

DETROIT

NATIVE SUN

MDHHS launches recovery housing assistance fund to support long-term recovery and housing stability

LANSING, Mich. — The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) has launched the Recovery Housing Assistance Fund (RHF), a new program designed to help individuals undergoing substance use disorder treatment or who are in recovery secure stable living arrangements.

RHF helps support eligible individuals and families as they transition into recovery housing or permanent housing. Funded through \$3.5 million from the Michigan Opioid Healing and Recovery Fund, RHF is part of Michigan's broader strategy to support opioid prevention, harm reduction, treatment and recovery services. Since it began in June, the program has helped 24 individuals.

"Safe, stable housing is one of the most important supports we can provide for people working toward long-term recovery," said Amy Epkey, MDHHS acting director. "The Recovery Housing Assistance Fund will help remove financial barriers that make it harder for people to stay housed, stay connected to care and continue rebuilding their lives."

RHF provides critical financial assistance of up to \$4,000 to prevent housing instability and reduce the risk of homelessness. Eligible expenses may include emergency funding to avoid eviction or utility shutoffs, as well as support for first month's rent, security deposits and other approved costs connected to securing stable housing. Funding requests may be submitted through eligible treatment providers and Recovery Community Organizations. Payments will be made directly to landlords, utility companies and other approved vendors.

"The fund has allowed us to quickly address housing barriers that could have otherwise resulted in eviction or homelessness for individuals actively working toward recovery," said Brandi Clanton, director of recovery services, Recovery Services Unlimited, Inc. "In several cases, this assistance has provided the stability needed for residents to maintain employment, continue participating in treatment and recovery support services and remain focused on rebuilding their lives rather than worrying about where they would sleep. From an organizational perspective, the program has filled a critical gap that previously left providers with very few options when unexpected financial crises threatened someone's housing stability."

Stable housing is a key component of recovery, yet nearly one in four individuals discharged from publicly funded substance use treatment in Michigan experience homelessness. Research conducted by MDHHS has also found that people experiencing homelessness face an increased risk of fatal overdose, underscoring the need for housing-focused recovery supports.

"Recovery does not end when treatment ends," said Dr. Natasha Bagdasarian, chief medical executive and chair of the Michigan Opioids Task Force. "Safe, stable housing provides the foundation people need to focus on their recovery and stay connected to their community. The Recovery Housing Fund helps alleviate financial barriers that too often interfere with long-term success in recovery."

This program is expected to assist approximately 1,000 individuals and families as they transition into recovery or permanent housing. In addition to providing housing assistance, MDHHS will evaluate program outcomes to better understand systemic barriers to successful recovery and establishing long-term housing. This information will help inform future recovery housing investments and strengthen Michigan's continuum of substance use disorder services.

"Housing instability can disrupt progress and deepen inequities for people and families with children already facing barriers to care," said Tommy Stallworth, MDHHS senior advisor and Michigan Opioids Task Force member. "Investing opioid settlement dollars in emergency housing assistance provides vital stability for people in recovery by reducing relapse triggers, lowering stress and connecting them to essential care. Stable temporary or supportive housing acts as a secure base where individuals can focus on their health and sustaining recovery."

Andrea Edgar, SUD case manager at Hegira Heath, Inc., said RHF recently offered hope and opportunity for a woman with three school-aged children, when she got behind on her housing and utility payments.

"She experienced a financial setback but was willing to do the footwork to continue to keep her children enrolled in virtual classes due to a transportation barrier, a roof over their head and food on the table by advocating for herself and her family," Edgar said. "She actively pursues recovery in many areas of her life by participating in services such as intensive outpatient services, parenting classes and financial literacy/budgeting and is seeking part-time employment."

For more information about the RHF program, visit the settlement spending webpage.

Additional information about proposed programming under Michigan's Opioids Healing and Recovery Fund can be found on the opioids settlement website. Michigan is slated to receive more than \$1.8 billion from national opioid settlements by 2040, with half being distributed to the State of Michigan and the other half being distributed directly to county, city and township governments across the state.

Gov. Whitmer signs legislation to relieve financial headaches to homeowners with delinquent property taxes



LANSING, Mich.—Governor Whitmer signed bipartisan bills making certain programs that help Michigan residents avoid foreclosure due to delinquent property taxes permanent, expanding the ability of the Detroit/Wayne County Port Authority to issue bonds, and more. The bills build on Governor Whitmer's work to grow Michigan's economy and provide more and stable housing for all Michiganders.

"Every Michigander deserves the chance to stay in their home," said Governor Whitmer. "I'm proud of the work we've

done to build more homes than in any administration in history and we want residents stay in their homes through tax relief and downpayment assistance. This bill even more Michiganders stay in their homes, avoid foreclosure, and money in their pockets when they sell. I'm also signing bills to grow the economy and invest in Wayne County and working together to help Michigan 'make it' in Michigan."

WIC participants now able to use benefits online at Meijer stores

LANSING, Mich. - The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) announced that families participating in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) are now able to shop with their WIC benefits online at Meijer stores.

"WIC beneficiaries were already able to use their WIC cards for in-store shopping at Meijer and offering online shopping will make it even easier for families to buy healthy foods," said Amy Epkey, MDHHS acting director. "MDHHS is committed to helping residents put food on the table for their families."

"We are excited to offer this new service to our clients," said Michigan WIC Director Christina Herring. "We are continuously looking for ways to improve the WIC shopping experience. Online shopping will allow our WIC families to more easily and quickly access healthy foods while juggling the demands of their everyday life."

Online shopping will be available at all 122 Meijer stores in Michigan where WIC clients can choose between curbside pickup or home delivery. Clients can shop for WIC foods using their WIC card and non-WIC foods using a different payment

method in the same transaction, also offering free home delivery.

"As a family-owned company, we understand how important shopping for healthy foods is for all families," said Don Smith, merchandising & marketing manager. "We are proud to be able to offer this in Michigan, building on our legacy of improving accessibility for customers in Michigan."

The Michigan WIC Program serves more than 187,000 women, infants and children each month by providing healthy nutrition education and breastfeeding promotion and referrals to other helpful resources.

Michigan WIC plans to expand online shopping to other retailers. This initiative is made possible through collaboration with Meijer and processor Fidelity National Information Services / Central Data Process. More information is available at Michigan.gov/wic.

To learn more about the program, visit Michigan.gov/wic.

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