



The Importance of the Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA) Program

AIDS is still a crisis in America. Despite the new found optimism surrounding treatment options, every year an estimated 40,000 people are newly diagnosed with HIV. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that as many as 950,000 people are living with HIV. Over the past 20 years, the epidemic has shifted and today the fastest rising rates of infections are among woman and people of color.

Geographically, the epidemic is shifting. Rates of infection are growing in rural areas and southern states.

For people struggling with the disabling and impoverishing effects of HIV/AIDS, housing is the cornerstone of health and stability. In a study by UCLA, a third of people living with HIV went without medical care in order to pay for food, clothing, or housing. Without stable housing remaining on rigorous antiretroviral medication schedules is nearly impossible. Maintaining health and stability is essential when managing HIV. Successfully managing HIV-treatment and the many side effects of treatment is severely impaired, if not impossible without, access to stable housing that provides clean water, bathrooms, refrigeration and proper nutrition. For people living with HIV/AIDS—housing is healthcare.

It has been estimated that as many as half of all people living with HIV/AIDS will need housing assistance at some point in their illness. For many of those, short-term assistance with rent, mortgage, or utility costs alone will provide the necessary support to remain healthy and in stable housing. But others are struggling with multiple diagnoses of HIV and mental illness and/or substance use. Access to housing assistance and services is often further complicated by histories of incarceration, institutionalization, and homelessness. This array of challenges calls for more than just housing, but requires coordinated care with housing at its foundation.

In response to the unique and varied housing needs of people living with HIV/AIDS the Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA) program was created in 1992. The program, run by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), has directly addressed the housing and service needs of people living with HIV/AIDS. Part of the program success has been in its ability to leverage funds and support from mainstream housing programs. HUD reports that for every HOPWA dollar \$2.19 of other housing funds are leveraged.

However, despite the success of HOPWA there is still a great unmet need. In program year 2003-2004, more than 78,000 units of housing were provided to people living with HIV/AIDS. With an estimated 450,000 people with HIV/AIDS in need of housing assistance, HOPWA cannot even begin to meet current the growing need. In the past 13 years the program has grown from 38 formula jurisdictions to 122 in 2005. In fact, for FY2006, 2 new jurisdictions are expected to become eligible for HOPWA funding, yet proposed funding have dropped dramatically. From FY2004 to FY2005 the program was cut by 13 million; for most existing jurisdictions, this will result in a net loss of funding, and subsequently, a loss of housing.

Funding HOPWA programs sufficiently to meet the growing need is vital not only to people living with HIV/AIDS, but also to the broader continuum of housing and services providers. Through the flexibility of the program HOPWA has become a vital component of the Continuum of Care process in communities across the country. The HOPWA program and mainstream housing programs, such as Section 8, have come to create a web of support that work to better serve all those in need of housing assistance and services. It is critical that all of these interdependent programs receive full and appropriate funding levels in order to successfully serve all those in need.

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