



## Special Message to the Community Action Network

### *The Community Action Network and COVID-19*

March 19, 2020

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In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we want to provide you with an update on our ongoing efforts to assist the Community Action Network and stress protecting the health and safety of staff and customers. We understand that your CAA is weighing many issues and affirm that the safety and health of your staff and customers is your primary role right now. Thank you all for your efforts to date and for the intention and focus you will bring to these next few months.

This situation is unprecedented, yet we are confident in the collective strength of our network and our ability to support people with low-income and their communities. We urge you to follow all CDC guidelines, stay in touch with your State CSBG Offices and other funders, and to connect and work with your local public health department.

As you know, the Community Action Network is a proven national network, the only non-military network in the country directly affiliated with the Federal Government. Community Action is the trusted entity in communities serving families with low incomes during this crisis and needs flexible funding to assist those most in need. The Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) is the ideal lever for the federal government to drive funds to localities to meet specific local needs during the pandemic, as it supports a network of 1,000+ agencies, serving 99% of America's counties. The Community Action Network has a demonstrated track record of accountability and complies with OMB Uniform Guidance and national CSBG Organizational Standards. Utilizing existing programmatic expertise and fiscal capacity, all Community Action COVID-19 pandemic efforts will be provided and documented efficiently and effectively. ***We applaud NCAF and David Bradley for the efforts in Congress to ensure Community Action is a key part of the nation's response.***

The Community Action Partnership staff are working remotely until March 31 (at minimum and will likely go longer as the situation develops) and it is our plan to remain fully operational. In response to requests for resources and guidance on emerging issues related to COVID-19 we are coordinating with our national partners (CAPLAW, NASCSP, and NCAF) and have compiled a number of useful resources and updates on our COVID19 resource page ([Click Here](#)) and on CAPLAW's COVID19 resource page ([Click Here](#)).

We are ***seeking information on what your CAAs is experiencing and how you are responding.*** Certainly local efforts take priority, but if you have a team member who can share your experience and/or provide links to local press or promotion on your actions, please email us at [csbg@communityactionpartnership.com](mailto:csbg@communityactionpartnership.com).

Please keep an eye on our **social media platforms** for real-time communication as we do not want to overwhelm your inbox. This includes Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Our Twitter feeds include [@CAPartnership](#) and [@PartnershipCEO](#) and we will be using the tag **#CommunityAction**. We will be posting and sharing/re-sharing information as it

becomes available. We will also send out more frequent newsletters when key documents or guidance are released in addition to our weekly contact while trying to balance and be aware of how full your inboxes already are. Also, please keep an eye out for a **weekly web meeting** invitation to share information and hear from the network. We plan to create a standing time when the Network can check in; the date/time is TBD and we are working with the National Partners to deploy.

The Partnership board, comprised of CAA Executive Directors and CEOs from around the nation, met on March 17, 2020, and identified issues and needs CAAs and their customers are experiencing at this early stage of the COVID-19 pandemic. The issues discussed by the board included:

- Community Action's reach into 99% of America's counties is critical and CSBG flexibility is one of the most important tools in our toolbox.
- Working with our national partners to call on Congress to increase CSBG eligibility to 200% of the federal poverty guidelines to ensure that families can access needed programs and services as they did during the Great Recession.
- Working with our national partners to call on Congress so CAAs can use the inherent flexibility of CSBG today to provide comprehensive case management and emergency services.
- Working with our national and state partners to rapidly direct existing and near-future CSBG funding for a range of programs and services to alleviate material hardships including, but not limited to, rental payments, energy/water bill payments, food, hygiene products, cleaning supplies, home delivered meals, childcare, and fulfillment of other basic needs.
- Working with our national and state partners to use existing flexibilities to approve the use of CSBG funds to purchase resources unique to this crisis including protective gear, equipment, facilities modifications to continue service provision, and appropriate vehicles needed for food transport.
- Working with our national and state partners to allow for the purchase of specialized cleaning products. Specialized cleaning services will be needed as we move through and eventually come out of the pandemic. CAA's will need to deploy specialized cleaning services for offices and vehicles in order to remediate or prevent virus transmission. These procedures will likely incur greater expense than "standard" cleaning/maintenance protocols.
- Community Action Agencies administer a wide range of funding in addition to CSBG, which direct agencies to respond to the unique needs of each community. We expect existing funding will not be enough to meet all the emerging needs.
- Community Action Agencies may need to immediately and significantly modify their service delivery models to account for this public health emergency. Investment in technology will be required for both service recipients as well as Community Action Agencies.
  - For Community Action customers, children will be out of school/pre-school for weeks, if not months and will need to continue education via computer/laptop. Families with low incomes whose school-age/pre-school children are affected by school closures will need laptops/tablets and assistance with payments for internet service. Our program with SafeLink via the Lifeline program provides limited free internet service minutes and does not require families to use a new device, they can use a current device (phone, tablet, etc.). For more information regarding our partnership with SafeLink click [here](#). In addition, some parents may also need help connecting to the internet so they can work from home. Questions on Safelink may also be sent to [membership@communityactionpartnership.com](mailto:membership@communityactionpartnership.com).
  - For Community Action Agencies: Organizations will need to quickly increase their technological capacity to be able to serve clients remotely as well as take technology into the field to assist families applying for services. Immediate technological infrastructure will be required (e.g.,

servers, laptops, tablets, mobile scanners, increased internet bandwidth) to allow staff to work remotely and to work with customers in one-on-one settings rather than common spaces. Agency software and technology platforms that will permit web-based conferencing, sharing of documents and other operational needs (including allowing fiscal and human resources) may need to be updated or purchased.

- Many Community Action Agencies may play a convening role for the community and faith-based response to local interventions including the coordination of community-based and faith-based services, focused unduplicated efforts, and the maximizing of resources coming into communities. This role requires intensive staff, technology and communications infrastructure to convene virtually/remotely and to facilitate ongoing coordination.
- Community Action Agencies are modifying shelter activities to follow CDC and HUD guidance for homeless and other shelter and supportive housing environments. Support will be needed to provide rental payments or other services for people who live in public housing, affordable housing developments or use vouchers, etc. but who have lost their income, in order to ensure housing continuity and prevent homelessness. In addition, support for Community Action and other local nonprofit housing projects will be needed so that programs can be maintained, and debt payments can be made so long term affordable housing assets to be preserved.
- Distribution of food and other needed household supplies may require a different distribution model than is currently in place in most communities. Increased home delivery and other innovations to this emergency needs system, particularly smaller organizations that provide these resources in a less formal, less structured setting will be needed.
- Many CAA's are actively partnering with local school districts to ensure that children and their family members have access to food during periods in which schools are closed.
- Many CAA's operate Head Start and Early Head Start which are closed or scaled back given local and statewide school closures and these programs have unique needs and challenges that will need guidance and support.
- CAA's will serve households not served by school districts, especially homes with seniors and homes with small children not yet enrolled in schools. Delivery of goods includes meals, food, medication, and other supplies will be needed. Additionally, where many communities rely on volunteers to provide these delivery services, a significant proportion of those volunteers are older and will likely need to self-quarantine, requiring a new cadre of delivery people that may need to be paid for these services.
- The Community Action network recognizes the role of trauma in shaping behaviors, affecting health outcomes and influencing the provision of services. The current pandemic is a new and powerful source of trauma in every American's life – disrupting virtually all daily life activities. It is especially disruptive for children and families with low incomes. As we look ahead, Community Action will need to be creative in addressing its potentially long-term impact.
- CAA's play a key role in coordinating with public health partners to disseminate information about local needs and responses. Additionally, some CAAs are working with health/medical providers and emergency response entities on how to provide childcare for medical professionals and emergency responders who need childcare in order to work.

All in all, we believe that as COVID-19 affects our nation, our resources should be focused on both the immediate emergency response and the ongoing recovery efforts. Specifically, we will be encouraging federal policymakers to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable Americans and recognize the unique

role that CSBG and Community Action play in every community and our ability to respond to immediate community needs.

As noted above, we are here to assist you with **disseminating what your CAAs is experiencing and how you are responding**. When you can, please share your experience and/or links to local press or promotion on your actions with us via email at [csbg@communityactionpartnership.com](mailto:csbg@communityactionpartnership.com). We promise to make wise use of the information and share best practices across the Community Action Network.

We have entered a season when “belonging” matters more than ever and we would like to emphasize that while **physical** distancing is critical for everyone’s health and safety right now, social distancing or social isolation is something different and may be especially harmful to our customers. As a result, we invite the Network to engage in “social solidarity” along with spatial separation, giving particular emphasis to **taking care of one another in the process**. This aligns deeply with our vision, values and our promise.

**Thank you for all you are doing to help families across America**. We stand in awe of your leadership, creativity, and resiliency. There is more to come; however, know you are living the Community Action Promise every day regardless of where you are deploying your skills. Through all of this, we know you are thinking and planning for the response your agency will deploy that will help support families. I leave you with the Promise of Community Action and the promise to stay in touch and stand with you during this challenging time.

*The Promise of Community Action  
Community Action changes people’s lives, embodies the spirit of hope,  
improves communities, and makes America a better place to live.  
We care about the entire community, and we are dedicated to  
helping people help themselves and each other.*

Yours in Community Action,



Denise Harlow, CCAP  
Chief Executive Officer