



# LIVE UNITED



720 2nd Ave.  
Seattle, WA 98104

October 2, 2015

Victoria Wachino, Director  
Center for Medicaid and CHIP Services  
Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services  
200 Independence Avenue Southwest  
Washington, DC 20201

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Dear Director Wachino:

On behalf of United Way of King County, I am writing to express our strong support for the Supportive Housing Medicaid benefit proposed in the Healthier Washington Initiative's 1115 Medicaid Transformation Waiver application to the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

Supportive housing is a nationally recognized evidence-based best practice for serving people who are chronically homeless and have serious behavioral and/or physical health disabilities. People who are chronically homeless experience significant health disparities, including high rates of chronic and acute behavioral and physical illnesses, risk of injury, trauma, and exposure from living outside, and barriers to accessing uninterrupted, appropriate levels of health care. As a result, this population also has high costs to public systems, including health care, due to frequent emergency department utilization, hospitalizations, and high utilization of other public crisis services.

A strong body of local and national evidence has demonstrated that supportive housing is effective in helping people who are chronically homeless access and retain permanent housing and regular, appropriate levels of health services. This intervention leads to housing stability, positive health outcomes, and improved utilization of health and social services. These proven outcomes result in significant savings to public systems that often exceed the cost of providing supportive housing. An evaluation of DESC's 1811 Eastlake Project, a supportive housing program in King County, found that over \$4 million in savings to public systems was achieved within the first year of the program. Of this total, 56% of the savings was in Medicaid cost reductions.

In 2005, United Way of King County launched a local initiative – the Campaign to End Chronic Homelessness. United Way raised \$20 million in private donations to meet the needs of some of our community's most vulnerable citizens. The vast majority of those funds were invested in supportive services in permanent housing. United Way and its local partners recognized that investments in permanent supportive housing produced better outcomes at a lower cost to our community.

One of the barriers to bringing permanent supportive housing fully to scale in Washington is a shortage of funding for the services that are critical to the model's success. If approved, the Supportive Housing Medicaid Benefit will bring additional resources for supportive housing services to Washington and will help make the expansion of this intervention financially feasible.



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In our community, this benefit will help continue the effort that was begun through the Campaign to End Chronic Homelessness. It will help bring vitally needed housing units on-line along with the services that will help people successfully transition out of homelessness. This can happen while producing a savings to our community's public systems including our health care system.

We at United Way of King County were gratified and encouraged to read this past summer's CMMS memo on using Medicaid for health coordination services in supportive housing. We will continue to invest privately raised dollars to support ending chronic homelessness, but our community requires additional support to ensure Medicaid-eligible adults receive the health coordination services they require to remain stably housed.

I strongly encourage you to approve Washington State's 1115 Medicaid Transformation Waiver application, including the Supportive Housing Medicaid Benefit. If implemented, this proposal will create significant health care savings while ensuring people with serious disabilities are able to live with security, autonomy and dignity in their own communities.

Sincerely,



Sara Levin  
Vice President, Community Services