

August 5, 2020



Recommendations for Improvements to the NH Housing Relief Program

Background

Anticipating the impacts of COVID-19 related income loss on NH residents' ability to cover housing costs, the Governor's Office for Emergency Relief and Recovery created the NH Housing Relief Program. The NH Housing Relief Program provides two potential paths for assistance: 1) one-time financial assistance for housing related needs, such as rent, mortgage or utilities; or 2) short-term rent stabilization.

New Hampshire's 5 area Community Action Programs, known as CAPs, are charged with administering the NH Housing Relief program. The CAPs successfully launched the program on June 30, 2020. According to the most recent data, CAPs have received 4,701 inquiries and responded by sending 4,503 applications. However, to date, only 1,385 completed applications have been submitted and only 139 applications have been approved.

Recommendations

In order to improve access to this important program and provide housing stability for residents in need, Housing Action NH recommends the following improvements:

1) **Centralize Intake.**

Instead of requiring the applicant to decipher the CAP agency's geographic catchment area on the CAPNH.org website, we suggest a single point of inquiry that is forwarded to the appropriate CAP.

municipal staff such as welfare directors, as well as property management companies and landlords so that they can assist applicants with completing the application. We also urge the distribution of more paper copies.

2) **Institute Proactive Case Management Follow Up.**

Since the data shows that less than 30% of residents in need complete applications after the initial inquiry, we recommend that CAP agency staff proactively follow up by phone and email with applicants and offer support for completing the application.

4) **Offer Options for Documentation.**

The pandemic has created challenges for applicants seeking documentation to substantiate income loss. If the applicant is unable to access documentation, we recommend that the CAPs allow for affidavits to substantiate need.

3) **Expand Access to Application.**

We recommend that the CAPs make the housing assistance application available to other social service agencies, local housing authorities, appropriate

5) **Notify Landlords of Applications In-Process.**

In order to deter evictions, we recommend that CAPs notify an applicant's landlord when an application has been submitted, along with an anticipated timeline for a completed review.