



Congregate Care Worker Supports for PAUSE: Program Guidance

November 30, 2020

We all rely on workers on the front lines of the pandemic in congregate care settings to keep themselves, and our loved ones, safe. To stay on the job and protect their families, workers must take additional precautions to protect themselves, their loved ones, and their clients from COVID-19. We recognize that for many congregate care workers, the ability to self-isolate is difficult without additional support. Further, we believe that workers who are caring for this population deserve reward and incentive to stay at work amidst the current increase in cases. We want to provide additional support to congregate workers to create the appropriate incentive to stay healthy and stay at work to care for others.

Program Description

The **Congregate Care Worker Supports for PAUSE** is established to provide payroll support for workers in congregate care settings. These funds are an additional measure to be used as secondary to other federal COVID-19 relief funding received by congregate workers, and other funding resources made available by the State over the duration of the COVID-19 response. This Program will distribute up to \$3 million in funding to congregate care providers to be used as supplemental payroll support to direct care workers for taking on the risk of coming to work during the recent surge.

The program will provide payroll support for frontline workers earning under \$25 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.

Eligible uses of funds include but are not limited to:

- Temporary raises to compensate workers for the added hazards of working during the pause
- Recruitment or retention payroll support
- Funds may also be used to cover any increased payroll taxes or UI or similar contributions that are a function of the increase in the payroll amount

Funds should not be used to backfill or supplant existing wage support programs, but rather to expand them. Increased payroll support must be based on a baseline average of wages paid to the individual employee or class of employees as of October 2020. It is the state's intention that this funding be used to increase current rates of pay or provide other financial support beyond what a congregate care provider is currently doing. Payroll support should be used for workers who are directly interacting with consumers or residents, not workers conducting telework or on vacation.

Unlike the Workforce Stabilization Loan Program launched in April 2020, the state will not mandate the specific ways in which the payroll supports are to be distributed. We hope that this encourages experimentation as necessary among congregate care providers, and recognizes differences between them in the kinds of workers that are required to ensure that residents are well-protected. Additionally, this program will be processed as a grant, rather than a loan.



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Provider recipients will be required to pay out all funds by December 30, 2020. For providers who issue payroll checks to workers in arrears, checks may be issued to workers in January 2021 as long as the hours covered by that payroll check were worked prior to or on December 30, 2020.

Funding and Application Dates

Key dates for the **Congregate Care Worker Supports for PAUSE** Program are as follows:

- **December 1, 2020:** Applications available online at EOHHS website.
- **December 7, 2020 at noon:** Applications due to the State.
- **December 2020:** Funds disbursed to agencies

Eligible Applicants

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).

The following providers are not eligible for this program:

1. Any provider who was required to repay the full amount of the loan of the previous workforce stabilization program.
2. Any provider who did not respond to an EOHHS request to participate in an audit of the previous workforce stabilization program.

Program Application

Providers who received funding from the previous Workforce Stabilization Program will receive the application via email to the email address used in previous applications. Applicants will need to apply an electronic signature, and return the application to EOHHS via email. Funding will be distributed via check to eligible providers based on employee census information submitted for the previous rounds of workforce stabilization loan program disbursements.

New applicants who did not participate in the original workforce stabilization program will be asked to complete a new workforce stabilization application to determine funding amounts. This application must be requested via email to OHHS.LTSSWorkerSupportsPause@ohhs.ri.gov with the subject *'Provider Name' – Congregate Care Worker Supports PAUSE – request for application*.

All questions regarding this Program should be directed to: OHHS.LTSSWorkerSupportsPause@ohhs.ri.gov with "Congregate Care Worker Supports for PAUSE" in the subject line.



Eligible Uses of Funds and Reporting Requirements

Funds received through this Program must be for supplemental payroll supports as described in this guidance.

Applicants will be required to report to EOHHS at the end of the grant period on the distribution of funds and their methods of tracking payments. Recipients should be able to show the State how funding was used, to whom payroll supports were allotted, and how much was received. A template for this report will be distributed to all grant recipients at a later date.

Applicants will have until December 30, 2020 to distribute funds to direct care workers and document how funds have been distributed. If funds are not distributed to direct care workers for work performed on or before December 30, 2020, any unexpended funds must be returned to the State.

Once funds are disbursed, successful Applicant award recipients are instructed to keep detailed and complete financial records demonstrating that funds received through this Program are spent in accordance with these requirements, as award recipients of these funds will be subject to audit. In the event of an audit, if the award recipient is found to have used funds for ineligible expenses, the award recipient will be considered in violation of the award agreement at which point RI EOHHS may begin the process of recouping all or a portion of the funds awarded. The State will determine whether the full award or a portion of the award shall be recouped based on the State's assessment of the unique circumstances of each violation of the award agreement.

In Closing

The COVID-19 public health emergency represents a clear hardship for the State's LTSS system that requires broad cooperation to overcome; it is also clear that the public health emergency shall continue to present challenges as it evolves. This Program represents an opportunity to extend that cooperation to build strong resilience for the current crises and improve health outcomes for all Rhode Islanders in need of long term services and supports.

The State of Rhode Island looks forward to working with critically important congregate care workers and stakeholders to establish and carry out this program of support.