

§20-A. Housing First Program

1. Program established. The Housing First Program, referred to in this section as "the program," is established in the department to facilitate the delivery of support and stabilization services to residents of properties established or developed to provide permanent housing to address chronic homelessness in the State. Except as otherwise provided in this section, services facilitated under the program must be available on site, 24 hours per day and be designed to build independent living skills and connect individuals with community-based services. The department shall ensure that reimbursement under the MaineCare program is available to providers under the Housing First Program to the maximum extent possible. For the purposes of this section, "chronic homelessness" means a situation in which a person is living in a place not meant for human habitation, including emergency shelters, for at least 12 months and for whom homelessness is correlated with a condition that makes accessing services and maintaining housing a significant challenge such as substance use disorder or a behavioral health condition. "Chronic homelessness" includes a situation in which a person has been living intermittently in an institutional care facility, including but not limited to jail or a health treatment facility, but is otherwise living in a place not meant for human habitation.

[PL 2023, c. 412, Pt. AAAA, §1 (NEW).]

2. Fund established. The Housing First Fund, referred to in this section as "the fund," is established as a separate and distinct fund for accounting and budgetary reporting purposes in order to support the program. Funds distributed in accordance with this section must be used to supplement, not supplant, existing or future federal funding designed to provide services associated with services provided by the program under subsections 1 and 5, including but not limited to the MaineCare program and the housing outreach and member engagement provider program administered by the department.

[PL 2023, c. 412, Pt. AAAA, §1 (NEW).]

3. Sources of fund. The Treasurer of State shall credit to the fund:

A. All money received by the State in accordance with Title 36, section 4641-B, subsection 4-B, paragraph E-1; [PL 2023, c. 412, Pt. AAAA, §1 (NEW).]

B. Money from any other source, whether public or private, designated for deposit into or credited to the fund; and [PL 2023, c. 412, Pt. AAAA, §1 (NEW).]

C. Interest earned or other investment income on balances in the fund. [PL 2023, c. 412, Pt. AAAA, §1 (NEW).]

[PL 2023, c. 412, Pt. AAAA, §1 (NEW).]

4. Distribution of funds. Beginning July 1, 2025, the department shall make distributions from the fund as described in this subsection.

A. Annually, the department shall deposit \$1,000,000 from the fund to an account established for the purpose of providing funding for housing stability services described in subsection 5. [PL 2023, c. 412, Pt. AAAA, §1 (NEW).]

B. The department shall establish payment models as appropriate for the purpose of providing 24-hour, on-site supportive services to residents at Housing First Program properties established or developed to provide permanent housing to persons experiencing chronic homelessness. Supportive services must include coordination with a MaineCare provider. [PL 2023, c. 412, Pt. AAAA, §1 (NEW).]

C. The department shall establish 2 permanent, full-time positions in the department to assist providers with providing 24-hour, on-site supportive services and navigating reimbursement under the MaineCare program for those services. [PL 2023, c. 412, Pt. AAAA, §1 (NEW).]

D. The department shall annually determine the amount necessary to support the established payment models at each property for services provided under the program in the current fiscal year

and the anticipated amount needed to pay for 24-hour, on-site services expected to be provided at each property in the next fiscal year. Funds in excess of those amounts must be transferred to the Maine State Housing Authority for the purposes of:

- (1) Providing technical assistance to housing developers to help with capital and planning issues associated with developing properties consistent with the housing model established by the program and as described in subsection 5; and
- (2) Developing affordable housing projects with a housing model established by the program and as described in subsection 5. [PL 2023, c. 412, Pt. AAAA, §1 (NEW).]

[PL 2023, c. 412, Pt. AAAA, §1 (NEW).]

5. Housing stability services. The department shall establish a payment model to provide funds to pay for the costs of housing stability services provided to residents at properties under the program where supportive services are not necessarily provided on site or 24 hours per day. Services funded under this subsection must be available to residents no less than 20 hours per week and must adequately meet the needs of the residents to build independent living skills, to maintain housing and to access necessary community-based services. Housing stability services funded under this subsection may also include outreach to persons who are experiencing chronic homelessness for the purposes of establishing connections and providing support that may result in securing stable housing at a property under the program.

[PL 2023, c. 412, Pt. AAAA, §1 (NEW).]

6. Rulemaking. The department and the Maine State Housing Authority shall jointly adopt rules to administer the program. The rules must specify which elements of the program are administered by the department, which elements are administered by the Maine State Housing Authority and which elements are administered jointly, if any. Rules adopted under this subsection are routine technical rules under Title 5, chapter 375, subchapter 2-A.

[PL 2023, c. 412, Pt. AAAA, §1 (NEW).]

7. Report. Beginning February 1, 2025, the department and the Maine State Housing Authority shall submit a report annually to the joint standing committee or joint select committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over housing matters to provide the committee with necessary data and information to evaluate the effectiveness of the program. The initial report submitted to the committee must provide an assessment of the number of housing units and the scope of services needed to serve persons who are experiencing chronic homelessness to serve as a baseline against which the effectiveness of the program and other services will be measured. Subsequent reports must provide updates to that assessment in addition to the following:

- A. An accounting of the services facilitated using money from the fund at properties that provide 24-hour, on-site services and properties that provide housing stability services described under subsection 5; [PL 2023, c. 412, Pt. AAAA, §1 (NEW).]
- B. An accounting of services provided at properties under the program funded under the housing outreach and member engagement provider program and services reimbursed under the MaineCare program; [PL 2023, c. 412, Pt. AAAA, §1 (NEW).]
- C. The number of residents served by the program and the number of months residents avoided returning to homelessness or maintained stable housing; [PL 2023, c. 412, Pt. AAAA, §1 (NEW).]
- D. The amount of money from the fund transferred to the Maine State Housing Authority pursuant to subsection 4, paragraph D that is used for the purposes described in subsection 4, paragraph D, subparagraphs (1) and (2); and [PL 2023, c. 412, Pt. AAAA, §1 (NEW).]
- E. Information requested by the committee considered necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of the program. [PL 2023, c. 412, Pt. AAAA, §1 (NEW).]

[PL 2023, c. 412, Pt. AAAA, §1 (NEW).]

SECTION HISTORY

PL 2023, c. 412, Pt. AAAA, §1 (NEW).

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