

## DHHS Program Helped 40,000-plus Households During Pandemic

By Administrator

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The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services' COVID-19 Support Services Program has helped more than 41,800 NC households isolate or quarantine during COVID-19.

Launched in August 2020 in COVID-19 “hot spots” throughout the state, the Support Services Program focuses on communities hit hardest by COVID-19.

In addition to food assistance such as home-cooked meals and groceries, the Support Services Program offered recipients financial relief payments, COVID-19-related supplies (such as masks or hand sanitizer), transportation to medical or vaccine appointments, and medication delivery to individuals who needed support to be able to quarantine or isolate due to COVID-19. The Support Services Program started in 20 counties and later expanded to 29 counties.

The types of services offered through the program will now narrow because original program funds have been spent. NCDHHS is currently finalizing the continuation of food assistance through the program and will open applications for assistance soon. Food assistance has been one of the top requested services from recipients.

Anyone who tests positive for or who has been exposed to COVID-19 and is not fully vaccinated needs to quarantine or isolate. But many North Carolinians struggle to safely quarantine or isolate and still access basic needs such as food and medications.

Four vendor partners across the state — ADLA Inc, Duke University Health Systems, Piedmont Health Services and Sickle Cell Agency, and Quality Comprehensive Health Center — administered the original program.

The Support Services Program was featured by Boston-based Partners in Health as part of a series of case studies on care resource coordination during COVID-19. North Carolina also has been recognized nationally for its work to reach underserved and historically marginalized populations and deliver equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines.

The program enabled 88% of recipients who received support through Duke University Health Systems successfully isolate or quarantine. Respondents to a recent Duke survey of recipients, one-third of whom were Spanish speaking, also said it was “easy” or “very easy” to ask for

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services (86%) and they felt less at risk of contracting COVID-19 because of the services provided (81%).

“The Support Service Program has been critical to our fight against COVID-19,” said NCDHHS Secretary Mandy K. Cohen, M.D. “Taking a whole-person approach to addressing health, including nonmedical drivers such as food, housing, transportation, employment and safety, leads to better health and well-being for North Carolinians overall, and especially during a pandemic.”

The Support Services Program builds on NCDHHS’ Community Health Worker Program, which employs community health workers in 55 counties to connect North Carolinians with medical and social supports such as diagnostic testing, behavioral health services and education about vaccines, as well as vaccine registration.

The Community Health Worker Program plans to expand to support to all 100 counties by the end of Summer 2021. A community health worker is a frontline public health worker who is a trusted member of the community, often bilingual, and has a close understanding of the community served. This program has served around 500,000 North Carolinians to date and is currently focused on vaccine support work for historically marginalized populations.