

Help is here for New Mexico renters

Written by By Debbie Romero, Secretary, New Mexico Department of Finance and Administration; Donnie Quintana, Emergency Rental Assistance Program Coordinator
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Up to 15-months of rent, utility assistance available

As New Mexico families emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, many of us find life incredibly different than it was 15 months ago. Our households, our communities, and our jobs have all been impacted and likely look very different now.

The pandemic was an indiscriminate hammer, fracturing the lives of people across the spectrum and far too many New Mexicans now find themselves struggling to make ends meet, or are employed, but behind on housing costs like mortgages, rent, or utilities.

Fortunately, thousands of renters in New Mexico are likely eligible to receive funds to cover up to 15 months of rent and utility payments. These payments will help keep people in their homes.

We would like to provide some important points regarding the federally-funded assistance program.

It's important to note that while individuals are required to apply to receive these funds, program administrators are not waiting for people to stumble upon our website or give us a call. We are running a robust advertising campaign, building an extensive ambassador network of community and nonprofit organizations, and are regularly adapting the application process to meet the needs of New Mexico renters, while also satisfying the onerous federal requirements for issuing these funds. In fact, our call center hours were recently extended and the center was operational on Memorial Day.

Most importantly, there is a tremendous need throughout New Mexico for this sort of support. Many New Mexicans experienced job losses or reduced wages during the pandemic and struggled to make ends meet. While these losses had a direct impact on the individual, there were compounding effects to landlords and utility providers as well.

While landlords and utility providers are not eligible to apply for individuals, they play a critical

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role in the process. Landlords and utility providers must certify that individual applicants are tenants or customers, are behind in rent or payments, and must also provide necessary tax documents to receive payment on behalf of the applicant. Though a seemingly simple step in the process, delays in landlord response have been a significant cause for delays in funding applicants.

Despite challenges, progress is being made. To date, nearly \$3M in assistance has been recommended for renters across New Mexico. This includes individuals like a single mother of three who received \$17,000 to cover back rent and utilities. We haven't let the barriers associated with building and executing such a significant assistance program keep us from getting support to New Mexico renters as soon as possible.

Perhaps more than anything, we want readers to know that they each can play a part in supporting a neighbor, friend, or family member. If you're a landlord – tell your tenants about the program and help us process the necessary paperwork quickly. If you're a renter – visit the website to see if you're eligible to receive rent or utility assistance. I also encourage everyone not in either of these categories to become an ambassador for the program and connect people in your community with renthelpnm.org or (833) 485-1334.

By doing so, you will help New Mexico bounce back from the year that none of us wanted or deserved.

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