



Support for Homeless Youth in the Context of COVID-19: A Brief Overview

April 1, 2020

The federal government provides targeted support for homeless teens and young adults primarily through the Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) program, administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). As part of the federal response to COVID-19, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act, P.L. 116-136) includes provisions relevant to the RHY program. The CARES Act also includes provisions for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD's) Youth Homelessness Demonstration Grant and for Department of Education (ED) supports for homeless students in elementary and secondary education.

Runaway and Homeless Youth Program

The RHY program, authorized under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) is made up of three components: the Basic Center Program (BCP), Transitional Living Program (TLP), and Street Outreach Program (SOP). RHYA grantees must provide at least 10% of the total approved cost of the project, with the remaining share covered by HHS. The RHYA authorizes an appropriation for the BCP, the TLP, and other activities such as the [National Runaway Safeline](#), and a separate appropriation for the SOP. FY2020 appropriations are \$113.8 million for the BCP, the TLP, and other activities; and \$17.1 million for the SOP. The CARES Act provides additional funding of \$25 million that is available through September 30, 2021, to support "activities carried out under" the RHYA, but it does not further specify how funds are to be allocated. The CARES Act also provides that funds should supplement, not supplant, existing funds and should be available without regard to matching requirements.

The BCP provided temporary shelter and services to approximately 21,000 runaway and homeless youth under age 18 and their families in FY2018. The TLP provided longer-term housing and services to approximately 3,100 youth ages 16 through 22 (and sometimes an older age) in FY2018. The SOP provides education, counseling, and referrals for homeless youth who have been, or are at risk of being, subjected to sexual exploitation. SOP grantees made contact with over 35,000 youth in FY2018.

In terms of the RHY program response to disasters and other emergencies, there are existing provisions in the RHYA statute (34 U.S.C. §§11222(a)(16), 11212(b)(13)) and HHS regulations (45 C.F.R.

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§1351.23(g)) requiring RHY grantees to have emergency preparedness plans in place. In addition, HHS published a [resource](#) in 2012 for providers in case of a disaster.

In responding directly to COVID-19, HHS issued [guidance](#) that provides flexibilities for applicants and grantees in programs conducting human service activities related to or affected by COVID-19. HHS' Runaway and Homeless Youth Training and Technical Assistance Center (RHYTTAC) published on its [website](#) relevant federal guidance, including a [resource](#) by the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) about supporting homeless children and youth during the pandemic.

Youth Homeless Demonstration Program (YHDP)

HUD appropriation laws for FY2016 through FY2020 have provided support for the YHDP. The laws have specified that HUD is to set aside between \$33 million and \$80 million from the Homeless Assistance Grants appropriation for the YHDP to demonstrate that a comprehensive approach to serving homeless youth within a community can “dramatically reduce” homelessness for youth under age 25. Most recently, in August 2019, HUD announced \$75 million for 23 communities using FY2018 appropriations. The grant period is for two years, and HUD may renew each grant for up to one additional year. The FY2018 omnibus appropriations law for HUD (P.L. 115-141) directs HUD to obligate YHDP funds by September 30, 2020. As specified in the [FY2018 notice of funding announcement \(NOFA\)](#) for the program, obligated funds generally remain available for expenditure until September 30, 2025.

The CARES Act rescinds unobligated FY2018 funds for the YHDP, and provides an equal amount of new budget authority for HUD through September 30, 2021, for “completing the funding of awards made” with FY2018 appropriations. The law specifies that funding does not need to be made under a separate funding competition (NOFA).

Homeless Youth in Elementary and Secondary Education

The Department of Education provides funds under [Title I-A of the Elementary and Secondary Education \(ESEA\)](#) to local educational agencies (LEAs) with relatively high concentrations of students from low-income families to be used for supplementary educational and related services. LEAs receiving Title I-A grants must reserve a portion of the funds to provide homeless students with an education comparable to those received by other Title I-A students. Separately, ED's Education for Homeless Children and Youths (EHCY) program, authorized under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, funds LEAs (via competitive subgrants from state educational agencies [SEAs]) to facilitate the enrollment, attendance, and success in school of homeless children and youth. In school year 2017-2018, [more than 1.5 million homeless children and youth](#) were eligible for services under the program.

While ED has issued [resources, guidance, and waivers](#) related to requirements pertaining to elementary and secondary education in the context of COVID-19, the EHCY program requirements, such as enrolling homeless children in school, [continue to be in effect](#) during the pandemic.

The CARES Act includes provisions relevant to homeless K-12 students. The act established an Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund of \$13 billion for SEAs, which is to be distributed by ED to SEAs based on the amount of funding each SEA received under ESEA Title I-A for the most recent fiscal year; 90% of these funds must be distributed, also by formula, to LEAs. The CARES Act enumerates 11 areas in which LEAs may use relief funds, three of which pertain to homeless children and youth: (1) any activities authorized under the EHCY program, among other federal elementary and secondary education programs and activities; (2) activities to address the unique needs of children experiencing homelessness and specified other student populations, including how outreach and service delivery will meet the needs of each population; and (3) planning and implementing activities

related to summer learning and supplemental afterschool programs, including meeting the needs of students experiencing homelessness and specified other student populations.

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