
**Report to
The Vermont Legislature**

Progress Report on the Health Care Provider Stabilization Grant Program

In Accordance with Act 136 (H.965) of 2020: An act relating to health care- and human services-related appropriations from the Coronavirus Relief Fund.

Submitted to: The House Committee on Appropriations
The House Committee on Health Care
The House Committee on Human Services
The Senate Committee on Appropriations
The Senate Committee on Health and Welfare

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Agency of Human Services

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BACKGROUND

In accordance with Act 136 (H.965) of 2020, the Agency of Human Services shall submit a report on the progress of administering the Health Care Provider Stabilization Program as established within the Act to the House Committees on Appropriations, Health Care and Human Services and the Senate Committees on Appropriations and Health and Welfare on or before August 15, 2020 and October 1, 2020. The progress report shall contain information on the distribution of Health Care Provider Stabilization Grant Program funds to date, including the types of providers awarded funds, the aggregate amounts awarded by provider type, and the aggregate amounts awarded by geographic region of the State of Vermont. However, as of August 15, 2020 at 11:59PM, the first application cycle for the Health Care Provider Stabilization Grant Program just closed. Thus, this Report is being submitted with the most up-to-date information regarding the total number of completed applications received by the Agency of Human Services following the application deadline. The Program is authorized to utilize up to \$275,000,000 from the federal Coronavirus Relief Fund to provide direct cash grants to eligible health care and human service providers who have lost revenue and/or observed increased expenses due to the novel coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) public health emergency.

The Agency of Human Services launched the Health Care Provider Stabilization (“HCS”) Grant Program on Friday, July 17, 2020. A broad spectrum of health and human service provider types, spanning self-employed practitioners to peer services providers to hospitals are eligible for the grant program. To ensure equity in the process and to encourage all eligible providers to seek funding, applicants had four weeks to complete the application, with the first round of applications due to the Agency by August 15, 2020 at 11:59PM EST. The process was intentionally designed to award funding only after all grant applications for an application cycle had been received. This ensures that awards are made in accordance with the total need demonstrated by eligible health care and human service providers in the applications submitted to the Agency, subject to available funding, and awards are not made on a first come, first served basis. It is the Agency’s intention to administer two application cycles: July 17 – August 15, 2020 (for the time period March 1, 2020 – June 15, 2020), and one beginning in October (for the time period June 16, 2020 – September 30, 2020). However, if demonstrated need in the first application cycle exceeds the allocated funding amount, the Agency may prioritize the distribution of funds in the first cycle.

Funding will be issued as one or more grant payments beginning in late August for the applications received in the Program’s first application cycle. As of August 15, 2020, the first application cycle for the HCS Grant Program has just closed. Once all applications are

reviewed, funding determinations and award payments will be issued in late August. Thus, the specifics of provider type, geographic, and general funding distribution information under the Program will be part of the progress report due on or before October 1, 2020.

PROGRESS UPDATE: HCS GRANT ADMINISTRATION

The Health Care Provider Stabilization Grant Program was designed to ensure a stabilized system of care that can continue to serve Vermonters by providing financial assistance to a broad array of health care and human service providers who experienced financial hardship due to the COVID-19 public health emergency. The Program is authorized to utilize up to \$275,000,000 from the federal Coronavirus Relief Fund to provide direct cash grants to eligible health care and human service providers who have lost revenue and/or observed increased expenses due to the COVID-19 public health emergency. The Program must be administered in accordance with the requirements of Act 136 of 2020, as well as with the Federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act that governs the permissible use of Coronavirus Relief Funds.

HCS Online Application Portal for Electronic Application Submission

As part of administering the Health Care Provider Stabilization (“HCS”) Grant Program, the Agency of Human Services needed to develop an online application portal in order to support providers in applying for the Program and submitting required documentation for the application through electronic means.¹ The HCS Grant Program online application portal opened on July 17, 2020 and providers had through August 15, 2020 at 11:59PM EST to submit their application for grant funding for the time period of March 1, 2020 – June 15, 2020. This 4-week opening for applications to be submitted was intended to ensure that even Vermont’s smallest providers had sufficient time to complete their application; it also ensures that the grant funding is not awarded on a first come, first served basis but rather with consideration for the total need demonstrated in applications received.

Program Overview for Applicants & Additional Guidance Documents

The Agency developed an overview document for providers that describes the Program in one-page, including objectives of the Program, eligible provider organizations, documentation required, grant application process and timeline, and conditions of grant funding.² The one-page overview included the required information regarding grant fund expenditures by December 30, 2020, that grant funds must be used to cover costs and lost revenues associated with the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) disaster, and that any grant funded with federal funds is subject to the requirements of a Single Audit. The one-

¹ <https://vermont.force.com/economicrecovery/s/hcs-register>

² <https://dvha.vermont.gov/sites/dvha/files/documents/News/Program%20Overview.pdf>



page Program overview was publicly posted on the same day that the HCS Online Application Portal opened in order to support providers in understanding Program process and requirements. In addition, guidance documents including a Frequently Asked Questions, Application Readiness & Documentation Upload Guide, Expenditures Guide, Peer Support & Program Pre-Approval Certification, Revenue Changes Guide, and Financial Assistance To Date Guide were all developed and published on DVHA's public-facing COVID-19 website, with a link that directs all interested individuals to the full Program information at: <https://dvha.vermont.gov/health-care-provider-stabilization-grant-program>.

Outreach & Education for Eligible Providers

In addition to the Governor of Vermont including information about the HCS Grant Program in his twice weekly press conferences, the Governor's Office issuing a subsequent press release about the Program and the Agency developing a sign-up list for providers to receive programmatic announcements and updates, the Agency also developed an online submission form to receive any questions related to the HCS Grant Program.³ Questions received from potential applicants were reviewed and compiled into the Frequently Asked Questions document to ensure information was shared broadly with providers of all types and sizes. Building on the lessons learned regarding the effectiveness of the Agency of Commerce and Community Development's webinar for potential grant applicants, the Agency of Human Services offered a series of webinars scheduled for the first week after the HCS Grant Program online application portal opened on July 17, 2020. The webinars were well attended, with some garnering participation from over 100 individuals throughout the State of Vermont, and offerings included: General Overview of the Program, Completing Revenue Expenses, Claiming COVID-19-related Expenses and a webinar designed specifically for designated agency and specialized service agency applicants. All presentations in the HCS Grant Program webinar series were recorded and posted publicly at: <https://dvha.vermont.gov/health-care-provider-stabilization-grant-program>.

Eligibility Requirements for Applicants

The first page of the HCS Grant Program online application portal provided the following eligibility requirements to ensure applicants were aware of the minimum requirements, including that providers must have been/be:

- Domiciled in Vermont;
- Operating on or before February 1, 2020;
- Considered a "billing provider"⁴;
 - if not a billing provider, complete [the pre-approval certification](#) and receive

³ [HCS Grant Program Announcements and Updates; HCS Grant Program Online Submission for Questions.](#)

⁴ An [FAQ](#) was provided for more information and definitions.

approval before beginning the application.

- Committed to maintaining participation in value-based payment initiatives, as applicable, through calendar year 2021, if already participating in calendar year 2020 (as required in Sec. 7(c)(1)(D) of Act 136. Participation in a value-based payment initiative will not affect an entity's award amount;
- In agreement with the terms and conditions of the Grant.

Number of Applications Received through August 15, 2020

The Agency of Human Services received 351 completed applications for the Health Care Provider Stabilization Grant Program by the deadline for the first application cycle (August 15, 2020 at 11:59PM). A total of 198 questions were received from potential applicants, with all questions answered before the first application cycle closed.

Early Successes and Challenges of Administering the HCS Grant Program

Building on previous experience providing financial relief to health care providers, the Agency of Human Services and Department of Vermont Health Access were successful in quickly opening a new online application portal and developing an application process to reflect the requirements of Act 136 of 2020. Only 15 days after Governor Scott signed Act 136, the Program application process and new online portal were opened.

Agency and Department staff have demonstrated incredible flexibility and dedication by quickly orienting themselves to this new stream of work and executing it to the same high standard as their routine assignments and while responding to COVID-19. While there have been some technical issues with AHS' adaptation of ACCD's existing grant application platform, solutions and workarounds have quickly been developed and staff have been accessible and responsive to all incoming questions.