

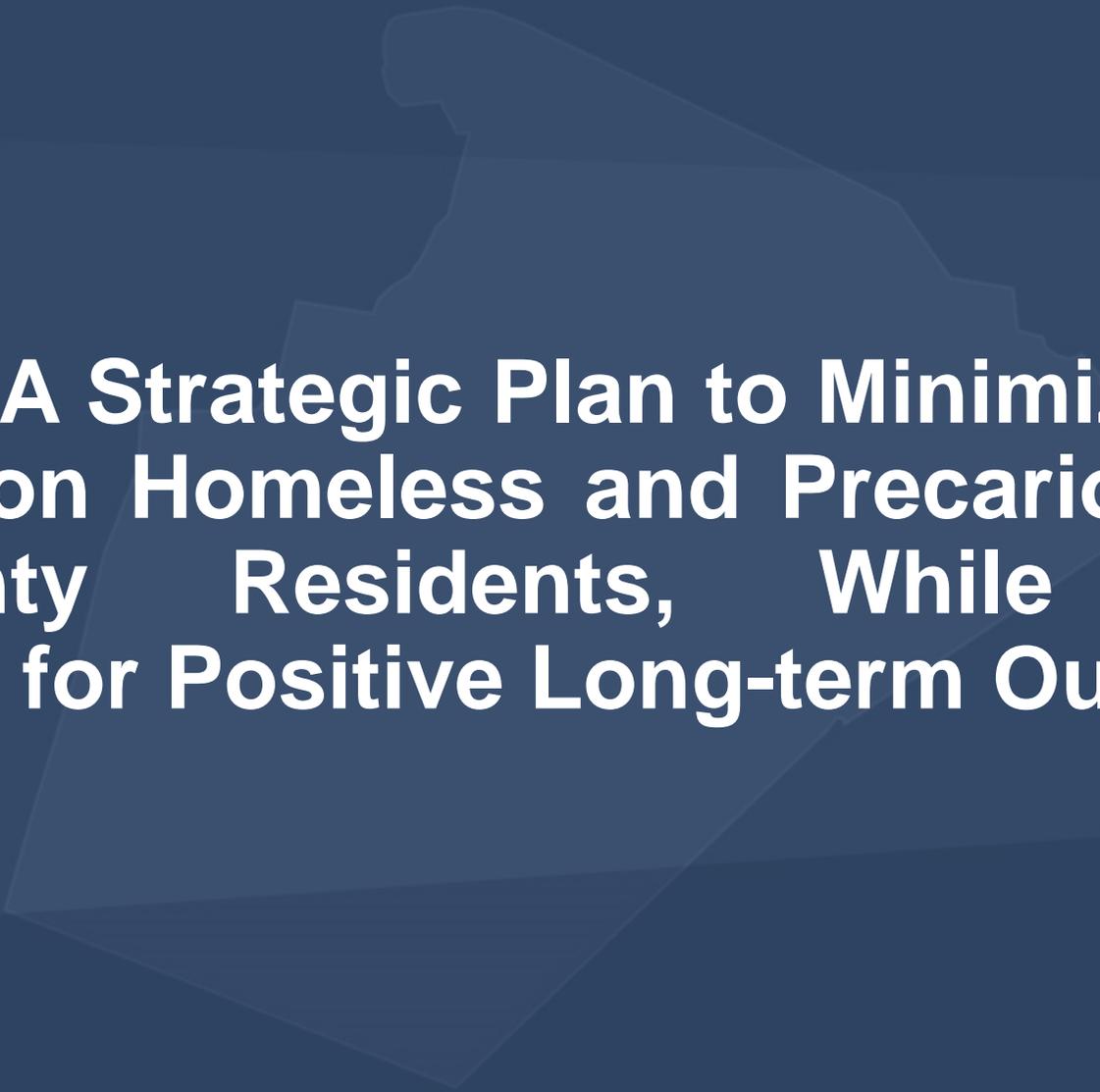
House Wake

Wake County COVID-19
Strategic Plan for Housing
May 5, 2020



@wakegov    

wakegov.com



House Wake: A Strategic Plan to Minimize the Effects of COVID-19 on Homeless and Precariously Housed Wake County Residents, While Maximizing Opportunities for Positive Long-term Outcomes

General Description

This six to eight-month strategic plan utilizes and coordinates federal, state and local funding to address the COVID-19 crisis within our homeless and precariously housed population and aims to move the maximum number of individuals possible to housing stability.



The Challenge

Wake County has been in the midst of a housing crisis for some time. COVID-19 will significantly exacerbate this issue.

Since March 15, the state of North Carolina has seen a massive rise in unemployment with nearly 906,622 claims filed between March 15th and April 28th. The number of filings continues to grow.

The high rate of unemployment is a warning of the coming wave of evictions and foreclosures that will soon be laid upon our already deficient system. This plan is the first step to addressing the coming need, but should not be seen as the final solution.

Looking Ahead

Wave I (current & ongoing): Households who cannot access unemployment insurance face a high risk of become housing insecure today (e.g. undocumented, borderline homeless, employed in the grey economy).

Wave II (June 1, 2020): When superior court and district court proceedings resume, households who are unable able to pay rent will be put at a higher risk of housing insecurity.

Wave III (July 31, 2020): Following the expiration of the Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation program on 07/31/2020, households who had been reliant on the additional \$600 in weekly unemployment benefits will face an increased risk of housing insecurity.

Wave IV (December 31, 2020): Following the expiration of the Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation and Pandemic Unemployment Assistance on 12/31/2020, households still experiencing unemployment will face an increased risk of housing insecurity.

Federal Programs and Funding



The CARES Act provides additional flexible funding to state, local, tribal, and territorial governments, and public agencies, through familiar and new programs that can be used to address housing instability and homelessness.

Wake County CARES Allocations

Round one of CARES allocations has brought the following financial support to Wake County:

- Community Development Block Grant (CDBG): \$1,258,790
- Emergency Services Grants (ESG): \$626,800
- Housing Assistance for Persons with Aids (HOPWA): \$132,656
- Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF): Up to \$193M

Other housing related funding in the CARES Act which Wake County may apply for:

- FEMA Public Assistance – which can be used to meet homeless services if a request is made to FEMA
- LIHEAP – additional funding to cover utility costs



House Wake Components

Seven Major Components of House Wake

There are seven distinct components of this plan, each important and required to properly address this crisis.

1. Healthy Hotels Initiative
2. Homelessness Prevention Expansion
3. Rapid Rehousing Permanent Placement Program
4. Housing Navigation & Landlord Engagement Program
5. Oak City Cares Hygiene Program
6. Housing Services Enhancement Program
7. Shelter & Street Outreach Enhancement Program

1. Healthy Hotels

Currently, the EOC has contracted with two hotels for use of approximately 160 units to establish high-risk, healthy hotel sites for the population meeting criteria of homelessness and one or more high-risk category for the COVID-19 virus.

To access these units, resident must be referred from one of three locations:

- A shelter in Wake County to reduce shelter populations in order to allow for proper social distancing.
- Hospitals discharging a person from an in-hospital admission (excluding an emergency department visit) who met the above criteria for homelessness and high-risk category and would have otherwise been discharged to a Wake County shelter.
- A street outreach program working with the unsheltered population above 65 years old and/or above 55 years old with lung disease or the immunocompromised.

Healthy Hotels Continued

The Healthy Hotels Initiative transitions oversight of the healthy hotels to the Housing Department, allowing this initiative to run for the term of the COVID-19 relief funds availability, through December 31, 2020.

This transition allows Wake County and its community partners additional time to permanently house clients from these hotels and allows us to connect hotels and clients to the broader strategic plan and expanded community services.

The Housing Department will contract with community service organizations to provide site and case management services for individual locations. The County will develop program details and manage contracts with the hotels, behavioral health and community service organizations as well as monitor their progress.

Treasury CRF funds will support this program.

2. Homelessness Prevention Expansion

According to reports, in April, one-fifth of market rate Raleigh renters were not able to pay their rent. This ratio does not include renters living in affordable housing, where a higher percentage of residents are struggling to continue to pay their bills.

In order to begin to address the wave of evictions coming from renters, homeowners as well residents utilizing hotels as their primary residence, expansion in the following programs are required:

- Wake Prevent! Homelessness Prevention Program
- Wake Prevent! Hotel Families Assistance Program: Phase II

Wake Prevent! Homelessness Prevention Program Expansion

With the current moratorium on evictions expiring, we expect there to be a surge in eviction filings. Wake Prevent!, being the largest homelessness prevention program in the County, will receive the majority of the calls for help.

This plan supports nearly doubling the capacity of this program.

While the expanded Wake Prevent! capacity will help, other means to quickly disseminate support, as it becomes available, to affected renters and homeowners should be considered.

Treasury CRF funds will support this program expansion.

Wake Prevent! Hotel Families Assistance Program: Phase II

The Wake Prevent! program was expanded to serve families living in Wake County hotels on April 6, 2020. This expansion allowed staff to utilize funding to cover the cost of hotel stays, allowing these families the opportunity to continue to shelter-in-place.

Phase II of this program will allow staff to accommodate families who have been screened, but not referred for services or aid due to lack of current capacity.

Currently, more than 130 families, living in more than 42 different hotels in Wake County have been approved for this program and are waiting in queue.

Treasury CRF funds will support this program expansion.

3. Rapid Rehousing Permanent Placement Program

As recommended by HUD, the majority of CARES entitlement dollars (CDBG, ESG & HOPWA) will be allocated to provide short-term rental assistance and services, with the goal of helping people obtain housing quickly, increase self-sufficiency, and stay housed.

Grants to affordable housing developers may also be made through this program to support the immediate rehabilitation of existing affordable units that are currently inhabitable.

Rapid Rehousing Permanent Placement Program Continued

Prospective agencies and affordable housing developers will have the opportunity to apply directly to Wake County for funding to support rapid rehousing efforts.

Expenses may include, but are not limited to:

- Security deposits
- Rental assistance
- Property damage
- Vacancy payments
- Program administration
- Affordable housing development and rehabilitation

CDBG & HOPWA funds will support this program.

4. Housing Navigation & Landlord Engagement Program

The aftermath of COVID-19 breeds uncertainty for our developer and property management community, for the first time in a long time. This provides a unique opportunity for Wake County to work with our developers and property management companies to increase the stock of available affordable available in Wake County.

The Housing Navigation & Landlord Engagement Program will educate potential partners on the benefits of working with our programs as well as coordinate efforts to create and manage a database of Wake County vacant units and will work with service providers to support clients' rapid re-housing into them.

Database developed should provide details about unit size, rent and availability date as well as who the owner is willing to accept in terms of a renter (criminal histories, poor credit, evictions, income, etc.).

Housing Navigation & Landlord Engagement Program Continued

The Housing Department will contract with a community partner to provide this extremely important service to our community through the end of the 2020 calendar year, as the funding allows.

Partnering agency should seek funding to support the continuation of this program beyond the 2020 calendar year.

Treasury CRF funds will support this program.

5. Oak City Cares Hygiene Program

In the current environment, residents still unsheltered in Wake County do not have access to showers or laundry to tend to their personal hygiene needs. While Oak City Cares typically provides this service, due to COVID-19, the County's building floorplan does not allow this service to continue inside healthily.

Oak City Cares has offered to continue to provide this service by utilizing outdoor FEMA showers, washers & dryers, that can be properly sanitized and maintained according to current CDC recommendations.

Treasury CRF funds will support this program.

6. Housing Services Enhancement Program

Funding allocated to be used as a flexible funding source to compliment programs approved for CARES entitlement programs and to bridge gaps. Generally, these funds would be used for client supportive services while in one of the Hotel, Rapid Rehousing, or street outreach programs.

Expenses may include, but are not limited to:

- Food
- Personal Hygiene
- Household supplies
- Transportation (gas/bus cards)
- Green Chair fees to furnish permanent homes
- Basic technology needs for school age children to continue education

Treasury CRF funds will support this program.

7. Shelter & Street Outreach Enhancement Program

Funding to support programmatic and physical shelter alterations that support social distancing as well as street outreach programs working to identify high-risk unsheltered residents.

Expenses may include, but are not limited to:

- Physical shelter alterations and supplies
- Unsheltered engagement
- Case management
- Emergency health and mental health services
- Transportation

ESG & HOPWA funds will support this program.

Opportunity in Catastrophe

It may sound farfetched, but if we are smart, bold and brave, we can use this crisis and the funding now being made available to address longstanding gaps and issues within our service system.

The House Wake Strategic Plan is a bold step in this direction.

Let us not allow the opportunity in this catastrophe to go to waste.



Questions?

Lorena D. McDowell, MPNA

Wake County Director of Housing Affordability & Community Revitalization

Lorena.mcdowell@wakegov.com