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HOPE Program Offers Rent and Utility Assistance for North Carolinians Struggling to Recover from Pandemic

Governor Roy Cooper and Chief Operating Officer of the North Carolina Office of Recovery and Resiliency (NCORR) Laura Hogshead shared an update on the application process for the N.C. Housing Opportunities and Prevention of Evictions (HOPE) Program. The program is open for a second application period to assist very low-income renters that are experiencing financial hardship due to COVID-19. The HOPE Program provides rent and utility bill assistance to prevent evictions and utility disconnections.

"I strongly encourage landlords and utilities across our state to lend a hand to their communities and to participate in these programs so that we can keep people in their homes with their lights on," said Governor Cooper. "I am proud that North Carolina is taking steps to support families who need it as we emerge from this pandemic."

The current HOPE Program is serving very low-income renters in 88 North Carolina counties. Very low-income is defined as earning less than or equal to 50 percent of the area median income for the county where the renter lives. Twelve additional counties and five tribal governments received money directly from the federal government to operate their own programs.

In the last two weeks, more than 8,000 people have applied for financial assistance and as of today, \$9.5 million has been awarded. Payments began on June 1 and 924 checks for a total of \$1.1 million have been mailed to help North Carolinians in need. Payments are expected to continue to go out on a rolling basis every business day. Previous applicants who received help can re-apply if they still need assistance.

North Carolina initially launched the HOPE Program last fall, using flexible federal CARES Act funds to keep low-income people struggling during the pandemic in their homes and their utilities turned on. In total, the program awarded \$133 million to more than 36,000 applicants. Congress subsequently recognized the outstanding need for rent and utility assistance and passed additional funds in the two stimulus bills, including the American Rescue Plan.

"In advance of this second application period, HOPE Program processes have been streamlined to ensure people get help as quickly as possible," said NCORR Chief Operating Officer Laura Hogshead. "Our goal is to continue to provide housing stability while our state recovers from impacts of the pandemic."

Complete details about the HOPE Program, including eligibility requirements, program benefits and an online application, are available at www.hope.nc.gov. Applicants who cannot access the website may also call (888) 9ASK-HOPE or (888) 927-5467.

North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Mandy K. Cohen, M.D. also joined the Governor today and provided an update on the state's COVID-19 vaccination efforts. As part of its ongoing effort to get more North Carolinians vaccinated and safely bring summer back, the NC DHHS is offering \$25 Summer Cash Cards at select vaccine sites to offset the time and transportation costs of getting vaccinated.

To date, over 8.3 million doses have been administered in North Carolina, with 54.3 percent of adults partially vaccinated and 49.2 percent of adults fully vaccinated. 79.9 percent of the 65 and older population have been partially vaccinated.

Employment and Transition Planning Webinars for People with Disabilities

The North Carolina Council on Developmental Disabilities continues its series of Employment and Transition Webinars to educate and inform stakeholders about a statewide system that provides and sustains integrated employment for all North Carolinians living with a developmental disability, regardless of complexity or needed level of support.

The webinars will be held on Thursdays from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. via Zoom. Each webinar will include time for Q&As with leading experts in employment and transition planning for people with intellectual and/or other developmental disabilities. The upcoming webinars include:

- June 10 - The Role of Assistive Technology and Devices in School, Employment, and Community Living
- June 24 - Building Meaningful Lives with an Integrated, Meaningful Day
- July 8 - Think College and Post-Secondary Education
- July 22 - Customized Employment with Fidelity
- August 5 - Benefits Planning and Creating an ABLE Account
- August 19 - Putting All the Pieces Together for North Carolina Employment First

The webinar is open to all Employment First stakeholders, transition professionals, self-advocates, families, job coaching/CRP staff, and MCO staff. Registration is required as space is limited.

To learn more and to register for the webinars, visit NCCDD's website, nccdd.org.

About North Carolina Council on Developmental Disabilities: The North Carolina Council on Developmental Disabilities (NCCDD) works to assure that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and their families participate in the design of and have access to needed community services, individualized supports and other forms of assistance that promote self-determination, independence, productivity and inclusion in all areas of community life. The Council identifies problems facing its community through its five-year planning process and funds innovative projects and initiatives that promote the goals of the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act (DD Act) for all North Carolinians.

FDA Approves First Drug that Slows Alzheimer's Disease

On Monday the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved aducanumab (Biogen/Eisai) to treat Alzheimer's disease.

This is the first drug that slows Alzheimer's disease. And, this is the beginning of a completely new future for Alzheimer's treatments. This is a new type of Alzheimer's treatment; it addresses the disease in a way that has never been done before, compared to currently approved drugs.

Alzheimer's, a progressive, degenerative and fatal brain disease, is the most common cause of dementia. For Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures, an annual report by the Alzheimer's Association, visit alz.org/facts.

Quotes from the Alzheimer's Association

- Harry Johns, Alzheimer's Association president and CEO: On behalf of those impacted by Alzheimer's and all other dementia, the Alzheimer's Association welcomes and celebrates today's historic FDA approval of aducanumab for Alzheimer's disease. This approval is a victory for people living with Alzheimer's and their families. It is a new day. This approval allows people living with Alzheimer's more time to live better. For families it means being able to hold on to their loved ones longer. It is about reinvestigating scientists and companies in the fight against this scourge of a disease. It is about hope.
- Joanne Pike, Dr.P.H., Alzheimer's Association, chief strategy officer: This therapy will be of great interest to many, but it is not the only important element of Alzheimer's treatment and care. The Alzheimer's Association has made it a priority to partner with health care systems, physicians, and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to ensure early and accurate diagnosis, and access to treatment, care management and care planning.

The Alzheimer's Association will do everything in its power to ensure access to the drug and FDA-required diagnostic testing for all who will benefit. Eliminating barriers to access is our highest priority.

- Maria C. Carrillo, Ph.D., Alzheimer's Association, chief science officer: This FDA drug approval ushers in a new era in Alzheimer's treatment and research. History has shown us that approvals of the first drug in a new category invigorates the field, increases investments in new treatments and encourages greater innovation. We are hopeful and this is the beginning — both for this drug and for better treatments for Alzheimer's.

We are proud of what the Alzheimer's Association has done to accelerate the drug development process, so individuals will have access to more effective treatments faster. This new drug approval, and sustained progress in the research field, is due to years of investment, unrelenting dedication, and our vision of a world without Alzheimer's and all other dementia.

Additional Facts and Figures: (alz.org/facts)

- Alzheimer's disease is the sixth-leading cause of death in the United States.
- More than five million Americans are living with the disease, including 180,000 North Carolina residents - a number estimated to grow to as many as 210,000 by year 2025.
- More than 11 million family and friends, including 358,000 in North Carolina, provide unpaid care to people with Alzheimer's or other dementias in the United States.
- In 2020, friends and family of those with Alzheimer's in North Carolina provided an estimated 517 million hours of unpaid care, a contribution valued at \$7.3 billion.

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