



House Wake!

Wake County COVID-19 Strategic Plan for Housing

Wake County
May 5, 2020



General Description

House Wake! is a strategic plan to minimize the effects of COVID-19 on homeless and precariously housed Wake County residents, while maximizing opportunities for positive long-term outcomes.

This six-to eight-month strategic plan utilizes and coordinated federal, state and local funding to address the COVID -19 crisis within our homeless and precariously housed population and aims to move the maximum number of individuals possible to housing stability.



The Challenge

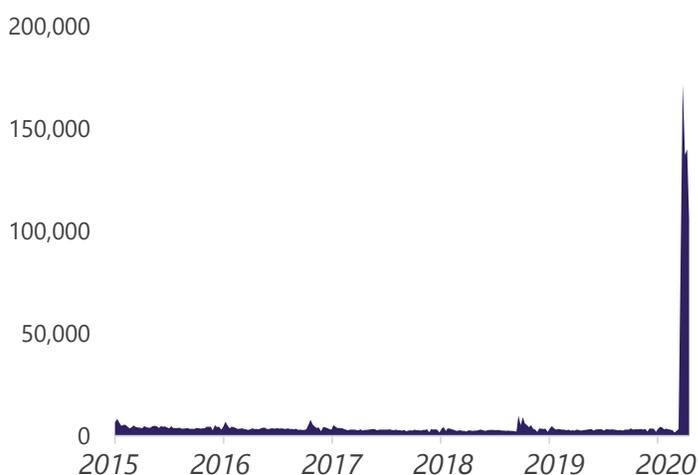
Wake County has been in the midst of a housing crisis for some time. COVID-19 will significantly exacerbate this issue.

Since March 15th, 2020 the state of North Carolina has seen a massive rise in unemployment insurance claims filing. Between March 15th, 2020 and April 18th, 2020, the latest available data from the Department of Labor shows the insured

unemployment rate jumped from 0.47% to 10.64%.

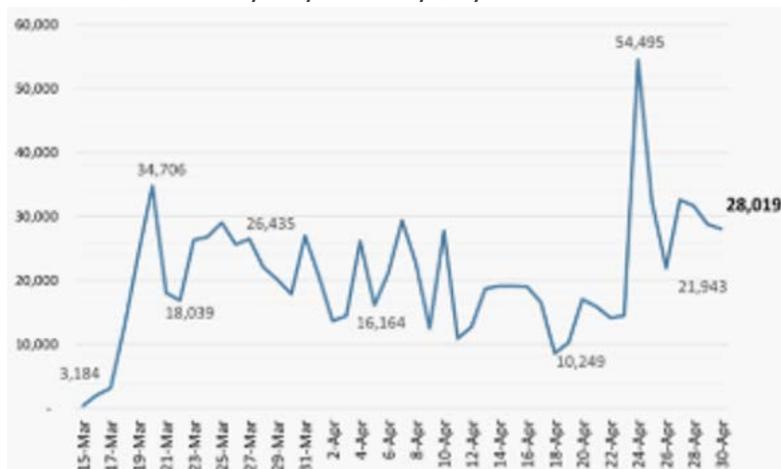
More recently recorded data from the North Carolina Department of Labor shows the high claims rate has continued throughout the month of April, with the highest single day filing of 54,495 recorded on April 24th, 2020.

Claims Filed 1/3/15 – 4/18/20



Source: US Dept. of Labor

Claims Filed 3/15/20 – 5/01/20



Source: North Carolina Dept. of Commerce

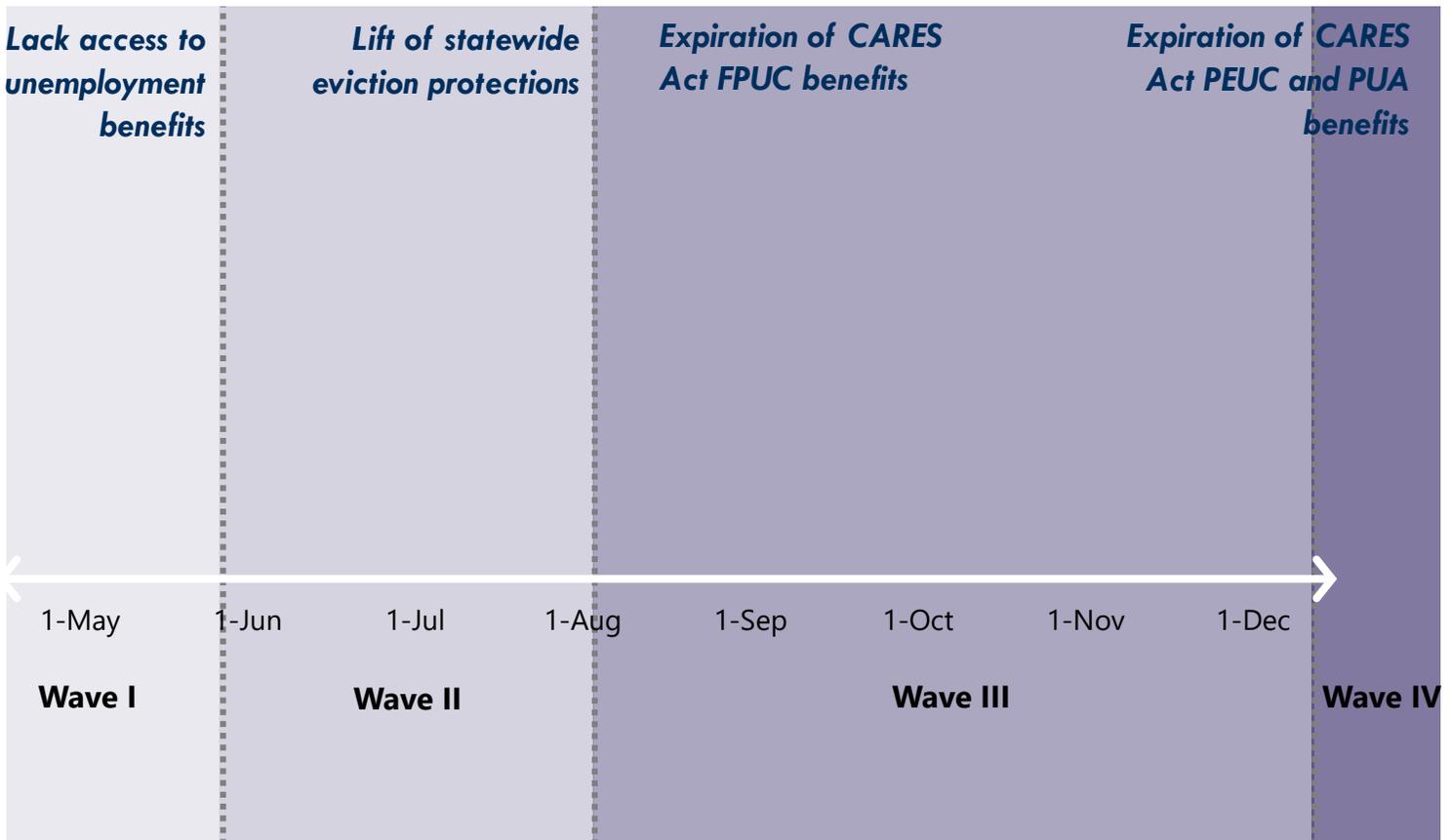
The high rate of unemployment is a warning of the coming wave of evictions and foreclosures. This plan is the first step in addressing the coming need but should not be seen as the final solution.

Looking Ahead

The programs proposed in this plan are focused on addressing the first wave of housing insecurity. The County will need to develop additional housing programs and policies in the coming months for the future waves and form close partnerships as the need will be far beyond the County's ability to address alone.

- Wave I (ongoing): Households who cannot access unemployment insurance face a high risk of become housing insecure today (e.g. undocumented, borderline homeless, employed in the grey economy).
- Wave II (June 1, 2020): When superior court and district court proceedings resume hearings, households who are unable able to pay rent will be put at a higher risk of housing insecurity.

- Wave III (July 31, 2020): Following the expiration of the Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation program on 07/31/2020, households who had been reliant on the additional \$600 in weekly unemployment benefits will face an increased risk of housing insecurity.
- Wave IV (December 31, 2020): Following the expiration of the Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation and Pandemic Unemployment Assistance which expanded the benefits pool and benefits timeline, on 12/31/2020, households still experiencing unemployment will face an increased risk of housing insecurity.



Federal Funding for Wake County

The CARES Act, H.R. 748, signed into law on March 27th, 2020, provides additional flexible funding to state, local, tribal, and territorial governments, and public agencies, through familiar and new programs that can be used to address housing instability and homelessness.

The first round of CARES Act funding allocations for Wake County housing programs include:

- \$1,258,790 through Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)
- \$626,800 through Emergency Services Grants (ESG)

- \$132,656 through Housing Assistance for Persons with Aids (HOPWA)
- Up to \$193M through the Coronavirus Relief Fund

In addition to these four programs, other housing related funding in the CARES Act which Wake County may apply for includes FEMA Public Assistance, available to provide homeless services, and Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).

Seven Components of House Wake

There are seven distinct components of the House Wake Plan.

1

Healthy Hotels Initiative

2

Homelessness Prevention Expansion

3

Rapid Rehousing Permanent Placement Program

4

Housing Navigation & Landlord Engagement Program

5

Oak City Cares Hygiene Program

6

Housing Services Enhancement Program

7

Shelter & Street Outreach Enhancement Program

1 Healthy Hotels Initiative

Due to the coronavirus, many Wake County service providers have had to adjust programming to protect current clients and others have halted services or temporarily closed due to a lack of capacity as volunteers are required to stay at home.

To fill this gap, the Wake County Emergency Operation Center (EOC) contracted with two hotels to provide approximately 200 hotel rooms for the population meeting criteria of homelessness and one or more high-risk category for the COVID-19 virus.

To access these units, residents must be referred from one of three locations:

- A shelter in Wake County to reduce shelter populations in order to allow for proper social distancing
- Hospitals discharging a person from an in-hospital admission (excluding an emergency department visit) who met the above criteria for homelessness and high-risk category and would have otherwise been discharged to a Wake County shelter.

- A street outreach program working with the unsheltered population above 65 years old and/or above 55 years old with lung disease or the immunocompromised.

The Healthy Hotels Initiative transitions oversight of this program from the EOC to the Housing Department, allowing this initiative to continue through December 31, 2020, when the COVID-19 relief funds are set to expire. This transition allows Wake County and its community partners time to permanently house clients from these hotels and to expand the program to additional hotels as needed.

The Housing Department will contract with community service organization to provide site and case management services for individual locations. The County will develop program details and manage contracts with the hotels, behavioral health and community service organizations as well as monitor their progress.

Funding for this program will come from the coronavirus relief fund.

2 Homelessness Prevention Expansion

Recent reports found that in April, one-fifth of market rate renters in Raleigh were not able to pay their rent. This estimate excludes renters living in affordable housing, where a higher percentage of residents are struggling to pay their bills. As the current moratorium on evictions expires, eviction filings are expected to increase.

The Wake Prevent! Homelessness Prevention Program is the largest homelessness prevention program in the County. Since its implementation on October 1, 2019, the program has served more than 150 households provided more than \$300k in direct assistance to support families and individuals on the verge of homelessness. This includes Wake County residents who are at or below 50% of the Area Median Income (AMI), who are 30 days or less to homelessness and who fall into one of the five

following categories:

1. Currently fleeing domestic violence
2. Facing eviction
3. Living in a hotel
4. Couch surfing
5. Exiting an institution

To address the wave of evictions, COVID-19 relief funds will be used to expand the Wake Prevent! Homelessness Prevention Program to support additional precariously housed residents.

The County may also contract with other homelessness prevention providers to increase capacity, or determine other methods of providing financial support to residents that are unable to pay their rent and/or mortgage due to COVID-19.

COVID-19 relief funding will also be used to provide housing support through the Wake Prevent! Hotel Families Assistance Program: Phase II. This program was established on April 6, 2020 as an expansion of the Wake Prevent! Homelessness Prevention Program to allow funding to be utilized to cover the cost of hotel stays that enabled families to shelter-in-place.

The current program includes:

- A dedicated phone line and dedicated email address for communication with families who are applying for services or have questions about services
- Housing Department Staff who form an eligibility triage team and conduct scheduled telephone screenings
- Three nonprofit providers which provide services and aid up to 128 families. These nonprofits have the capacity to serve a combined total of 64 families at a point in time; and take additional families as current cases stabilize and move to self-sufficiency.

Currently there are over 160 families living in more than 40 hotels in Wake County that have been approved for services, but are still waiting to be referred. Phase II will work to expand the program capacity both with dedicated County staff and nonprofit partners to support families who have been screened for program eligibility but have not yet been referred for services or aid.

Recommended adjustments to current program:

1. Increase the capacity of the eligibility team and expand scope to include documentation collection eligibility certification
2. Enter into contracts/agreements with the hotels allowing Wake County to pay hotel fees directly upon client approval for the program
3. Increase capacity with current nonprofit partners and/or expand capacity by identifying new partners to provide case management

Funding for these programs will come from the coronavirus relief fund.

3 Rapid Rehousing Permanent Placement Program

As recommended by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) the majority of CARES Act entitlement dollars (CDBG, ESG, and HOPWA) will be allocated to provide short-term rental assistance and services with the goals of helping people obtain housing quickly, increase self-sufficiency, and stay housed.

Grants to affordable housing developers may also be made through this program to support the immediate rehabilitation of existing affordable units that are currently inhabitable.

Prospective agencies and affordable housing developers will have the opportunity to apply

directly to Wake County for funding to support rapid rehousing efforts.

Expenses may include, but are not limited to:

- Security deposits
- Rental assistance
- Property damage
- Vacancy payments
- Program administration
- Affordable housing development and rehabilitation

Funding for this program will come from CDBG & HOPWA allocations.

4

Housing Navigation & Landlord Engagement Program

The aftermath of COVID-19 breeds uncertainty for our developer and property management community, for the first time in a long time. This provides a unique opportunity for Wake County to work with our developers and property management companies to increase the stock of available affordable available in Wake County.

The Housing Navigation & Landlord Engagement Program will:

1. Educate potential partners on the benefits of working with Wake County programs
2. Coordinate efforts to create and manage a database of Wake County vacant units
3. Work with service providers to support clients' rapid re-housing into identified units

This database should provide details about the unit size, rent, and availability date as well as each owners minimum requirements for their units

(criminal histories, poor credit, evictions, income, etc.). The ability for repaid re-housing providers to have access to Housing Navigators, armed with real-time vacancy information will fill one of the largest gaps existing in our system and one of the toughest barriers to Wake County being able to exit residents from these emergency COVID-19 services into permanent housing, as opposed to back out on the street.

The Housing Department will work with community partners to provide this service to the Wake County community through the end of the 2020 calendar year until the available funding expires. Partnering agencies are encouraged to seek funding to support the continuation of this program beyond the 2020 calendar year.

[Funding for these programs will come from the coronavirus relief fund.](#)

5

Oak City Cares Hygiene Program

In the current environment, residents still unsheltered in Wake County do not have access to showers or laundry to tend to their personal hygiene needs. While Oak City Cares (OCC) typically provides this service, due to COVID-19, the County's build, which houses OCC, does not have a floorplan that allows this service to continue inside healthily.

OCC has offered to continue to provide this service by utilizing external FEMA showers, washers and dryers that can be properly sanitized and maintained according to current CDC recommendations.

[Funding for these programs will come from the coronavirus relief fund.](#)

6

Housing Services Enhancement Program

Funding set aside for this program will be used for supportive services for clients in one of the Hotel, Rapid Rehousing, or street outreach programs. This flexible funding source would compliment programs approved for CARES Act entitlement programs and to bridge gaps.

Expenses may include, but are not limited to:

- Food

- Personal Hygiene
- Household supplies
- Transportation (gas/bus cards)
- Green Chair fees to furnish permanent homes
- Basic technology needs for school age children to continue education

Funding for these programs will come from the coronavirus relief fund.

7

Shelter & Street Outreach Enhancement Program

Funding set aside for this program will be used to support programmatic and physical shelter alterations that support social distancing as well as street outreach programs working to identify high-risk unsheltered residents.

Expenses may include, but are not limited to:

- Physical shelter alterations and supplies
- Unsheltered engagement

- Case management
- Emergency health and mental health services
- Transportation

Funding for these programs will come from ESG & HOPWA funding allocations.

Moving Forward

The House Wake! plan is an effort to realize the opportunity in this catastrophe and is the first step in pursuing a just and resilient recovery for the residents of Wake County. Now begins the difficult work of ensuring that, even in the face of a pandemic, all Wake County residents have access to and can retain safe, affordable housing.

The next step will be to plan a systematic recovery that addresses the underlying issues which made so many households vulnerable to losing their homes. This will involve addressing more deeply entrenched challenges of housing affordability with even greater vigor than we marshaled before COVID-19.

Throughout the recovery process, the Housing Affordability and Community Development Department will continue to work with community partners of all types. Wake County recognizes that the enormity of the challenges that we face as a community can only be addressed through close collaboration and we appreciate the giving and collaborative posture that our community has manifested in the face of this crises.