

A Pandemic's Silver Lining: We Can End Homelessness in Florida with CARES Act Funding

BY: SUSAN POURCIAU AND AMANDA ROSADO

The CARES Act passed by Congress in March 2020 included \$4 billion in supplemental funding for the Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) program administered by HUD. The CARES Act ESG funds, known as ESG-CV, provides Florida communities almost \$189 million – approximately 14.5 times the amount of the regular 2020 allocation. Combined, the 2020 ESG and the ESG-CV allocations exceed \$202 million (see HUD Allocations¹).

Even as the ESG monies flow into Florida communities, an estimated 27,000 people are experiencing homelessness at any time in our state. With simple math, we see that the ESG and ESG-CV funding provides almost \$7,500 in funding for each person who is homeless in Florida.

In other words, this funding – if used wisely – will be enough to end homelessness in many Florida communities when combined with HUD Continuum of Care (CoC), State Challenge Grant funding, and other ongoing resources.

So how should communities use ESG-CV to effectively end homelessness?

ESG-CV should be used first and primarily to rapidly rehouse people already experiencing homelessness. Rapid rehousing includes financial assistance to pay security deposits, ongoing rent, and similar expenses, along with case management to support the household to remain stably housed.

People who are literally homeless are at great risk of contracting and spreading the coronavirus. Further, many have chronic health conditions such as heart or lung issues or uncontrolled

diabetes, and they are more likely to have severe symptoms from COVID-19 (see CDC.²) The spread of coronavirus is reduced by helping people move out of emergency shelters or encampments and into their own apartments.

Only after all homeless households are housed should ESG-CV be used for homelessness prevention. Prevention programs are

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ineffective at actually preventing homelessness because it is extremely difficult to identify households that would become homeless but for the assistance. Notably, eviction prevention and homelessness prevention are not equivalent. The vast majority of households that are behind in their rent or even evicted do not become homeless; they find other solutions on their own and never enter the homeless assistance system (see, for example, Evans, Sullivan, and Wallskog 2016³).

This is not to say that eviction prevention is unimportant. Rather, non-ESG funding should be used for that purpose, to reserve ESG funding for people already experiencing homelessness. Sources of prevention assistance include SHIP, HOME, TANF, CDBG, and Coronavirus Relief Funds (CRF). By

¹ https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/comm_planning/budget/fy20/

² <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html>

³ <https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/Impact-of-homelessness-prevention.pdf>

coordinating the various funding sources to complement one another, many community needs can be addressed effectively (see HUD Planning and Implementation⁴ and FHC Webinar⁵).

An approach that is more effective than typical prevention programs is a diversion program. Diversion is a process during which trained specialists engage with people who have already lost their housing and then help them find alternatives to entering the homeless assistance system. (See HUD, USICH, VA 2019⁶.) By providing the assistance closer to the homeless system, rather than upstream, resources can be better targeted to reducing homelessness.

The Florida Housing Coalition recommends following the Do's and Don'ts offered by the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) to ensure that ESG-CV funding helps end homelessness in your community. (See graphic on right.)

The ESG-CV funding coming to Florida's communities can make a meaningful difference for persons experiencing homelessness, but only if those monies are administered effectively. For more guidance and information on effectively deploying ESG-CV and other CARES Act funding, contact Amanda Rosado (rosado@flhousing.org) or Susan Pourciau (pourciau@flhousing.org).



Amanda Rosado is the Ending Homelessness Team Director at the Florida Housing Coalition, and is a strong advocate for housing first and recovery-oriented systems of care. She is passionate about utilizing evidence-based practices and providing effective interventions to work with vulnerable populations. Amanda holds a Master's degree in Social Work from the University of South Carolina.



Dr. Susan Pourciau is a Technical Advisor for the Florida Housing Coalition. Susan's areas of expertise include housing first, Continuum of Care (CoC) governance, homeless system design, data analysis, rapid rehousing, CoC funding, and permanent supportive housing. Prior to joining the Florida Housing Coalition, Dr. Pourciau was the Executive Director of several human services nonprofit organizations, worked as the Policy Director for the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), and was on the faculty of Florida State University. Susan has a doctorate in Accounting and a law degree from Duke University. **HNN**

USING ESG-CV FUNDS DO'S AND DON'TS

HOW WE USE CARES ACT EMERGENCY SOLUTIONS GRANT FUNDS WILL HAVE LONG-TERM IMPACTS.

| DO | DON'T |
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| Be strategic with your ESG funds. | Use funds for anything not supported by data to meet immediate needs. |
| Prioritize ESG funds for homeless assistance. | Use ESG funds for prevention until EVERY homeless person in your community is housed. |
| Focus on ending unsheltered homelessness to support the most vulnerable in your community. | Use funds for people who are not literally homeless. |
| Examine every spending proposal through a racial equity lens. | Assume racial equity will automatically be achieved without intentional efforts. |
| Use ESG funds to take diversion and rapid re-housing to scale. | Use ESG funds for eviction prevention. |

DO: Consult the Framework for an Equitable COVID-19 Homelessness Response.

The graphic above was developed by the National Alliance to End Homelessness.

⁴ <https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/COVID-19-Homeless-System-Response-Rehousing-Activation-Planning-and-Implementation-Tips.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.flhousing.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Coordinated-Investment-Planning-Rental-5.26.2020.pdf>

⁶ https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/Prevention-Diversion-Rapid-Exit-July-2019.pdf