North Carolina Offers Expedited Funding to Increase Community Non-Congregate Shelter Options During COVID-19

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The North Carolina Department of Public Safety, Division of Emergency Management and the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services today announced a new, expedited reimbursement program that aims to expand non-congregate sheltering options in communities across the state.

“To slow the spread of this virus, individuals with COVID-19 need to isolate and avoid close contact with others — but in many circumstances that can be a challenge,” said NCDHHS Secretary Mandy Cohen, M.D. “North Carolinians need access to non-congregate sheltering — like hotels or dormitories — so they can isolate safely and protect their loved ones. This expedited funding will help communities create options for North Carolinians who need a safe place to isolate and recover due to COVID-19.”

The new funding option allows local jurisdictions, agencies and community organizations to receive expedited reimbursements from NCEM for all eligible costs for non-congregate sheltering operations and associated wrap-around services (e.g., food, security, cleaning, transportation). Applicants will be considered regardless of whether they currently operate a non-congregate sheltering program.

"This pandemic has created an urgent need for more non-congregate sheltering options, and we’re acting quickly as a state to help our counties and local communities respond," said NCEM Director Michael Sprayberry. "Having the state cover the costs of this sheltering up front and then handle the federal reimbursement relieves county governments of that fiscal and administrative burden, and opens non-congregate sheltering to more people who need it."

The expedited funding stream will allow communities across the state to secure locations such as hotel and motel rooms as well as essential wrap-around services for individuals with no other safe place to quarantine, isolate or social distance due to COVID-19.

In Orange County, officials are already planning on using the new funding stream to support single rooms for over 60 individuals who were previously living in a congregate setting at the IFC SECU Community House in Chapel Hill. The funding "has allowed the County to extend the timeline for non-congregate sheltering. It will keep shelter residents safe during this health crisis as well as keep shelter staff safe so they are able to properly provide services to some of the County's most vulnerable residents," said Emila Sutton, Orange County's Housing & Community Development Director.

Counties that request this option will remain responsible for setting up and managing their program locally, including coordinating comprehensive wrap-around services, weekly reporting and verifying program costs. NCEM will enter into a Memorandum of Agreement with each funding recipient and will serve as the direct applicant for reimbursement to the Federal Emergency Management Agency. The state expects FEMA to ultimately reimburse approximately 75% of the new funding.

Currently, over half of North Carolina counties have some access to non-congregate sheltering for individuals in their communities, but this access is often very limited. The expedited reimbursement will allow for further sustainability and accessibility of those non-congregate sheltering options and reduce barriers for additional counties in setting up sheltering options.

NCDHHS recommends non-congregate sheltering options for individuals in need who:

- Test positive for COVID-19 and do not require hospitalization but need isolation. This includes those discharged from hospitals.
- Have been exposed to COVID-19 and do not require hospitalization but should be quarantined.
- Are First Responders and healthcare workers who do not require hospitalization but need to avoid direct contact with their families due to exposure to COVID-19.
- Are at high risk for COVID-19 and need to undertake social distancing as a precautionary measure, as determined by public health officials. For high-risk groups such as people over 65 or with certain underlying health conditions (respiratory, compromised immune systems, chronic disease), this may include those whose living situation makes them unable to adhere to social distancing.

Further information and guidance about non-congregate sheltering is available on the NCDHHS website (https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/information/housing-sheltering/non-congregate-sheltering).

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