

JANUARY 2022

HOPWA: Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS

Established in 1992, HOPWA is the only federal program dedicated to the housing needs and support of people living with HIV/AIDS. Using the HOPWA program, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) makes grants to local communities, states, and nonprofit organizations for projects that benefit low-income persons living with HIV/AIDS and their families.¹ Prior to changes made to HOPWA, program funds were based on the number of cumulative AIDS cases since the epidemic began, including those who have died. Public Law 114-201, the Housing Opportunity Through Modernization Act (HOTMA), signed by President Obama on July 29, 2016, included the long-sought switch to counting those living with HIV in each jurisdiction rather than cumulative AIDS. Access to housing assistance and services is often further complicated by histories of incarceration, institutionalization, and homelessness. HOPWA

HOPWA plays a crucial role in Ending the HIV Epidemic.

housing assistance helps prevent homelessness and creates access to medical care and support services for individuals and families affected by HIV and AIDS. HOPWA plays a crucial role in Ending the HIV Epidemic. However, the President's Request of \$450 million for FY2022 into the HOPWA program falls short of the HIV/AIDS coalition request of \$600 million.

Essentiality of HOPWA to combat the HIV Epidemic

HIV/AIDS-related stigma and discrimination add additional barriers to accessing and maintaining housing. To end the HIV/AIDS epidemic, persons

living with HIV must have access to high-quality and culturally competent services, including housing and supportive services that are non-stigmatizing, non-discriminatory, inclusive, and responsive to their needs. Issues such as discrimination and systemic racism that contribute to differences in access in housing and lead to ongoing disparities among racial, ethnic, and LGBTQ+ communities must be addressed. Reducing these disparities requires a focus on the needs of disproportionately affected populations, supporting racial justice and LGBTQ+ rights, combating HIV-related stigma and discrimination, providing leadership and employment opportunities for people with or at risk for HIV, and addressing social determinants of health and co-occurring conditions to reduce health inequities and disparities.

Challenges

- Transportation options in rural communities are often limited or nonexistent, making it difficult for clients to access services
- Coverage of very large and remote areas causes challenges for program staff who must carry out home visits, maintain close connections to clients, and engage landlords
- Lack of affordable rental housing stock is a major obstacle for many rental assistance programs
- Substandard housing is common, and further complicates access to housing
- Stigma and confidentiality issues are often more prevalent in rural communities
- Lack of accessible health and mental health services may make treatment and adherence more difficult to maintain²

The CARES Act

Due to the immense concern the initial wave of COVID-19 created in the United States, the CARES Act was enacted in 2020 and served to be the largest stimulus package in US history. Its support for programs such as HOPWA included: "\$53.7 million will be allocated to formula grantees... \$10 million in additional one-time, non-renewable funding will be awarded to HOPWA permanent supportive housing competitive (renewal) grantees in a manner proportionate to their existing grants... In addition, \$1.3 million in funding will be awarded to existing HOPWA technical assistance (TA) providers."³ Unfortunately, COVID-19 has exposed the many holes we currently have in our healthcare system and support services sector for at-risk individuals. While the larger scope for HIV/AIDS programs has proven to be beneficial, this scope must be long term rather than a short-term solution. If we are to end the HIV Epidemic by the targeted goal of 2030, this same level of commitment must be consistent to the very end. In the most recent White House HIV/AIDS Strategy for the United States 2022-2025 briefing, Americans with

HIV at risk of homelessness or housing instability are in a very unique situation where more integrated collaboration between more federal agencies and localized organizations are necessary to address the key issues affecting each community.

NMAC goals and policy needs

HOPWA remains incredibly underfunded. There is an immense need to provide safe, affordable, and serviceable housing for persons living with HIV/AIDS. NMAC stands by the End the HIV Epidemic initiative. If we are to achieve that goal, we must address the core issues facing HIV/AIDS individuals daily. NMAC wishes to see the coalition request of \$600 million for the FY2022 spending bill be adopted. Like so many other HIV/AIDS programs, funding plays one of the most essential components of how effective these programs may be. With the proper assets, funding, personnel, and trainings we are many steps closer to seeing this epidemic end. For people living with HIV/AIDS, housing is healthcare. For low-income people struggling to manage their HIV/AIDS care, housing is an essential cornerstone of health and stability.

Endnotes

¹ "Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS." *HUD Exchange*, <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/hopwa/>.

² *HOPWA Fact Sheet Challenges in Rural Areas*. <https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/HOPWA-Factsheet-Challenges-in-Rural%20Areas.pdf>.

³ *Office of Special Needs Covid-19 Frequently Asked ... - Hud*. <https://www.hud.gov/sites/dfiles/CPD/documents/OSN-COVID-HOPWA-2020-08-11-FINAL.pdf>.