

Channeling Dollars, Services and Supplies to Support Homeless Service Providers

Arizona Department of Housing
Special Achievement: COVID-19 Response

HFA Staff Contact

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Responding to an Important State Need

Arizona Governor Doug Ducey on March 30, 2020 announced \$6.7 million in funding to support Arizona's most vulnerable citizens amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The dollars were a part of a bipartisan state budget agreement that established the Emergency Crisis Contingency and Safety Net Fund, adding \$50 million for Arizona's COVID-19 response to assist Arizonans needing eviction assistance, struggling small businesses, food banks and Arizona's homeless population.

Included in the \$6.7 million, the Arizona Department of Housing was allocated \$5 million toward assisting homeless shelters in the prevention and slowing the spread of COVID-19. The governor directed the Arizona Department of Housing to join together with the Arizona Department of Economic Security and the Arizona Department of Administration to work with public and private-sector partners to help ensure our homeless service providers would be able to address the additional needs of the homeless community during the pandemic.

As the implications of the pandemic became clear, homeless providers everywhere became exceedingly concerned about their ability to address the cleanliness of their environments as well as the distancing needs necessary to keep the virus from spreading throughout the homeless community. With congregate sheltering and feeding generally being the norm, many shelter operators needed to completely rethink their service model during this time. There was also an added concern about the numbers of unsheltered homeless who tend to crowd closely spaced tents into small public areas.

Arizona Department of Housing was the lead agency in the coordinated effort to assist homeless service providers with temporary isolation and quarantine housing; sanitation supplies and services; and, other direct resources needed, as the homeless providers scrambled on a statewide basis to find ways to allow social distancing while still meeting the needs of Arizonans experiencing homelessness.

Innovative

The Department immediately set about to reach out to over 100 homeless service providers around the state through the local Continuum of Care networks to access the local need and prioritize funding. While the Arizona Department of Housing administers the State's rural Balance of State Continuum of Care, it does not directly oversee the Continuum of Care processes in the state's most populous counties, Maricopa and Pima Counties. Thus, the Department reached out to engage the other two Continua in the process of contacting and assessing the needs of all of the homeless shelter and service providers in the entire state.

The providers were relieved that emergency funding was being considered to support their mission to aid homeless populations by providing additional shelter opportunities, meals, and other basic necessities, with the ultimate goal to move people into housing.

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The effort was split into two components that provided assistance to over 80 homeless services providers in the state:

Nearly \$3 million was set aside to provide grants to fund:

- Alternative space, including motel vouchers and tents/supporting equipment; and
- Staffing and operations support, as the addition of unique sheltering spaces and motel stays greatly increased the need for staffing.

Just under \$2 million was set aside to provide:

- In-kind supply support.

Immediate grant funding of nearly \$3 million allowed homeless providers to institute methods to make sure that sleeping arrangements provided the correct amount of distancing by reducing the number of shelter inhabitants and allowing some of their most vulnerable populations to shelter in vacant motel rooms. Of course, this model then required additional staffing, as motels required homeless navigators be on-site and available 24/7 to meet the ongoing needs of their clients. Clients staying in motel rooms, then also required additional feeding support, such as vouchers for meals at motel-associated and nearby restaurants.

Some shelters with additional outdoor space were able to add tents as another tool to spread out sleeping arrangements. Supporting equipment included portable handwashing stations, port-a johns, and mobile shower stations.

The Arizona Department of Housing organized the supply delivery effort by partnering with State government's main administrative agency, the Arizona Department of Administration, who had the ability to order supplies in bulk through the State's Procurement Office through pre-existing vendor relationships, in order to gain savings and expedite orders. This ability enabled savings and quick delivery of much needed supplies to the state's homeless provider network, who on their own, had no buying power at a time when many of the needed supplies were in extremely short supply or difficult to get due to increased demand.

The Department received requests from over 80 shelters for 32 unique hygiene and sanitary supplies (including hand sanitizer, hand soap, laundry detergent, hydrogen peroxide, trash bags, bleach, gloves, cloth facial masks, diapers, wipes, etc.). One of the State's valued suppliers, Perimeter Global Logistics, agreed to partner in the effort, providing warehouse space and making deliveries, at cost, directly to each homeless service provider that requested supplies. An approximately 2-3 month supply of materials were delivered within the first few weeks of the effort to fulfill every requester's short-term needs.

This summer, the Arizona Department of Housing reached out once more to the network of providers, asking them to once again submit their "dream order" for supplies to get them through the remainder of the calendar year to 2021. The Housing and Administration Departments arranged for those supplies to be delivered before fall so that busy providers could put their time and money into more important endeavors to address homelessness.

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Achieved Intended Results

The Arizona Department of Housing moved quickly to channel dollars, services and supplies to support programs serving homeless populations in Arizona amid the COVID-19 pandemic through the distribution of \$5 million for in-kind supplies and grants to pay for much needed resources to address the significant burden brought about by the pandemic.

The effort was able to help every single entity around the state that sought assistance, and provided valuable feedback on additional needs that would need addressing through the remainder of the year. In addition to the \$5 million in immediate support, the inventorying of needs revealed at least \$9.7 million more in additional needs that since that time, are being addressed through CARES Act Funding that came to the state, counties and local governments through the Federal government. The outreach that was initiated by the State allowed entitlement agencies to have immediate access to lists of needs that they were then able to utilize in their planning and distribution of the Federal assistance.

Provided benefits that outweigh the costs

The ability to swiftly respond to the unique needs of the state's homeless populations and provide simple necessities such as hand washing stations, and alternative sleeping arrangements, provided an invaluable service to this important provider network. As we write about this story (knock on wood), there has not been a significant outbreak of the virus amongst Arizona's homeless population. We believe the ability to address the situation in a timely manner surely reduced the spread of illness and may have saved lives.

While local governments and homeless providers immediately knew that these needs needed to be addressed, they did not have the resources to address those needs. It was the State's quick actions that provided immediate resources that were otherwise lacking until additional Federal resources became available.

The Department and its state agency partners were able to quickly purchase supplies in bulk and coordinate the delivery of those supplies during a time when those supplies were not easily accessible, especially in large quantities. The resources allocated by the Governor's Office and administered by the Arizona Department of Housing provided direct and timely relief to communities most impacted by COVID-19.

"These critical funds come at a time of tremendous uncertainty, particularly for individuals experiencing homelessness," said Human Services Campus, Inc. Executive Director Amy Schwabenlender. "We are adapting our campus daily to protect the health and safety of the men and women receiving services, including elderly and those with ongoing health challenges, and our incredible staff on the front lines every day."

The Arizona Department of Housing is pleased that the State was able to help our homeless service provider partners with additional resources during this crisis, avoiding the spread of the virus, helping to maintain the health and safety needs of the providers and their clients, so that the providers can focus on the most important task of moving those experiencing homelessness into housing.

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Visuals

Delivery of supplies to homeless service providers in Arizona, from toilet paper to hand sanitizer, soap and other needs.



Thank you from all of us at UMOM!



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