

## Kentucky's COVID Mitigation Funding Plan 2021 (SABG) Submission

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Submission Due: October 1, 2021

### Overview:

Kentucky received notice of COVID Mitigation funding on August 10, 2021, in the amount of \$562,833 for Substance Abuse Block Grant (SABG), and \$638,096 for Mental Health Block Grant (MHBG) available for expenditure between September 1, 2021 and September 30, 2025. As noted in the award letter from SAMHSA, people with mental health and substance use disorders are more likely to have co-morbid physical health issues like diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and obesity. Such chronic illnesses have been associated with high instances of contracting coronavirus disease (COVID-19) as well as with higher risk of death or poor outcomes as a result of COVID-19. This Notice of award (NoA) provides one-time funding made available by the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, and is available to expand COVID-19 testing and mitigation resources for people with mental health and substance use disorders. These funds are dedicated to provide resources and flexibility for states to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the COVID-19 public health emergency and **ensure the continuity of services to support individuals connected to the behavioral health system**. Substance Abuse Block Grant (SABG) and Mental Health Block Grant (MHBG) require separate plans and budgets for this funding.

SAMHSA anticipates that as COVID-19 cases rise among unvaccinated people, and in areas where the more transmissible Delta variant is surging, this funding will expand activities to detect, diagnose, trace, and monitor infections and mitigate the spread of COVID-19, by providing resources and flexibility for states to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the COVID-19 public health emergency and ensure the continuity of services to support individuals connected to the behavioral health system of care.

For the sake of the readers, which may include the Kentucky Behavioral Health Planning and Advisory Council and other interested parties, specific requirements related to this funding are listed below.

- To fund activities in the behavioral health care system, related to COVID-19 infections and strategies to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 through detection, diagnosis, tracing and monitoring.
- These funds are separate and apart from the statutory purpose behind SAMHSA's block grant and associated requirements.

Some examples of allowable expenses as described by SAMHSA include:

- Rapid onsite COVID-19 testing;
- Facilitating access to testing services;
- Behavioral health services for people in short-term COVID-exposure housing;
- Behavioral health services to staff working as contact tracers and other members of the COVID-related workforce;
- Financing the cost of test administration and purchasing of supplies like personal protective equipment (PPE);
- Supporting mobile health units, particularly in medically underserved areas;
- Training and technical assistance on implementing rapid onsite COVID-19 testing; and

- Promoting awareness of availability of these funds.

Examples of expenses NOT allowed with this funding are as follows:

- Activities related to purchasing, disseminating, or administering COVID-19 vaccines;
- Activities to address COVID hesitancy or vaccination activities;
- Costs already paid for by other federal or state programs, other federal or state COVID-19 funds, or prior COVID-19 supplemental funding;
- Construction projects;
- Support of lobbying/advocacy efforts;
- Facility or land purchases;
- COVID-19 mitigation activities conducted prior to September 1, 2021; and
- Financial assistance to an entity other than a public or nonprofit private entity.

Kentucky is pleased to present its application for COVID-19 Mitigation funds available to support testing and mitigation strategies for the COVID-19 public health emergency through September 30, 2025. As is the case across the United States and around the world, the pandemic has devastatingly impacted the citizens of Kentucky, including those citizens who seek or receive behavioral health services. With the surge of the Delta variant of the coronavirus, Kentucky's infection rate has significantly increased. To date, there have been 8,422 COVID-related deaths in Kentucky, and as of September 22<sup>nd</sup> there are currently 2,257 COVID-related hospitalizations. Of those hospitalized, 651 are in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) and an additional 453 are on ventilators. Kentucky is currently experiencing an 11.66% positivity rate for COVID-19.<sup>1</sup>

For persons with SUD, the risk of contracting COVID-19 and experiencing serious illness or even death as a result of infection is elevated. A National Institutes of Health-funded study found that people with SUD are more susceptible to COVID-19 and its complications. Risk of COVID-19 was highest among those who had received a diagnosis of SUD within the past year, and individuals with an opioid use disorder were 10.2 times more likely to contract COVID-19 than those without an SUD. This study also showed that patients with lifetime SUD diagnoses experienced more severe outcomes from COVID-19. Forty-one (41%) of patients with SUD were hospitalized in comparison to 30% of those without an SUD, and 9.6% with an SUD died as a result of COVID-19 in comparison to 6.6% of those without an SUD.<sup>2</sup> In addition to the risks associated with COVID-19, the current crisis is increasing risks associated with substance use and substance use disorder – due to the anxiety, social isolation, and stress associated with the pandemic and its necessary response. It is critical that addiction treatment services remain accessible and maintain the highest standard of safety for staff and service recipients. This additional funding offered from SAMHSA will benefit the public behavioral health system of care workforce and persons served by increasing the capacity to protect workforce and service recipients and further mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and ensuring Kentucky's behavioral health safety net remains intact.

The Kentucky Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities (DBHDID), began planning in mid-August 2021, forming an intradepartmental planning group to discuss options and plans for distribution of these funds. This planning group consisted of Commissioner-level leadership, including the Department's Medical Director and Deputy Commissioner, Division of Behavioral Health leadership, including the Division Director (who is also the Single State Authority), and Division block grant staff.

To ensure effective and targeted distribution of COVID-19 mitigation funds, the intradepartmental planning group gathered information regarding the ongoing COVID-19 response and mitigation needs of behavioral health providers across the state necessary to ensure continuity of care for behavioral health service recipients. Input on current COVID-19 testing and mitigation efforts and gaps in mitigation strategies was obtained from a number of behavioral health providers and stakeholders. Kentucky's fourteen (14) Community Mental Health Centers (CMHCs) participated in a survey initiated by the Commissioner of DBHDID, which helped to assess current levels of testing and mitigation spending and opportunities to enhance mitigation efforts. Non-profit substance use residential treatment programs, community-based homeless and housing programs for adults with serious mental illness, and the Kentucky Association of Regional Programs, Inc. (KARP), a non-profit association that leads, promotes and advocates for eleven (11) of the fourteen (14) Community Mental Health Centers in Kentucky also provided feedback. Stakeholder input highlighted the ongoing need to enhance mitigation efforts including COVID-19 screening, testing, mitigation strategies such as PPE, and contact tracing. Throughout the pandemic, programs have aimed to ensure the provision of masks, gloves, hand sanitizer, and antiseptic cleaning supplies for both staff and service recipients. However, it was consistently reported that funding limited the ability to further mitigate risk and more efficiently protect staff and service recipients. In particular, maintaining ample supplies and PPE is often difficult, as is the implementation of rapid testing procedures, especially given the recent rise in transmission related to the Delta variant.

In order to ensure Kentucky's behavioral health safety net stays intact, the DBHDID planning group met with leadership within the Kentucky Department for Public Health to discuss the potential of collaborating to distribute COVID-19 mitigation resources through existing PPE distribution processes and procedures. Through this partnership, COVID-19 mitigation funding would be used to primarily support the PPE needs of non-profit residential substance use treatment programs, other community-level congregate care settings, and, as able, other non-profit community programs serving individuals with substance use disorders.

### **COVID-19 Mitigation Funding Plan**

The Kentucky Department for Public Health (DPH) is responsible for developing and operating state public health programs and activities for the citizens of Kentucky. The mission of DPH is to improve the health and safety of people in Kentucky through prevention, promotion and protection. DPH oversees programs designed to improve the lives of Kentuckians through prevention of negative health outcomes, promotion of healthy lifestyles and protection from disease, injury, and environmental health impacts. DPH has almost 150 different programs to help Kentuckians become healthier and operates these programs in cooperation with its partners such as local health departments, universities, and providers across the state.

DPH supervises and supports local boards of health and 61 local health departments serving all 120 counties in Kentucky. DPH relies on these local health departments to carry out core public health activities required by Kentucky state statute and regulation and to provide preventive services to specific populations mandated by budget appropriations.

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) is located within the Cabinet for Health and Family Services Secretary's office, and is the regulatory and licensing agency for all health care, day care and long-term care facilities and child adoption/child-placing agencies in the commonwealth. The OIG has to date licensed approximately 140 residential substance use disorder (SUD) treatment facilities across the state.

Residential SUD treatment facilities are an integral part of the service system for individuals with substance use disorder in Kentucky. In addition, while many outpatient behavioral health services have transitioned to telehealth and/or hybrid service delivery models during the pandemic, residential programs continue to provide necessary direct, in-person services. Individuals in need of residential substance use treatment generally have additional physical health challenges that put them at higher risk of contracting COVID-19. Given this, it can be difficult for these programs to wholly prevent the spread of COVID-19 and providing PPE and testing to control the spread is vital in efforts to maintain the safety net.

These residential SUD treatment facilities provide specialized residential SUD treatment for pregnant and parenting women, men, families, and Veterans with SUD. Kentucky will prioritize residential SUD treatment facilities for this COVID-19 mitigation funding opportunity given the increased need to protect the health of residents and staff and reduce, or ideally prevent, the spread of COVID-19 in the community, while simultaneously supporting the need to maintain treatment services in a therapeutic residential environment.

Furthermore, Kentucky will prioritize facilities that provide access to FDA-approved Medications for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD), whether onsite or through partnerships with other community-based providers. MOUD is the evidence-based gold standard of treatment for individuals with opioid use disorder (OUD) given it improves outcomes above and beyond an abstinence only treatment approach. Overall, the utilization of MOUD is linked to numerous positive outcomes including increased treatment retention and decreased likelihood of return to use and overdose.

Additionally, Kentucky will allocate COVID-19 mitigation funds to support mitigation efforts at Syringe Services Programs throughout the state. Currently, there are seventy-three (73) Syringe Services Programs (SSPs), operated through local health departments, serving sixty-two (62) counties. Not only do SSPs provide safe syringe exchange for persons who inject drugs, they also provide linkage to substance use disorder treatment programs, onsite or community-based peer support services, recovery support services, access to overdose prevention education and naloxone, screening, care and treatment for HIV and viral hepatitis, prevention of mother-to-child transmission, hepatitis A and hepatitis B vaccination, screening for other sexually transmitted diseases and tuberculosis, partner service and a number of other medical, social and mental health services. SSPs provide important harm reduction services for persons in active addiction as well as those seeking recovery. Given this, increased access to mitigation resources is vital for these staff and the persons they serve.

DBHDID will partner with the Department of Public Health (DPH), a sister agency within the Cabinet for Health and Family Services, to make SABG COVID Mitigation Funds available to eligible entities for the purchase of PPE:

*Licensed Non-Profit Residential SUD Treatment Facilities*

- DPH will develop an application process whereby residential SUD treatment providers can apply to receive PPE. Both DPH and DBHDID will promote this opportunity through provider networks. Applicants will provide information to ensure they meet licensure requirements, are non-profit entities, and will submit an MOUD attestation. They will be required to submit a budget for the requested amount of PPE and justification of the need.
- Applications will be reviewed and approved by the DPH Harm Reduction Task Force in consultation with DBHDID.

- Based on the amount of PPE approved and awarded, the DPH Preparedness Branch will order PPE to be delivered to the central DPH warehouse. The Preparedness Branch will then ship awarded PPE to each individual facility.
- DPH will also share alternative federally funded COVID-19 testing opportunities with awardees.
- DPH will track all expenditures and relevant data, and will report to DBHDID on a regular basis.

#### *Syringe Services Programs*

- DPH will develop an application process whereby local health departments operating SSPs can apply to purchase PPE. They will be required to submit a budget for the requested amount of PPE and justification of the need.
- Applications will be reviewed and approved by the DPH Harm Reduction Task Force in consultation with DBHDID.
- Based on the amount of PPE approved and awarded, DPH will allocate funding through existing contracts with local health departments.
- DPH will track all expenditures and relevant data, and will report to DBHDID on a regular basis.

These funds will be distributed through the DBHDID contract modification process. Each year, allotted funds will be added to the contract between DBHDID and DPH. Kentucky DBHDID operates on the State Fiscal Year (July 1 – June 30). Funding will be distributed to DPH by the end of calendar year 2021. The application process for both residential SUD treatment facilities and syringe services programs will be finalized by the end of calendar year 2021.

It is anticipated that these funds will be expended prior to September 30, 2025. However, as funds are expended, annual totals will be reconciled and reported at the end of each year as required. As residential SUD programs and SSPs utilize available funds, DBHDID will open availability to additional non-profit SUD programming as able.

**COVID-19 Mitigation Funding Budget**

COVID Mitigation Funding Plan 2021 (SABG) Amount: **\$562,833**

**Proposed Budget**

**SFY 2022 (July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022)**

**Total Proposed Expenditures: \$262,500**

Department for Public Health

- 5% Administration Fee: approximately **\$12,500**

Total PPE Supplies for Eligible Programs: **\$250,000**

- Residential SUD Treatment Facilities: **\$150,000 (15 Facilities x \$10,000)**
- Syringe Services Programs: **\$100,000 (20 SSPs x \$5,000)**

**Proposed Budget**

**SFY 2023 (July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023)**

**Total Proposed Expenditures: \$300,333**

Department for Public Health

- 5% Administration Fee: approximately **\$14,300**

Total PPE Supplies for Eligible Programs: **\$286,033**

- Residential SUD Treatment Facilities: **\$161,033 (16 Facilities x \$10,050)**
- Syringe Services Programs: **\$125,000 (25 SSPs x \$5,000)**

The proposed budget anticipates that only a select amount of residential SUD Treatment providers and local health departments will apply for COVID-19 mitigation funds to receive/purchase PPE. Based on previous similar application processes, often times a limited number of applications are received due to limitations in capacity to apply or lack of awareness of the funding opportunity.

Kentucky has allocated approximately \$10,000 per residential SUD treatment provider and up to \$5,000 per Syringe Services Program through June 30, 2023. These allocation estimations are based on feedback collected from stakeholders in efforts to assess and target mitigation needs. If there are not ample award recipients identified through initial funding application rounds, DHDID may open up the funding opportunity to additional non-profit SUD providers.

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<sup>1</sup> Cabinet for Health and Family Services. Department for Public Health data as of September 22, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Wang Q.Q., et al., (2020). COVID-19 risk and outcomes in patients with substance use disorders: analyses from electronic health records in the United States. *Molecular Psychiatry*