

Workforce Stabilization Loan Program Program Guidance – Updated 4/30/2020

Program Summary

Announced on April 24, 2020, Governor Raimondo has established a Workforce Stabilization Loan Program to stabilize and maintain the low-wage congregate care workforce currently on the frontlines of the COVID-19 public health crisis. The fund will provide payroll support for frontline workers earning under \$20 per hour who work with seniors, people with developmental disabilities, individuals with mental health and substance abuse disorders, and young people in Rhode Island's Department of Children, Youth, and Families congregate care facilities

During the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency, direct care workers in 24/7 congregate care facilities, including certified nurse assistants, private care aids, food servers and custodians, are facing challenges getting to work, including increased childcare responsibilities at home and increased stress at work. For the lowest wage workers, these challenges have resulted in absences that threaten the health and safety of our congregate care providers and the vulnerable populations they serve.

To address the needs of workers, providers, and patients, Rhode Island's Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHHS) will offer forgivable loans to eligible Medicaid-funded and other providers on the condition that these funds are used to address the challenges facing low-wage frontline workers. The loan will be forgiven, in full, if this condition is met and audit requirements are met.

Qualifying Employees

Workforce stabilization funds shall be used to increase compensation for qualified provider frontline employees earning less than \$20 per hour. Eligible employees include, but are not limited to certified nursing assistants, personal care aids, custodians, food service workers, laundry workers, housekeeping, maintenance and other direct service professionals. Eligible employees may be direct employees or contract employees. Qualifying employees must be on staff at the facility or work primarily in the facility. Case managers or caseworkers who travel to multiple residential sites earning under \$20 are not eligible.

- Employees who earn less than \$20 per hour and work thirty hours (30) a week or more are eligible for a \$200 weekly salary increase.
- Employees who earn less than \$20 per hour and work from twenty-two (22) to twenty-nine (29) hours per week are eligible for a \$150 weekly salary increase.
- Employees who earn less than \$20 per hour and work from fifteen (15) to twenty-one (21) hours per week are eligible for a \$100 weekly salary increase.
- Employers should base employee counts on their application on the number of employees earning less than \$20 per hour as of February 1, 2020. This will allow employers to apply for loan funds to cover employees that may have already received a wage increase. However, providers will be required to provide EOHHHS payroll data from

February through July to verify that employees were previously receiving, and continued to receive, appropriate wages under this loan.

- Loan recipients (providers) are responsible for distributing funding to their employees in accordance with the terms stated above in the next pay cycle after loan funds are received.
- If the provider uses funds for other purpose, the employer will repay the state for the inappropriately utilized funds.

Duration:

This is a temporary program designed to stabilize the essential workforce during the peak of Rhode Island’s COVID 19 health crisis. The duration of the payroll support program will be 4 weeks and apply to hours worked from May 4th – June 1st, 2020.

Qualifying Providers:

Medicaid and other providers that deliver care and other services in a residential facility are eligible to participate in this program. Providers that support aging adults, people with mental health diagnoses, individuals with substance use disorder, people with developmental disabilities, and at-risk youth are eligible to participate in the program. This includes nursing facilities (aka nursing homes or skilled nursing facilities), assisted living facilities, DCYF congregate care facilities (including group homes and residential treatment facilities), and licensed community residences for behavioral health, substance abuse disorder, developmental disabilities or traumatic brain injury (including DD group homes, group homes for the mentally ill, and substance use disorder facilities).

Administration:

Qualifying employers must submit an application to the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS). Applications will consist of contact information, provider billing information, electronic funds transfer information, and employee information to determine need and size of loan.

Program application, guidance, FAQs, blank loan agreement, and a PDF version of the loan application to assist in information gathering are available here:

<http://www.eohhs.ri.gov/Initiatives/Workforce.aspx>

To submit your application, please apply using the online application accessible at the link above. Incomplete applications will not be accepted.

Following EOHHS determination of loan amount, the provider will be asked to sign and return a loan agreement for the specific amount. A signed agreement by the provider will state that that loan funds will be disbursed appropriately and that the provider will participate in audit functions following receipt of the loan. A blank loan agreement can be found online for reference here: <http://www.eohhs.ri.gov/Initiatives/Workforce.aspx>

On the application, providers will state the number of employees eligible for the wage increase by the categories of hours worked (15-21 hours, 22-29 hours and 30+ hours). EOHHS will approve the forgivable loan in the amount requested and make every effort to disburse payments to providers by May 6. Loan recipients (providers) must attest that they will use the funds, in full, for employee wage increases.

Applications will be made available by 10am, Tuesday April 28. EOHHS requests that all providers desiring to participate complete the online application by Saturday, May 2 at 5pm. When final loan determinations have been made, EOHHS will contact the applicant with a signed agreement. Providers will then return signed agreements prior to payment processing. Applications received after May 2 will be considered on a rolling basis and processed subject to available funds.

Approved providers will receive the requested amount in a lump sum payment from EOHHS via directed payment through the State's Medicaid payment system. If an applicable provider is not usually paid through the Medicaid fee-for-service system, separate direct deposit arrangements will be made with relevant EOHHS agencies. Employers/providers will distribute the funds to eligible employees, as promised, over the course of the following four weeks. Any funds not spent on eligible employee wage increases must be returned to EOHHS.

The workforce stabilization loan will be forgiven, in full, if the funds are spent entirely on the conditions stated above. EOHHS will be asking for verification of the wage increases by requesting payroll and other documents. Payroll documents from February through July 2020 will be requested as part of this requirement.

For any further questions regarding this program, please email:
workforce_stabilization_loan@ohhs.ri.gov