

Housing support here for New Mexico families

Written by Gallupsun Staff
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The pandemic has created difficulties for many New Mexico residents. It made new struggles and exacerbated others, including struggles with housing. Lost wages have meant many of our neighbors fell behind on housing and utility payments. Many fell so far behind they are at risk of being evicted with few options for new housing.

Fortunately, multiple efforts have been put into place to help address these needs. The most prominent of these is the federally funded Emergency Rental Assistance Program, <https://www.renthelpnm.org/>. In New Mexico, hundreds of millions of dollars are being made available to help cover past and future rent and utility expenses for eligible households. These funds can help families stay in their homes by providing up to 15-months of rent support.

To date, the program has already awarded over \$78 million in rental and utility assistance to over 20,000 New Mexico households with an average assistance of \$4,000 for rent and \$750 for utilities.

The rent funds assist property owners of all sizes, from a couple with a small rental property as

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part of their retirement income to the larger housing providers. Rental assistance funds create a significant multiplier effect benefiting both tenants and landlords, as well as their communities. Utility providers of all sizes have also benefited.

Starting this program from scratch has been difficult, but New Mexico's Department of Finance and Administration and the City of Albuquerque have worked hard to address these challenges and create new and more effective responses to the ongoing crisis. The city and state agencies have worked in collaboration with the courts, housing advocates, the Apartment Association of New Mexico and others in the community to find solutions and expand housing stability. Owner representatives have worked together with tenant representatives so the DFA program can get help to all those affected quickly.

To respond to the ongoing housing crisis, DFA has also expanded the program to help with re-housing (first month and last month rent, the security deposit plus 3 months of rental monthly rent assistance) to people who have been evicted; and is providing emergency hotel assistance for individuals and families who are without housing options. DFA is also working with the Albuquerque Public Schools district to make sure assistance reaches those families most in need in New Mexico's largest city. The DFA and CABQ are also collaborating with New Mexico Legal Aid to expand legal assistance to tenants facing evictions throughout the state. DFA is now providing funding to the Administrative Office of the Courts to develop and implement a statewide program to help landlords and tenants mediate their disputes.

Unfortunately, housing struggles persist due to the prolonged nature of the pandemic. Nevertheless, the DFA has demonstrated its commitment to work as a partner with all communities to foster housing stability programs. These programs include solutions for payment of temporary housing, relocation expenses, and a significant investment in housing stability services that will help New Mexico renters stay in their homes.

While Emergency Rental Assistance has been successful in New Mexico and has helped so many people, we need to encourage housing advocates, landlords, and renters to continue to work together to access and utilize the full benefit of these federal dollars for the advantage of all New Mexico residents.