DESC
opening doors to end homelessness

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August 20, 2015

Dorothy Teeter, Director
Washington State Health Care Authority
PO Box 42710
Olympia WA 98504

Dear Ms. Teeter:

I am writing to express Downtown Emergency Service Center's (DESC's) support for the Supportive Housing Medicaid benefit proposed in the Healthier Washington Initiative's 1115 Medicaid Transformation Waiver application to the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

As a major provider of supportive housing, emergency shelter, and behavioral health services for people experiencing homelessness, we know from direct experience that supportive housing is the solution to ending chronic homelessness. It also relieves many of the physical and behavioral health problems that disproportionately affect chronically homeless people.

DESC has been a leader in supportive housing innovation, particularly in applying this intervention to homeless people with the most severe health conditions, including those who are the heaviest users of crisis health services. The outcomes of our work have been documented in numerous peer-reviewed studies published in scientific journals. One supportive housing program we developed and operate was evaluated by University of Washington researchers and found to dramatically reduce health system use and cost by the tenants served in the program. In a study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, the research team documented over $4 million in avoided health and criminal justice system costs in the first year of the program, across the 95 individuals served. The majority of these avoided costs were in Medicaid charges.

Additional published research on DESC programs shows improvements to individual health of supportive housing tenants, reduced problems from substance use, and reductions in use of crisis services such as psychiatric hospitals, jails, and EMS. Links to these studies are available at our website at desc.org/research.

One of the barriers to bringing supportive housing fully to scale in Washington is a shortage of funding for the housing services that are critical to the model's success. If approved, the Supportive Housing Medicaid benefit will bring additional resources for

Supportive Housing
1811 Eastlake
Aurora House
Canaday House
Cottage Grove Commons
Evans House
Kerner-Scott House
Lyon Building
The Morrison
Rainier House
Union Hotel
Scattered Site

Mental Health Services
Crisis Respite
HOME-Housing Opportunities & Meaningful Engagement
HOST-Outreach & Engagement
PACT-Intensive Team
SAGE-Case Management

Employment Support

Chemical Dependency Services

Emergency Shelter

Connections

Crisis Solutions Center

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supportive housing services to Washington and will help make the expansion of this intervention financially feasible. In Seattle and King County, creating more supportive housing is increasingly constrained by the lack of additional funds to pay for services. A Supportive Housing Medicaid benefit will establish the financial feasibility of more supportive housing unit creation, in effect leveraging affordable housing resources.

Thank you for proposing a Supportive Housing Medicaid benefit in Washington's 1115 Medicaid Transformation Waiver application. If implemented, this proposal will create significant health care savings while ensuring people with serious disabilities are able to live with security, autonomy and dignity in their own communities. We are eager to work with the Health Care Authority and other stakeholders on the final benefit design and implementation to ensure it most closely addresses the needs of the population it is intended to assist. We look forward to future conversations about that.

Sincerely,

Daniel Malone
Executive Director