

# Town Hall

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## Update on Covid-19 Emergency Supports for Family Caregivers

August 26, 2020



*Welcome*  
*Glad you're here!*

# Vermont Family Network

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# Housekeeping

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- Webinar being recorded
- Recording will be saved on [VFN website](#) and [YouTube channel](#)



# Asking Questions

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- Use **Chat** to type your question
- If you want to ask your questions out loud, use **Raise Hand** to be unmuted
- These functions at bottom of your screen



# COVID-19 Emergency Supports for Family Caregivers Update for 7/1/20-9/30/20

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AGENCY OF HUMAN SERVICES

DEPARTMENT OF DISABILITIES, AGING AND INDEPENDENT LIVING

DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES SERVICES DIVISION

# Introductions

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- Karen Price, Family Support Director – Education, Vermont Family Network
- Clare McFadden, Deputy Director of Payment Reform, Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living
- Selina Hickman Director, Developmental Disabilities Service Division
- Amy Roth, Asst. Dir. Developmental Disabilities Service Division

## Why are we here today?

- The Developmental Disabilities Services Division made emergency supports available to family caregivers through 6.30.20 due to the following factors:
  - The COVID-19 State of Emergency
  - Urgent requests for assistance from families
  - Availability of short-term emergency waivers to change normal Medicaid rules
- Some things have changed with the new fiscal year that started 7.1.20 and there is a need to update the options for supporting family caregivers.

## What has changed?

- Following orders from the Governor, there has been a gradual re-opening of the economy and businesses based upon the low rate of COVID-19 in the state.
- The Legislature has only approved funding of services through Sept. 2020. DAIL is awaiting final approval of FY21 budget to determine what to do for the remainder of the FY.
- All agencies have resumed some services and some families are having workers provide services.

## What has changed?

- The Division provided guidance and tools for teams to consider the safety of participating in activities in the community and restarting face to face services.
- DAIL received approval to allow providers to continue to receive payments through Aug. even when services were not being provided in order to stabilize providers for the future. Now, federal dollars from the Coronavirus Relief Fund are available to providers to cover lost income and increased expenses, although exact amounts can not be guaranteed.
- Funding to *increase* the allocations for families of children up to age 21 who receive Family Managed Respite are not available in this fiscal year.

# Who is this emergency support for?

People who receive Developmental  
Disabilities Services through

- Designated Agencies
- Specialized Services Agencies
- Self/Family-Managed Services – Transition II

# What are the options?

There are 3 categories of support:

1. Developmental Disabilities Home and Community-Based Services (DD HCBS) Conversion of Family-Managed Funds
2. DD HCBS Flexible COVID-19 Crisis Stipend
3. Priority use of One-Time Funds

# 1. Conversion of Family-Managed Funds

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DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES HOME AND COMMUNITY-BASED  
SERVICES

# 1. Conversion of Family-Managed Funds – *Developmental Disabilities Home and Community-Based Services (DD HCBS)*

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## **What is this?**

This payment takes unused respite or other family-managed funds from DD HCBS (formerly known as “the waiver”) and converts it into a “difficulty of care” payment to parents. The payment is available to help maintain the health and safety of a minor or adult child due to the loss of support workers because of COVID-19.

## **What do family caregivers need to do?**

People being supported by family caregivers should be still be working on the goals in the current ISA, if possible. If not possible, family caregivers should report to the case manager how they are helping to maintain health and safety. Families should maintain ongoing communication with provider agency.

# 1. Conversion of Family-Managed Funds – *DD HCBS continued*

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## Who can get it?

- An individual has an approved HCBS budget; and
- The budget has portions that are managed by the family; and
- The individual is living in the home of the family caregiver; and
- The family caregiver is providing additional care beyond the amount of natural support they typically provide as a result of the consistent loss of typical hourly or daily services. This is when some services are reduced due to either the unavailability of workers to provide the service or a team decision that participating in services poses a Coronavirus-related health and safety risk; and
- There are unused respite or other family-managed funds (not associated with agency-hired staff) in their HCBS budget as of 7/1/20 through 9/30/20.

An unpaid family caregiver is not able to receive a difficulty of care stipend when services are determined to be reasonably safe and workers are available.

# 1. Conversion of Family-Managed Funds – *DD HCBS continued*

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## **How much money is available?**

Unspent funds of up to \$5,000 or one quarter of their annual allocation for family-managed direct services, whichever is less, per eligible individual for the period of 7/1/20-9/30/20.

Example: Person has an annual amount of \$4,000 in respite and \$12,000 in family-managed community supports. Total available to convert is remaining balance from  $\frac{1}{4}$  of \$16,000 or \$4,000.

# 1. Conversion of Family-Managed Funds – *DD HCBS continued*

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## **When is the money available?**

The payment is available using funds from DD HCBS July 1, 2020 through September 30, 2020 due to state budget authorization for the first quarter only. Request must be submitted to ARIS by agencies by 11/7/20.

## **How do I get the funding?**

You need to talk to your Service Coordinator or Transition II Advisor to find out if this payment option is available to you. The agency will submit the request on your behalf.

# 2. Flexible COVID-19 Crisis Stipend

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DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES HOME AND COMMUNITY-BASED  
SERVICES

## 2. Flexible COVID-19 Crisis Stipend – *DD HCBS – Optional at agency discretion*

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### **What is it?**

These are potential “difficulty of care” crisis payments to family caregivers at agency discretion. The payment is available to help maintain the health and safety of a minor or adult child due to the loss of support workers because of COVID-19.

### **What do family caregivers need to do?**

People being supported by family caregivers should be still be working on the goals in the current ISA, if possible. If not possible, family caregivers should report to the case manager how they are helping to maintain health and safety. Families should maintain ongoing communication with provider agency.

## 2. Flexible COVID-19 Crisis Stipend – *DD HCBS – Optional at agency discretion, continued*

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### **Why are these payments optional for agencies to offer?**

The federal government made Coronavirus Relief Funds available to states to address the impact of the pandemic. One use of those funds is to help stabilize health care providers who are experiencing losses or who have additional costs related to addressing the pandemic.

The total amount available to the state is limited. Providers can apply for these funds to reimburse them for losses, but there is no guarantee that they will receive the amount that they request. Agencies would have to spend their own funds and take a risk regarding reimbursement.

Therefore the state is not requiring that agencies offer this option.

## 2. Flexible COVID-19 Crisis Stipend – *DD HCBS – Optional at agency discretion*

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### Who can get the funding?

- A minor or adult child has an approved HCBS budget; and
- The individual is living in the home of the family caregiver; and
- The family caregiver is providing additional care beyond the amount of natural support they typically provide as a result of the consistent loss of typical hourly or daily agency-managed services. This is when some services are reduced due to either the unavailability of workers to provide the service or a team decision that participating in services poses a Coronavirus-related health and safety risk; and
- The agency is able to bear the cost of the Difficulty of Care stipend in the instance that CRF is not awarded.

An unpaid family caregiver is not able to receive a Difficulty of Care stipend when services are determined to be reasonably safe and workers are available.

## 2. Flexible COVID-19 Crisis Stipend – *DD HCBS – Optional at agency discretion*

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### **How much money is available?**

- This is a one-time payment up to \$2,000.
- The maximum allowable amount does not constitute a guarantee. Agencies must evaluate the level of typical supports against what is being provided by the unpaid family caregiver in order to determine the appropriate amount.

## 2. Flexible COVID-19 Crisis Stipend – *DD HCBS continued*

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### **When is this money available?**

The payment is available from July 1, 2020 through September 30, 2020. Agencies need to provide the stipend prior to 9.30.20.

### **How do I get the funding?**

You need to talk to your Service Coordinator at your DA/SSA to find out if this payment option is available to you. This option is not available to people supported by Transition II.

# 3. Flexible use of One-Time Funds

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NON-DD HCBS – ONE-TIME FUNDS

# 3. Flexible use of One-Time Funds

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## **What is it?**

One-time funds are prioritized for use as Flexible Family Funding or to address a person's short-term personal health, safety or public safety needs and/or short-term crisis needs.

## **Who can get the funding?**

Any person eligible for developmental disabilities services.

### 3. Flexible use of One-Time Funds *cont.*

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#### **How much is it?**

The amount of funding is based on the specific needs of the person and must meet Flexible Family Funding and/or One-Time Funding guidance.

#### **How do I get it?**

You need to talk to your Service Coordinator to find out if this payment option is available to you.

# Q & A

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- We will review some of the questions that were sent ahead of time.
  - Then have time for people to ask additional questions.
  - We will create a document with all the answers and post on DAIL and VFN website.
  - Some questions we will have to research and get back to you. We will update the Q & A document.

# How will families hear this information?

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- VFN and DAIL will post this presentation on their websites, along with answers to questions.
- Agencies will reach out to families receiving services to explain options, including translation if needed.
- DAIL will share the information through its stakeholder networks.

# What do we need to do and when do we need to do it to receive the stipend?

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- Families should work with their provider agency to determine which option pertains to their circumstance.
- The agency will provide assistance with the process.
- Funds are available through 9/30/20, so families should contact their agency by early September to ensure enough time to process payments.

# For the stipend payments, who is the employer/employee?

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- The stipends paid through DDS HCBS in options #1 and #2 may be considered tax-free difficulty of care payments.
- They are not considered income for the purpose of federal taxes.
- There is no employer or employee.

How do these payments impact parents' benefits such as unemployment, SSI, fuel assistance, Reach Up, Food Stamps, etc.?

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- Unfortunately, DAIL is not able to answer this question.
- Each program has its own rules regarding what is considered income.
- Families will need to consult those programs for answers.

# Who determines “reasonably safe” for services to resume, as agencies and parents may disagree?

- This should be a team decision and there should be an effort to reach consensus.
- The Division provided tools, which are based on federal CDC and VT Dept of Health to assist with decisions to resume services:

[https://ddsd.vermont.gov/sites/ddsd/files/documents/Return to Community%20Activities Svcs Assess Tool.pdf](https://ddsd.vermont.gov/sites/ddsd/files/documents/Return_to_Community%20Activities_Svcs_Assess_Tool.pdf)

[https://ddsd.vermont.gov/sites/ddsd/files/documents/Return to Employment Svcs Assess Tool.pdf](https://ddsd.vermont.gov/sites/ddsd/files/documents/Return_to_Employment_Svcs_Assess_Tool.pdf)

- The agency can make a decision regarding safety to their staff.
- Individuals and guardians, as always, can make a decision regarding whether to participate in services.

Is the state looking at giving more than \$5K for the future as this amount is barely covering the expenses related to my not being able to work so I can care for my loved one?

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- These difficulty of care payments are not supposed to be income replacement for caregivers. Instead they are payments to family caregivers for providing extra care for their family members with a developmental disability due to the loss of paid services.
- DAIL will be considering what additional payments can be offered after the State budget for the remainder of the fiscal year has been determined.

# What will happen after September 30?

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- DAIL will make decisions about what will be available after the State budget is finalized.
- The one-time funds available under option #3 will remain available until they are all given out by the agency.

# What is happening with funding from agency managed services when services are not being delivered?

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- Through August agencies have been authorized by the State to utilize those funds to continue to pay workers in order to maintain the workforce for the future.
- Staff have been temporarily redeployed to other tasks or other people served by the agency.
- Starting in September, if services are not being provided, the agencies have been directed to stop billing for those services, as was the previous requirement, prior to the state of emergency.

If an individual lives in his/her own apartment, can a family caregiver who is providing support receive a stipend?

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No, the federal rule which allows for the payment of tax-free stipends only applies to situations in which a person is providing care in the home of the caregiver.

If the services and billing is suspended for a portion of the specified time period, can the family caregiver receive a stipend?

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- It would depend upon whether there were unused funds from when the budget was not suspended.

# How does it work for people who have a Unified Services Plan?

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- Once funds from the Hi Tech program or Children's Personal Care Services are blended into a Home and Community-based Services package, the options follow the guidance for HCBS noted above.
- A family can decide to go back to separate funding streams, but a decision to do so cannot be done retroactively, only going forward. The family would need to work with their agency case manager and then go back to the VT DOH and follow their procedures for reinstate.
- If at a later date, the family wishes to go back to a USP, a new request to do so would be needed.

Will you be allowing caregivers to use waiver money to reimburse for lost personal care services due to Covid-19 ?

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The funds available for payments to family caregivers is related to DDS HCBS services that were not able to be delivered, not lost services from other programs (e.g. Children's Personal Care Services)

# Will DDS consider changes to the policy of not paying parents for the long term?

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- DDS leadership is committed to revisiting this topic with all stakeholders
- It is a complex issue with varying perspectives
- We cannot focus on it at this time, because all our energies are focused on addressing the impact of the pandemic

# Resources

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## Links to DAIL guidance documents referenced in slides:

- DAIL/DDSD Emergency Supports for Family Caregivers update

[https://dail.vermont.gov/sites/dail/files/documents/DAIL-DDSD\\_Emergency\\_Support\\_for\\_Family\\_Caregivers\\_8.18.20\\_0.pdf](https://dail.vermont.gov/sites/dail/files/documents/DAIL-DDSD_Emergency_Support_for_Family_Caregivers_8.18.20_0.pdf)

- Family Managed Respite Guidelines

[https://ddsd.vermont.gov/sites/ddsd/files/documents/FMR\\_Guidelines.pdf](https://ddsd.vermont.gov/sites/ddsd/files/documents/FMR_Guidelines.pdf)

- Vermont Flexible Family Funding Guidelines

[https://ddsd.vermont.gov/sites/ddsd/files/documents/FFF%20Guidelines%2010\\_13\\_16.pdf](https://ddsd.vermont.gov/sites/ddsd/files/documents/FFF%20Guidelines%2010_13_16.pdf)

- One Time Funding Guidelines (page 36 – State System of Care Plan for DD Services)

[https://ddsd.vermont.gov/sites/ddsd/files/documents/Vermont\\_DS\\_State\\_System\\_of\\_Care\\_Plan\\_0.pdf](https://ddsd.vermont.gov/sites/ddsd/files/documents/Vermont_DS_State_System_of_Care_Plan_0.pdf)

# Upcoming Virtual Events

- Parent Focus Groups for VT Developmental Disabilities Council 5-Year State Plan



**1-800-800-4005**  
**INFO@VTFN.ORG**

**ONLINE LEARNING SERIES:**  
**PERSEVERING**  
**IN THE PANDEMIC**



# Medically Necessary Supplemental Fund

- Income-eligible families of children with special health needs (birth to age 21)
- \$1,000 per 12-month period for child's unmet medically-necessary needs such as equipment, medications, medical travel, and therapies
- [Joanne.Wechsler@vtfn.org](mailto:Joanne.Wechsler@vtfn.org) or talk with your CSHN Care Coordinator



A photograph of two black and white cows standing in a green field. In the background, there is a white fence and a large red barn. A green speech bubble is positioned between the two cows, containing the text "Thank you!".

Thank you!

# How Can We Help You?



[Info@vtfn.org](mailto:Info@vtfn.org)

1-800-800-4005 or (802) 876-5315

<http://www.VermontFamilyNetwork.org>