

Grant Initiatives

As the region continues to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, the MetroWest Health Foundation remains committed to addressing its impact on the health of individuals and organizations. We have been in regular communication with grantees to assess their needs and those they serve. As a result, the foundation is offering grants that seek to address a variety of issues in the wake of COVID and a return to in-person programs and services.

The foundation is pleased to solicit proposals from eligible nonprofit and government organizations for the following grantmaking initiatives:

- Children and Youth Mental Health
- Behavioral Health Workforce Recruitment and Retention
- Community Engagement
- Organizational Capacity Building
- Health and Housing Stability
- Responsive Grants

Application Information

Proposals must be submitted online and be received by the foundation by **4:00 p.m. on Thursday, March 31**. Instructions for the online application are available on the foundation's website at www.mwhealth.org. Incomplete or late proposals will not be considered for review.

Bidders Conference

The foundation will host a virtual bidders' conference with information on funding initiatives and the application process on **February 10**, from 2:00-3:00 p.m. Pre-registration is required. Please RSVP to rdonham@mwhealth.org by February 7.

Concept Papers/Calls

The foundation requires applicants to submit a one-page concept paper or call the foundation prior to a full proposal. Concept papers and calls help the foundation assess

whether the proposed project is aligned with its funding priorities. Concept papers, along with an accompanying cover sheet, or calls must be completed by **2:00 p.m. March 11**. The foundation strongly encourages applicants to call or submit their concept papers in advance of this deadline to allow for timely feedback. Please call or email the following program officer:

- For Youth Mental Health, Workforce and Responsive Grants:
Rebecca Donham, rdonham@mwhealth.org, (508) 879-7625 x202
- For Capacity Building, Community Engagement and Housing Stability Grants:
Rebecca Gallo, rgallo@mwhealth.org, (508) 879-7625 x207

Foundation Support

Once a grant is made, foundation staff work with grantees to ensure that project outcomes are achievable and measurable, that grant activities are connected to larger community efforts to address area health needs, and that grantees have access to technical assistance and training to help them achieve success. The foundation also seeks to learn from each grant, using site visits and grantee reports to record lessons learned that can inform our work and that of future grantees.

General Restrictions

The foundation supports programs that directly benefit the health of those who live and work in one of the 25 communities served by the foundation. Such support is limited to organizations that qualify as tax-exempt under Section 501(c)3 of the IRS Code, or organizations that are recognized as instrumentalities of state or local government.

The foundation does not provide grants to individuals, nor does it provide funds for endowments, fundraising drives and events, retirement of debt, operating deficits, projects that directly influence legislation, political activities or candidates for public office or programs that are customarily operated by hospitals in Massachusetts.

The foundation does not award grants to organizations that discriminate in the provision of services on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, age, ethnicity, marital status, disability, citizenship, sexual orientation or veteran status.

About the Foundation

The MetroWest Health Foundation's mission is to improve the health status of the community, its individuals and families through informed and innovative leadership. The foundation serves the following communities: Ashland, Bellingham, Dover, Framingham, Franklin, Holliston, Hopedale, Hopkinton, Hudson, Marlborough, Medfield, Medway, Mendon, Milford, Millis, Natick, Needham, Norfolk, Northborough, Sherborn, Southborough, Sudbury, Wayland, Wellesley and Westborough.

Child and Youth Mental Health

Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic, children have experienced major disruptions as a result of public health safety measures, including school closures, social isolation, financial hardships, and gaps in health care access. Many parents have reported poor mental health outcomes in their children throughout the pandemic. Research from October 2020 showed that 31% of parents said their child's mental or emotional health was worse than before the pandemic. Some children have also exhibited increased irritability, clinginess, and fear, and have had issues with sleeping and poor appetite. As mental health issues become more pronounced among children, access to care issues may also be increasing. These access issues may exacerbate existing mental health issues among children.¹

Even before the pandemic, significant numbers of MetroWest adolescents were living with mental health challenges. According to the 2018 MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey, 20% of high school students reported depressive symptoms and 13% had considered suicide in the past 12 months. LGBTQ youth were more than twice as likely than heterosexual cisgender youth to report depressive symptoms and three times as likely to have seriously considered suicide.

Activities and Outcomes

The foundation is seeking grant proposals from schools and organizations who serve children and adolescents (ages 3-19) that address the following objectives:

- 1. Replicate evidence-based mental health promotion and prevention (Tier 1)² and early intervention (Tier 2)³ programs that increase awareness and reduce the impact and incidence of mental health challenges.**
- 2. Provide cultural competency training for mental health clinicians designed to meet the unique needs of LGBTQ, BIPOC and other marginalized youth.**
- 3. Support youth-driven mental health initiatives that harness the creativity and connectivity of young people to promote mental health awareness, reduce stigma, build advocacy skills and address inequities.**
- 4. Provide education, training and other supports to parents and caregivers designed to build family resilience and stability.**

¹ Mental Health and Substance Use Considerations Among Children During the COVID-19 Pandemic, May 2021, Kaiser Family Foundation

² <https://www.schoolmentalhealth.org/Resources/Mental-Health-Promotion-For-All-Tier-1/>

³ <https://www.schoolmentalhealth.org/Resources/Early-Intervention-and-Treatment-Tiers-2--3/>

Funding

The maximum grant amount is \$50,000 a year for two years. Applications involving schools must submit a letter signed by the superintendent indicating support of the request.

Behavioral Health Workforce Recruitment and Retention

Introduction

The COVID pandemic has exacerbated the behavioral health workforce shortfall. Demand has increased for mental health and substance use services across all age groups. And clinical staff are leaving their positions at higher rates than before 2020. According to a September 2020 report by the National Council for Mental Wellbeing, demand for mental health and substance use treatment services has increased significantly just as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to weaken the financial viability of behavioral health organizations and reduce the availability of lifesaving treatment and services.

Specifically, the report found that:

- Demand for behavioral health services is increasing, with 52% of behavioral health organizations seeing an increase in the demand for services; and
- Capacity is diminishing as a result of the pandemic, and 54% of organizations have had to close programs while 65% have had to cancel, reschedule or turn away patients.

Solving the behavioral health workforce shortage will require a significant investment by federal and state governments, insurance companies, academic institutions and others. Private philanthropy can assist by providing flexible funding for new approaches and by partnering with grantees and other stakeholders to evaluate success and position promising ideas for replication.

Activities and Outcomes

The foundation is seeking grant proposals from qualified organizations that address the following objectives:

- 1. Develop ways to support and retain behavioral health staff:**
 - a. Create opportunities to reduce isolation and foster support among clinicians.
 - b. Launch new employee assistance programs designed to reduce burnout and increase wellness among clinical and administrative staff.
 - c. Implement ways to lessen the documentation burden placed on clinical staff.
- 2. Expand behavioral health career opportunities:**
 - a. Develop alliances between educational institutions and the region's behavioral health organizations that create career pathways for local students.
 - b. Expand opportunities for using community health workers, peer coaching and peer recovery support services.
 - c. Create pipelines for staff to move into leadership roles in behavioral health organizations.
 - d. Pilot new strategies for recruiting clinicians of color and those who speak languages other than English.

Funding

The maximum grant amount is \$50,000. Grants are made for one year with the possibility of an additional year of continuation funding.

Organizational Capacity Building

Introduction

COVID-19 continues to bring many challenges for nonprofit and municipal agencies. The public health crisis has shown a spotlight on societal and organizational structural issues, as well as strengthened collaboration and innovative ways of working together to solve immediate community needs. As we move into the next phase of the pandemic response, it is important to examine what is needed to strengthen the capacity of safety net programming, promote overall health and improve health equity, enhancing the capacity of agencies working in and with the community.

Capacity building grants are designed to enhance the systems within an organization or municipal department to operate more efficiently; better reach those most affected by the issue being addressed; more effectively use data collection and evaluation to improve programs and processes; define needs and strategies and train staff and volunteers.

Eligible organizations must have a primary focus on health and/or social services in the region.

Activities and Outcomes

The foundation is seeking grant proposals from qualified organizations that address the following objectives:

- 1. Professional development for staff and/or volunteers.** Training for staff with the goal of retention and creating career ladders for staff is encouraged. Any education programming designed to improve the ability of those working on behalf of the agency to perform their duties will be considered. *Examples: tuition reimbursement; leadership training; mentoring; technical training; license test prep*
- 2. Improvements to organizational operations.** This can include upgrading, piloting or purchasing new technology; enhancements to financial and/or fundraising systems and practices; improving internal systems and practices, including governance and administration; or other operations improvements that will enhance the ability of the agency to meet their mission. *Examples: Purchasing and converting to a more sophisticated financial system; assessing and improving internal policies*
- 3. Organizational planning.** This encompasses any planning with the goal of improving services. This can include, but is not limited to, strategic planning; succession planning; recruitment and retention plans; program design or planning for deeper collaboration or mergers between agencies. *Examples: Developing more equitable hiring practices; developing/implementing strategies for staff retention*

and career ladders; hiring consultant to assess potential for multiple agencies to share services or merge

- 4. Increasing capacity to better serve hard-to-reach populations.** This can include marketing/communications plans and activities; creative outreach campaigns or other strategies to serve those most affected by the issue being addressed.
Examples: Developing or scaling campaign (media, referral, word of mouth, etc.) to reach populations currently underserved by your agency; analyzing and improving internal conditions (i.e. welcoming space, staff/volunteers who represent the community, offering programming in multiple languages, etc.) to better serve hard-to-reach populations

- 5. Data collection and evaluation for the purpose of program or operational improvement.** Planning, training, tools and/or systems to improve impact measurement will be considered. There should be a plan to use the data to continuously adapt programming and/or operations and to share it with stakeholders. *Examples: Developing evaluation plans and metrics; training staff and volunteers on data collection, analysis and using it to improve programming; communicating data to stakeholders, including consumers; purchasing systems to help collect and analyze data*

Funding

The maximum grant amount is \$25,000 a year for two years.

Community Engagement

Introduction

MetroWest is a diverse region with strong communities that lead to powerful interpersonal connections. It is also one of the healthiest regions in the state. Yet, health inequities persist. There has been a spotlight on these inequities based on race, income and zip code since the start of the pandemic. The divides we saw in COVID-19 infection and death rates were a result of years of systemic policies and practices that have left too many of our neighbors more susceptible to a wide range of acute and chronic diseases- not only COVID.

The COVID-19 crisis also reinforced the effectiveness of looking to those most impacted by health inequities to identify causes, prioritize what to address and lead community interventions. The role of organizations, including the foundation, is to listen to community voices and provide support to leverage the strengths of each community to improve health.

Grants will be awarded to organizations to focus on specific issues that create barriers to health and wellness. The issues must be identified by those most affected by the barriers in a particular community. Community can be defined by geography or some other characteristic. Collaborations between multiple organizations, especially grassroots groups, is strongly encouraged.

Activities and Outcomes

The foundation is seeking grant proposals from qualified organizations that address the following objectives:

- 1. Engaging in grassroots community organizing.** This is defined as directly engaging those most affected by health inequities in the process of identifying possible ways to intervene. It can include, but is not limited to, outreach, training, convenings, participatory needs assessments or collective action planning.
- 2. Engaging in policy and/or systems change.** This includes advocacy for changes that impact community health. Those most affected by health inequities in the community must be an integral part of the entire process from identifying the issue to developing and implementing strategy to evaluating progress.
- 3. Planning and preparing interventions.** This can include conducting comprehensive needs assessments, studying the feasibility of raising sufficient funds for a project or assessing what has worked elsewhere. Those most affected by the health inequity being addressed should be integral to the entire process.

Funding

The maximum grant amount is \$25,000 a year for two years.

Health & Housing Stability

Introduction

Stable housing leads to improved physical and mental health outcomes.⁴ Housing costs are a major driver of economic insecurity in MetroWest. Households who pay more than 30% of their income on housing range from approximately 15-77% of renters in the region's communities and 16-36% of those with a mortgage.⁵ These numbers do not include most who live in subsidized housing, who may also be at higher risk of housing instability or even homelessness.

There are many factors that lead to housing instability, including lack of affordable housing options; working a lower-wage job; lack of affordable childcare; health and disability issues; and many more. And while the root causes of housing instability are systemic and require long-term structural solutions, there are strategies that can add to housing stability and conditions for residents. Those needs are the focus of this RFP.

Activities and Outcomes

The foundation is seeking grant proposals from organizations serving those experiencing housing instability and/or living in subsidized housing that address the following objectives:

1. **Foster Self-Sufficiency:** Create conditions that help families to achieve self-sufficiency by focusing on employment and education supports, resident parent education and support, peer support and social connections.
2. **Health Promotion:** Help residents to improve health and housing stability through case management and onsite supports and services

A crucial component of any plan or intervention is the genuine engagement and leadership of those most affected- in this case, those experiencing housing instability. Proposals should include concrete ways this engagement will take place.

Funding

The maximum grant amount is \$25,000 a year for two years. The foundation will not pay for rental assistance.

⁴ Health Starts at Home Evaluation Report (2021). The Boston Foundation. [hsah-may-2021-report527_v4.pdf \(tbf.org\)](#)

⁵ Understanding Economic Insecurity in MetroWest (September 2021). MetroWest Health Foundation. [PowerPoint Presentation \(d2yy08d49bfqoo.cloudfront.net\)](#)

Responsive Grants

Introduction

The foundation will award a limited number of responsive grants that address pressing health needs not included in its other categories.

Activities and Outcomes

The foundation is seeking grant proposals from qualified organizations that address the following objective:

Respond to new and emerging health issues. This could include but is not limited to, addressing vaccine hesitancy or barriers, new patterns or trends in substance use in the region, and the health needs of recently-arrived immigrants.

Funding

The maximum grant amount is \$20,000. Grants are for one year only and are not eligible for continuation funding.