Maine DHHS Invests $1 million in Coronavirus Relief Funds to Support Infection Prevention in Congregate Settings

October 1, 2020

Expert clinical assistance to help providers prepare for upcoming rules

AUGUSTA - The Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) announced today that it will invest nearly $1 million from the federal Coronavirus Relief Fund to support infection prevention and control practices in congregate care settings in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The funding will support free expert consultation for congregate care settings, including but not limited to group homes, assisted living facilities, adult family care homes, memory care homes, and private nonmedical institutions. It does not include nursing facilities, which are subject to separate state and federal infection prevention and control requirements and have received additional payments through MaineCare (//www.maine.gov/governor/mills/news/mills-administration-takes-steps-support-nursing-homes-response-covid-19-2020-03-26) to support their pandemic preparedness and response efforts.

More than 10,000 Maine people, including older adults and adults with disabilities, live in non-nursing home congregate settings, many with underlying conditions that place them at greater risk from COVID-19. These settings range widely in size, from 2 to 170 residents, and in services provided, from room and board to comprehensive personal and medical care.

DHHS is contracting with home health organizations that will dispatch a cadre of nurses and other health care professionals to congregate care settings across the state to help them tailor infection prevention and control plans for COVID-19 and other communicable diseases that meet the specific needs of their setting.

"Congregate care settings, including the many Maine people who call them home, are particularly vulnerable to the spread of COVID-19," **said Governor Mills**. "This investment will enable us to support these homes so that that staff can have the training and resources they need to keep their residents healthy amid this ongoing pandemic."

"In Maine and across the country, COVID-19 has struck residents and staff at congregate care settings particularly hard," **said DHHS Commissioner Jeanne Lambrew**. "This tailored clinical consultation will reduce the risk of infections among Maine people who are highly susceptible to the virus and improve consistency in infection prevention and control in these settings."

Through September 30, 63% of the 105 COVID-19 outbreaks closed in Maine were in non-nursing home congregate settings. From the start of the pandemic, DHHS has conducted outreach to more than 600 congregate settings about their infection control policies. It found a wide range of knowledge, practices and resources. Many settings lack a nurse or other clinical professional trained in infection control. Few have plans since federal and state rules currently do not require them.

The free clinical consultation announced today helps address this need. The consultation includes onsite reviews of policies, procedures and practices, interviews with staff and residents, clinical recommendations, development of an infection prevention and control plan, and follow up support. This will help facilities prepare for new infection control regulations that DHHS intends to adopt by early 2021 to help reduce outbreaks in congregate care settings over the long-term.
The expert consultation builds on the Mills Administration's support for nursing facilities and other congregate care settings in response to the pandemic. This includes more than $32 million in state and federal financial support, such as $10.1 million (//www.maine.gov/governor/mills/news/mills-administration-takes-steps-support-nursing-homes-response-covid-19-2020-03-26) for facilities that provide long-term services and support to children, older Mainers, and people with behavioral health disorders. Governor Mills and Commissioner Lambrew also announced (//www.maine.gov/tools/whatsnew/index.php?topic=DHS+Press+Releases&id=2297769&v=dhhs_article_2020) on March 30 that the Administration would accelerate pay increases for personal care workers.

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