



United Way of
Massachusetts Bay
and Merrimack Valley

**Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance
United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley**

**PSH COVID-19 Relief Funds: Executive Summary
November 2022**

The Problem:

In the spring of 2020, the pandemic lockdown hit. As many people retreated to their homes to reduce the spread of COVID-19, those who were experiencing homelessness remained at greater risk of becoming infected. Many were staying temporarily in shared spaces like emergency shelters. Others who had moved into permanent housing were either living in a congregate setting or were isolated without services in their homes. They were often older individuals who faced complex and disabling health conditions that made them more susceptible to the virus.

There were many pressing challenges facing providers of permanent supportive housing (PSH) to continue helping this vulnerable population: covering emergency staffing, obtaining personal protective equipment, paying for professional cleaning services, transitioning to technology for telehealth and remote case management services, providing food support to replace closed meals programs, and more. As the pandemic continued, PSH providers found themselves facing lost rent for units they were unable to lease up due to pandemic-related closures and delays, and the units themselves experienced greater wear and tear than usual given the increased amount of time that tenants were in them. In short, PSH programs and their respective housing units were facing significant costs and lost revenue because of the COVID-19 outbreak. The already-vulnerable tenants in these PSH units also faced instability in their supportive services, which put them at risk of relapsing or dealing with exacerbated mental health conditions.

The Solution:

In response, the Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance (MHSA) quickly reached out to PSH providers across the Commonwealth to hear firsthand about their most urgent needs. Using this information, MHSA then began working with concerned members of the Legislature

to advocate for flexible funding to help alleviate the additional expenses incurred by PSH providers, and successfully secured \$5.8 million in COVID-19 Relief Funds.

The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) asked MHSA to administer the funds and MHSA partnered with United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley (UWMB) to process applications and quickly distribute these resources.

The Impact:

This funding addressed the unmet needs that were intensified by the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. By having these extra resources, PSH provider agencies were able to focus more of their attention on their tenants to help ensure they were safe, accessing the care they needed, and remaining stably housed.

The PSH COVID-19 Relief Funds supported:

- 38 PSH provider agencies across Massachusetts
- 2,250 tenants in existing PSH units
- 338 new PSH units in development

By reaching out directly to the provider agencies at the height of the crisis to learn about their most urgent needs, MHSA was able to identify gaps and shape its advocacy to ensure appropriate and necessary resources were secured. The longstanding partnership between MHSA and UWMB enabled the funding to be distributed in a timely manner so that providers could support this vulnerable population at a time when they needed it most.

What's Next?

Despite the successes of this funding and the relief it provided, there is still great need for additional housing units across Massachusetts. The pandemic highlighted that congregate settings and crowded emergency shelters are not safe or sustainable options for vulnerable people who have complex disabling health conditions. Permanent housing with appropriate supports is a solution to the public health crisis of homelessness, and sufficient funding needs to be invested to ensure everyone has a safe and stable home of their own.

To continue the necessary expansion of PSH, MHSA and UWMB, along with the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH), are currently rolling out American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding to help providers develop more high-quality supportive housing. Together, the three agencies are part of a collaboration known as the Massachusetts Alliance for Supportive Housing (MASH). Launched in 2015 to expand PSH, MASH has a unique partnership structure that is effective at designing and implementing programs to address homelessness in Massachusetts and ensuring that funding can be allocated quickly and strategically.