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

October 09, 2015

Dear Director Wachino:

Homes First!, a community housing development organization is strongly in support of the Supportive Housing Medicaid benefit proposed in Washington State’s 1115 Medicaid Transformation Waiver application to the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

Homes First! currently owns and manages 81 rental units in 30 properties. Income from rents goes to maintain the housing, provide staff oversight, and help fund future affordable housing projects. Our strength is in our partnerships. We work together with local service providers to ensure our tenants receive the social-supports they need to be successful. We meet our tenants where they are and help them have the financial and emotional space they need to define for themselves what success may look like.

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 Medicaid, 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 Washington State, 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.



One of the barriers to bringing supportive housing fully to scale in Washington is a shortage of funding for the housing 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. In my community, this benefit will help keep our neighbors in housing, regardless of any barriers they may be personally experiencing.

We believe that households with modest means need safe and healthy housing that they can afford. When housing is affordable and supportive, low and moderate income people are able to put nutritious food on the table, receive necessary medical care, and provide reliable daycare for their children. But the benefits of affordable housing extend beyond its occupants to the community at large. National research shows that the development of affordable supportive housing increases spending and employment in the surrounding economy, acts as an important source of revenue for local governments and reduces the likelihood of homelessness and its associated costs.

Thank you for your consideration of Washington's 1115 Medicaid Transformation Waiver application. We look forward to continuing to work with the Washington State Health Care Authority to implement the 1115 waiver and a supportive housing Medicaid benefit. If approved, this proposal will result in significant savings to Medicaid while ensuring people with serious disabilities are able to live with security, autonomy and dignity in their own communities.

Sincerely,



Trudy Soucoup, CEO

