



[Austin](#)

\$17 million to be available soon to help Austin renters affected by COVID-19

by: [Yoojin Cho](#) Posted: Jul 21, 2020 / 12:30 PM CDT / Updated: Jul 21, 2020 / 06:20 PM CDT

AUSTIN (KXAN) — After distributing \$1.2 million in May, the City of Austin’s Neighborhood Housing and Community Development Department announced Tuesday \$17.75 million will be available to help renters in the second round of the Relief of Emergency Needs for Tenants (RENT) Program.

The city is calling the new round of funding RENT 2.0. Contrary to the first round of assistance that required applicants to be on a traditional lease, this round will offer help to non-traditional leases, too.

Additionally, city officials said, back in May, they didn’t have access to federal coronavirus relief funds, but now that it does, the program’s budget has increased from just over one million to 17 million dollars.

The biggest chunk of the \$17 million budget will go to providing direct assistance to tenants impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The breakdown of how the money will be used is as follows:

- \$13 million: rental assistance
- \$1.3+ million: eviction prevention and tenant stabilization services
- \$500,000: community outreach

The city hasn’t said yet when it’ll start accepting applications for RENT 2.0, but Mandy De Mayo, Community Development Administrator for NHCD, said people will submit their applications once, and each month, applicants will be selected randomly in a lottery.

The city says its goal is to make the application process as easy and accessible as possible. The initial application will feature several, basic questions designed to weed out applicants that don’t meet the basic qualifications.

More detailed questions will be asked of application after the randomized lottery draw.

During RENT 1.0, [there were nearly 11,000 applications submitted](#). The city was able to help 1,681 households, De Mayo said.

[Nearly 11,000 applied for Austin rent assistance program in May](#)

De Mayo said about two-thirds of the households that received assistance during RENT 1.0 were making 30% of Austin’s median family income (MFI) or less. That’s \$20,550 a year or less for someone who lives alone. For a four-person household, that’s \$29,300 or less.

[Austin's coronavirus relief program helped more than 3,700 people pay rent in May](#)

In RENT 2.0, those extremely low-income, 30% MFI or less households will be able to get up to three months of their rent covered through this funding, according to De Mayo.

Other qualifying households — those who make between 30% and 80% of Austin's MFI — will be eligible to get just one month's rent paid through the program.

During RENT 1.0, everyone, regardless of their income level, received a one-time payment, partially covering their monthly rent amount.

De Mayo said, this time, each payment will cover the full amount of people's rent as stated in their leases or contracts.

More people expected to apply

People who've been out of work during the pandemic have been receiving an extra \$600 a week in federal unemployment benefits.

"That provided essentially a bridge for a lot of folks, a safety net," De Mayo explained.

The bonus is set to expire at the end of July, potentially have enormous impacts of people's abilities to pay their bills.

Because of that, De Mayo told KXAN "We do anticipate more folks applying."

The city is expecting to pay the full monthly amount and in some cases paying three months' rest for some people, so they're expecting to help about 2,000 households in RENT 2.0.

The city will use a lottery system to pick funding recipients, so for people like Carlota Garcia with Central Texas Interfaith, the worry is about those who won't get picked.

"No longer are we able to borrow from friends or borrow from family, savings accounts have been pillaged, there is no cushion left for people," she said. "This moment has the potential to become disastrous."

She said the state and the federal government should create a plan that gets those in need help beyond the next six months.

"In order for us to be able to prevent families from falling into starvation, or worse, we really need to have the federal government step up, as well as a statewide government to step up, and really come through with some assistance for families to benefit," Garcia said.

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