Rental Assistance Program (Treasury Department)

COVID-19 Vaccination Information

Interim Considerations for Phased Implementation of COVID-19 Vaccination page (CDC)

State Vaccination Plans

Multicultural Vaccine Confidence Guidance

Vaccine Updates: Grantees and project sponsors are encouraged to follow developing HUD guidance and resources related to vaccination planning and distribution, including information on preparing staff and clients, interaction with public health authorities, flyers and other resources to help ensure timely access to vaccination efforts. To access the vaccine planning page and to sign up for automatic listserv updates, visit:

https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/6229/covid19-homeless-system-response-vaccine-planning-and-distribution/