

HOUSING HAPPENINGS

HOPWA in Minnesota

Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA) provides funds for housing assistance and housing-related services for low-income individuals with HIV and their families. HOPWA is a program of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) which can be used for development of housing, supportive services to allow persons to remain in their homes, emergency housing assistance and rental assistance. This assistance is designed to help eligible people retain or gain access to appropriate housing where they can maintain complex medication regimens and address HIV-related problems.

HOPWA Allocations in Minnesota

Minnesota receives two HOPWA awards each year, one for the eligible metropolitan area (EMA) and another for the state of Minnesota. These allocations totaled \$817,000 for the EMA and \$107,000 for the state in 2002.

The Minnesota Housing Finance Agency (MHFA) currently administers both HOPWA awards, which allows them to combine HOPWA with other MHFA funding sources. A recent change made by MHFA to the Minnesota Consolidated Plan allows for the funds previously designated for Greater Minnesota (outside the metropolitan EMA) to be used throughout the state (meaning inside the EMA also), though priority will still be given to Greater Minnesota.

The Great Debate

Available HOPWA funds cannot begin to meet the housing needs of HIV-positive people with low-incomes, so these scarce dollars must also be used to leverage additional money. An ongoing debate within the HIV housing community recognizes contrasting needs, such as capital projects vs. housing subsidies, and serving the most people vs. serving those with the greatest need.

The Minnesota HIV Housing Coalition meets regularly to address housing issues and options for people living with HIV in Minnesota. The coalition recently completed an HIV Housing Needs Assessment Update that reports in detail on current HIV housing, needs and gaps, past HOPWA allocations and recommendations for HOPWA usage. (For a copy of the report or to find out more about coalition meetings, call Kim at 612-373-9166).

Rental Subsidies

Housing subsidies, the desired housing choice for most people living with HIV, allow for housing scattered throughout the community. This allows HIV-positive households to live in neighborhoods that best meet their needs and protects their confidentiality regarding their HIV status since they are not living in designated AIDS housing. Subsidies allow more households living with HIV to be served and to maintain housing. Last year, in the metro area, 119 households received transitional housing subsidies through the Minnesota AIDS Project. Over 65 households received permanent rental subsidies through Metro HRA. Though the Metro HRA program was re-funded by HOPWA this year, the amount is only sufficient to cover subsidies for those who currently hold vouchers. This means that no additional households can access this program, unless additional HOPWA funds are used for rental subsidies.

Bricks 'n Mortar

Capital projects, on the other hand, add to the supply of housing. HOPWA funded capital projects must provide housing to people with HIV for a minimum of 10 years. However, the cost for new construction is approximately \$100,000 to \$150,000 per unit. If the entire HOPWA allocation were used for new construction, only 6-8 units could be funded annually.

The Salvation Army and St. Paul Urban League both completed new capital projects in December 2001, which added housing for 22 households. Combined with previous sites, the total available units specifically for people with HIV increased to 53 rental units. The agencies provide support services to tenants, and use separate property management companies to perform tenant screening and rental management. While this reduces potential conflicts between the roles of service provider and landlord, it has also resulted in property managers screening tenants using regular market-rate housing criteria, and seeking the most stable, desirable tenants, rather than those with the greatest need, or those for whom the project was intended. Thus, to date, five 3-bedroom apartments designated for families remain empty. Having any HIV housing units empty is a lost opportunity that affects the entire HIV community.

Adult Foster Care

Other funded capital projects have included adult foster care, though not all of the HIV adult foster care homes were funded with HOPWA. There are seven adult foster care homes in the metro area, which each house four individuals.

Set-aside Units

More recent trends include the use of HOPWA to fund a number of units within a larger rehab or new housing project. These set-aside units will allow people with HIV to live within a larger community. In some cases these may be supportive housing – permanent housing with support services, in others they provide affordable housing for those who can live independently. Unfortunately, opposition to some of these projects by "not in my back yard" (NIMBY) efforts has contributed to extending the development time, and further delays having these HOPWA funded units available to the people who need them.

Greater Minnesota

HOPWA funded emergency housing assistance through the Minnesota AIDS Project's Greater Minnesota rental assistance program became available last year and allows for assistance with mortgage payments, in addition to rental assistance. This program recognizes different housing needs in Greater Minnesota, and is now able to assist both low-income renters and homeowners in need. (For more information on this program contact Every Penny Counts Emergency Assistance at 612-331-7733 or 1-800-565-9028).

A recent HUD report evaluating HOPWA found that its flexibility in allowing a wide range of housing assistance and supportive services is a key part of its ability to meet the housing needs and preferences of people living with HIV. While HOPWA allocations have increased each year, so has the number of people affected by HIV. As other housing resources decline, the use of HOPWA will continue to have great impact on what options those living with HIV have for housing.

Housing Happenings is a timely update of housing-related information for HIV service providers and consumers. For further information contact Kim Lieberman, MAP housing systems advocate, at 612-373-9166, 800-243-7321 or by email at klierman@mnaidsproject.org

The report details the epidemiological profile and trends of HIV in Minnesota,as well as changes in HIV disease and the implications for housing needs.It analyzes current affordable housing availability, discusses the HOPWA (Housing Opportunities for Persons With AIDS) program, details how Minnesota has spent its HOPWA dollars, and offers priorities and recommendations.

Housing Needs

Advances in testing and treating HIV have had a major affect on the need for housing. People are living longer and need stable housing in order to maintain their health.When people cannot work,they will need rental or mortgage assistance. Housing stability is critical to effective HIV intervention. Stable housing also enhances the opportunity for access and adherence to services for people living with HIV, many of whom cope with homelessness, mental illness, and drug and alcohol addictions.

In spite of recent reports that show an increase in vacancy rates, little has changed in the availability of affordable units for people with limited incomes. For people with HIV who can no longer work, their only income may be from Supplemental Security Income (SSI).An SSI recipient receives a maximum of \$545 monthly, so what is considered affordable rent (30 percent of income) is no more than \$164 a month.

The 2000 Needs Assessment prepared for the Minnesota HIV Services Planning Council found that 52 percent of all HIV-positive individuals interviewed felt finding affordable housing was a problem. Nearly 37 percent reported that their HIV status has affected their housing. Nationwide, 65 percent of people living with HIV cite stable housing as their greatest need next to health care.

Housing Opportunities for Persons With AIDS

HOPWA is a federally funded program from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). In 2002, \$817,000 was allocated to the 11-county metro region. Greater Minnesota received a separate award of \$107,000. HOPWA has been used in Minnesota primarily to support capital projects and rental subsidies.Many of the HIV housing facilities in the Metro area were funded by HOPWA.However, these funds do not begin to meet the housing needs of people living with HIV and their families. If we consider that the cost for new construction is approximately \$100,000 to

Current Housing for People with HIV

The Minnesota HIV Housing Coalition