

Important update from the DHS Housing Support team regarding Housing Support payment increase

The Minnesota Legislature approved a one-time appropriation of \$5,530,000 to temporarily increase Housing Support funding through the Department of Human Services (the Department) for expenses in the months of March, April, and May 2020. The increased funding is to help maintain access to room and board, including activities necessary to comply with federal and state health and safety guidance, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The legislation also requires all vendors to submit documentation by October 1, 2020 showing that increased funding was used for COVID-19 related expenses.

Who will get an increased payment?

All Housing Support vendors who receive room and board payments for the months of March, April, and May 2020 are eligible for a 15% increase to those payments. In addition, Housing Support vendors that are authorized to bill for the standard Supplemental Service Rate (SSR) of \$482.84 (or lower in some cases) will receive a 15% increase for eligible billing days in March, April and May 2020. Vendors with an enhanced SSR approved by the legislature are not eligible for an increase in supplemental service funding.

How will payments be issued?

The Department will issue four rounds of direct payments to Housing Support vendors by paper check. The first round will occur the week of April 13, 2020. Issuing funds by paper check allows the Department to issue funds quickly and accurately with minimal impact to other payment systems and individual benefits. It also allows for accurate tracking of increased payments as required by law.

Standard payment process continues

All vendors will receive their regularly scheduled Housing Support payments as they normally do. Room and board payments will be paid using the payment method already in place in the MAXIS payment system. Supplemental Service Rate payments will issue after authorized vendors bill for the services they provide in the MN-ITS billing system.

Increased payment process

The Department will use Housing Support payment data from March, April, and May 2020 to calculate the increased payments (see below for more info). Note that sometimes county agencies issue payments after the end of the month. Increases to those payments will be issued in the next round. Today, payments are issued separately for each person, and room and board and supplemental service funding are also issued separately. In contrast, these increased payments will

be rolled up by agency as much as possible, and room and board and supplemental service funding will be merged together. Payments will default to the payee mailing address on file in the MAXIS payment system.

Four rounds of payments

The Department will issue four rounds of payments to Housing Support vendors:

1. Mid-April issuance of increases to March payments
2. Early May issuance of increases to April payments (including March payments issued in April)
3. Early June issuance of increases to May payments (including April payments issued in May)
4. Early July final issuance of increases to any outstanding payments from March, April, and May.

What kinds of expenses are eligible?

Eligible expenses are activities to maintain room and board standards, including activities to follow federal or state health and safety guidance regarding COVID-19. Examples include, **but are not limited to** the following:

- Costs for cleaning, hygiene, sanitation, or personal protection equipment for staff or residents.
- Modifications for quarantine or isolation spaces in order to meet recommended guidelines from the Minnesota Department of Health.
- Costs to maintain or reconfigure meal programs or meal delivery services.
- Costs to maintain staffing levels to ensure minimum room and board standards are met.
- Costs to maintain staffing levels to ensure minimum supplemental service standards are met.

For more information about federal and state guidance, here are some online resources:

- MN Department of Health: congregate living and care facilities (including homeless shelters), group homes, retirement communities, and licensed residential and non-residential settings.
<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/communities.html#congregate>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): providers working with people experiencing homelessness. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/homeless-shelters/index.html>

How to track and report expenses

Vendors should track March, April, and May 2020 COVID-19 related expenses for maintaining room and board standards and activities that follow federal or state health and safety guidance. Expenses do not need to be tracked or applied at an individual person level, and do not need to be reported by room and board vs. supplemental service activities. For example, if staff time is partially paid by room and board as well as supplemental services, it is not required to report staffing costs separately. This allows flexibility for each agency to use the funds where they are needed most for eligible purposes.

State law requires all vendors to submit documentation by October 1, 2020 showing that increased funding was used for COVID-19 related expenses. If documentation is not submitted or demonstrated for allowable expenses, it must be repaid. Department staff will send out more information about where and how and where to report this data. Minimum tracking elements include:

- the amount received as an agency
- the amount spent as an agency
- when the funds were spent
- what the funds were used for.

Questions? Please contact dhs.dhs.grh@state.mn.us.