Human Services receives federal grant to help older adults stay connected and to address other COVID-19-related needs

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The federal Administration for Community Living (ACL) has awarded the North Dakota Department of Human Services a $300,000 grant to help meet the needs of older adults and people with disabilities as communities continue working to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and to bring services and provide support to people at increased risk of COVID-19.

“Grant funding will be focused on addressing and preventing isolation, which we know can negatively impact individuals’ health and well-being, and on ensuring older adults and people with disabilities can access the care, support services and supplies they need to remain living in the community,” said Aging Services Division Director Nancy Nikolas Maier.

The department, she said, is partnering with ND Assistive to provide technology solutions to nursing homes and basic care facilities – especially those in rural areas – so that facility residents, their families and caregivers can stay connected.

The Long-Term Care Association is surveying its members to identify technology and other communication needs. Based on those results, ND Assistive will be distributing assistive technology devices and equipment and will provide training if needed to participating facilities.

Department Executive Director Chris Jones leads the state’s multi-agency effort to support and protect vulnerable individuals during the pandemic. He said, “It is vital that we continue to limit the risk to individuals in nursing homes and other congregate care settings. That means continuing to prohibit in-person visiting.

This grant funding will help us strengthen social connections, reducing the isolation and loneliness of facility residents and relieving some of the anxiety we know families are feeling because they cannot now safely visit loved ones."

He said the department will also be focusing on strengthening the statewide information and referral access system to connect qualified service providers and other partners and businesses with individuals in need. The vision is that partners will be able to help with shopping for essential supplies, do well-being checks and provide other needed support to older adults, individuals with disabilities and their caregivers.

Jones said, grant funds may also be used to collaborate with partners to secure and maintain safe housing through temporary housing assistance and transition support. This would help meet the needs of older adults and individuals with disabilities who entered a nursing home, basic care facility or other shelter setting due to COVID-19 and now need help transitioning back home or obtaining housing.

The federal grant is part of $955 million in grants authorized in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act.

Maier said North Dakota has a well-established network of community partners who work with the Department of Human Services and other state agencies to help older adults and people with disabilities stay healthy and live independently.

Information about services and supports for older adults and people with disabilities is available online as a searchable database at https://carechoice.nd.assistguide.net or by contacting the Aging and Disability Resource Link toll-free at 1-855-462-5465 weekdays between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m., CT or emailing CareChoice@nd.gov.

For more information about resources for individuals and families and the department's response to COVID-19, visit www.nd.gov/dhs/info/covid-19/index.html. For information about other resources supporting North Dakotans affected by the pandemic, visit ndresponse.gov/covid-19-resources.

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