

NEWS RELEASE | **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE** | August 18, 2021

Qualifying North Dakota renters can now get help paying past-due utility bills

BISMARCK, N.D. – Pandemic-related job losses and other financial hardships have had a domino effect in households' finances, impacting the ability to pay rent or mortgages, utilities and other household expenses. It has also increased household debt and placed a financial burden on many housing providers.

To help North Dakota renters regain their financial stability, the North Dakota Department of Human Services announced that in addition to help with rent, the ND Rent Help program can now also help qualifying renters pay past-due utility bills.

Payments will be made directly to utility vendors. Qualifying utilities include electric, natural gas and other heating sources, water, sewer and garbage services. ND Rent Help utility assistance is designed to complement the state's existing Low Income Home Energy Assistance program. It will pay for heating costs not covered by LIHEAP if a household qualifies for and participates in both programs.

To access rent and utility help through the ND Rent Help program, North Dakota renter households can earn up to 80% of [area median income](#) (AMI) based on household size, which equals an annual income of up to \$80,000 for a family of four depending on the county in which they live. In addition, at least one member of the household must have qualified for unemployment or have experienced a COVID-related hardship during the pandemic and be behind in rent or utilities, or be at risk of homelessness or housing instability.

Households with incomes below 50% of AMI or that include a household member who has been unemployed for 90 days or longer receive priority. Renters in North Dakota can contact an [approved application counselor](#) to get help locally applying for rent and utility assistance.

The utility help is the latest enhancement to North Dakota's housing stability program. In late July, the department announced that it had contracted with local application counselors to help renters apply for assistance.

In partnership with North Dakota Housing Finance Agency, DHS is developing a streamlined program. When fully implemented later this fall, it will feature a new online portal, housing facilitator services to help people navigate housing challenges, along with other support designed to lead to greater housing and financial stability for participating North Dakota households, as well as the housing providers who make up the state's local housing markets.

A companion program to help qualifying North Dakota homeowners with housing-related costs is also expected to be available later this fall.

-MORE-

ND Rent Help now offers utility help for qualifying North Dakota renters – page 2

From Jan. 1 through July 30, 2021, the department has expended \$5.6 million on rental assistance, benefitting 1,758 North Dakota renters. Payments are made directly to housing providers.

There are about 117,556 rental units in North Dakota according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

DHS has estimated that the ND Rent Help rent and utility assistance program and related housing stability efforts may be able to serve as many as 15,000-25,000 North Dakota households.

The ND Rent Help program follows U.S. Treasury Department guidelines. To learn more about ND Rent Help, visit www.nd.gov/dhs/info/covid-19/rent-help.html.

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