



Monterey County SB91 Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP)

Program Report

Submitted by United Way Monterey County

April 29, 2024

United Way
Monterey County



Introduction

This report provides a comprehensive overview of the Monterey County Emergency Rental Assistance Program, highlighting its success in providing rental and utility assistance to low-income households in the wake of the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. It details the results, partnerships with various agencies, and the impact on the community. Demographic data on clients served, applications, and assistance by agency and region are presented. Additionally, the report includes success stories which illustrate the outcomes for individual households, and the indirect effect the program had on creating jobs, improving our data infrastructure, and supporting our local economy. Overall, the program demonstrates a remarkable emergency response program that required implementing partners to implement while developing program infrastructure. It has made a significant impact on a large scale on housing stability in the region through direct financial assistance for rent and utilities as well as supplemental support in the form of case management, legal assistance, housing navigation, referrals, and capacity building.

Background

United Way Monterey County (UWMC) prioritizes access to affordable housing as a strategy to achieve financial stability for all people in Monterey County. With the onset of the pandemic, UWMC refocused its housing strategies from promoting new supply, to maintaining access to existing supply. The COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns had an immediate effect on many workers which soon translated into missed rental payments. Within a few months, rental arrears debt quickly mounted. In June 2020, the unemployment rate in Monterey County, California was 16.8 percent, By March 2021, the rate was still high at 10.1%. This garnered concern from local, state, and federal governments.

In the summer of 2020, UWMC was contacted by the City of Monterey to help implement a rental assistance program for residents who lived or worked in the City. UWMC's role was to help with the infrastructure of the application process, using a software tool developed in 2018 to provide closed loop social service referrals. The software was built on the success and resource data of the 211 Information and Referral system. The system, known as the Smart Referral Network software, helps send and track referrals for service, and was used in the early City of Monterey Rental Assistance program to collect and prioritize applications.

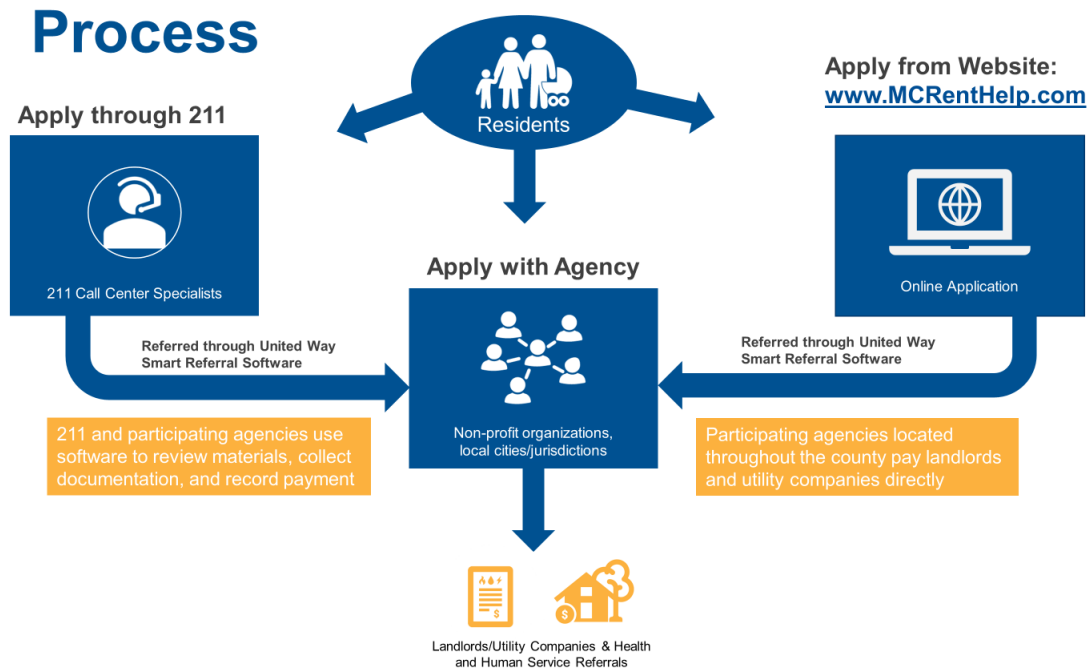
As 2020 progressed, the County of Monterey dedicated \$1.25M in CARES Act funding, for Countywide rent and utility bill assistance. UWMC was contracted to coordinate the application and distribution process. It was launched in October of 2020 with a spending deadline of 12/31/2020. The success of this rapid deployment of funding using UWMC's coordination and a network of implementing partners became a prototype.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act passed by congress on December 27, 2021 established a Federal Emergency Rent and Utility Assistance funding. In January, 2021, the State of California established California's program for administering and distributing rental assistance funds for low to moderate income households who had been impacted by the Covid-19

pandemic. The County of Monterey applied for and received an allocation of these funds. As the funds and program parameters were being finalized, the County of Monterey Department of Social Services contacted UWMC once again with the challenge. Could UWMC scale up the rental assistance program tenfold or more with rapid spending rates and aggressive program deadlines? Working closely together, UWMC and DSS staff parsed out the regulations and options of the new federal funding and together designed a program which came to be known as the Monterey County Emergency Rental Assistance Program, or ERAP.

Program Design

To scale the rapid distribution of significant resources, UWMC enlisted a network of existing and new partners who were able and willing to process applications and distribute the financial assistance. An application was designed as part of the Smart Referral Network (SRN) software and online access was provided through the UWMC website and via the MCRentHelp.com and Ayudaderenta.com. In addition, residents were encouraged to call 211 to start an application by phone with call specialists. 211 was also available for residents wanting to check on their status of their applications. English and Spanish options were fully supported via the website and 211 callers. Nearly half the applications received were via calls to 211 (48% of rental applications, 43% of utility applications).



Eligibility

Assistance was limited to applicants who have lost employment or income, or incurred costs due to the COVID-19 pandemic. (This was later broadened for phase 2 of ERAP which did not require COVID-19 impact). Families' annual income must not exceed 80 percent of the Area Median income (AMI), as determined by HUD. Families facing unemployment, homelessness, and at 50% AMI and below were prioritized. They must reside within Monterey County. Here is an example of the AMI table used during the program:

Household	1 Person	2 People	3 People	4 People	5 People	6 People
80% AMI	\$56,950	\$65,100	\$73,250	\$81,350	\$87,900	\$94,400
50% AMI	\$35,600	\$40,700	\$45,800	\$50,850	\$54,950	\$59,000

Required documents

Identity: Following State guidelines, accepted ID documentation includes state identification card, a driver's license, employment identification card, passport, permanent resident card, or non-US ID, driver's license, or passport. Note that a SSN was not required and every effort was made to reduce barriers to accessing the program.

Income: Current household tax returns or pay stubs for all employed members of an Eligible Household (one month), or Unemployment statements or benefits letters, or Social Security and Social Security Disability Insurance statements or benefits letters, or documentation of current participation in public benefits programs such as Medi-Cal, WIC, Free and Reduced Lunch participation, CalFresh, CalWORKs in California. For households that confirm that they have no source of income, and that cannot provide documentation to verify income or income eligibility, they could complete a written attestation of no income, which must include an unsworn declaration under penalty of perjury.

Loss of income: Households where one or more household members was currently unemployed, and that member has been unemployed for 90 days or more, were also eligible for assistance. Examples of unemployment documentation include letters of termination, last-received pay stub with employer's information, evidence of application for unemployment benefits, evidence of expired unemployment benefits, including unemployment benefits provided through the CARES Act. For self-employed persons, tax records, statements, or other documentation of loss of employment were accepted.

Utility assistance:

Eligible households must provide an up-to-date utility bill.

Other housing costs:

MCERAP, in accordance with Treasury Guidelines and SB91 and AB832, provides other housing assistance for Motel/Hotel bills, up to 3 months; deposit assistance for rehousing purposes; internet bill costs.

Collaboration with landlord:

Landlords were required to provide a W9-Property tax statement, proof of ownership of property, and a lease or rental agreement reflecting renter's name, residence, address, monthly rent due, contact information for payment.

Benefits

The financial assistance available was flexible and generous, with no absolute dollar cap. There was a maximum of 15 months of assistance per household. This included arrears payments back to March of 2020 (12 months maximum) and up to three months of future rent. (Later expanded another three months by the ERAP 2 funding.) Eligible utilities include water, sewer, trash, electric, gas, internet. Although the initial program design required a 20% match from landlords, in June 2020 that requirement was lifted. Subsequent rent and utility payments were made at 100%. Any landlords who had accepted the discounted payments in the first few months of the program were automatically "topped off" to ensure they received 100% of qualifying rent due. Other eligible expenses included: motel/hotel bills and RV parking costs, but these were in the minority of types of payments made. Utility assistance payments were made directly to utility companies. Rental assistance payments were made directly to landlords. In rare cases where landlords were uncooperative, payments could be made to tenants.

Partners

The initial subgrantees for this program were the following entities:

- Central Coast Energy Services
- Hartnell College Foundation
- Monterey Peninsula College Foundation
- Goodwill Central Coast
- Salvation Army Monterey Peninsula
- North Monterey County Recreation and Parks District
- Housing Resource Center
- City of Seaside
- City of Monterey
- City of Salinas
- City of Gonzales
- City of Soledad
- City of Greenfield
- City of King

When funding was extended into a second phase ("ERAP 2"), the following entities agreed to continue their participation as subgrantees by processing applications and administering payments to landlords and utility companies:

- Hartnell College Foundation
- Goodwill Central Coast
- Housing Resource Center

Central Coast Energy Services
City of Seaside
City of Salinas
City of Soledad
City of Greenfield
City of King

Additional Funding

GAP funding contract for \$150,000

In the fall of 2021, the County Board of Supervisors wanted to increase access for households that may not have been eligible under the ERAP program. An additional \$150,000 in “Gap Funding” was dedicated to support households with informal housing arrangements such as informal sublessors, those having incurred substantial personal debt to pay rent, but are up to date on rental payments, or households that have income above 80% of AMI but are still struggling to pay rental arrears. Gathering for Women and Goodwill Central Coast were subcontracted to distribute the benefits. In total they served 38 households with funds for items such as rental payments, utility payments, security deposits, medical bills, court fines, car repairs or payments, tax and loan repayments, meals and clothes closet visits.

Housing Stability Grants

In addition to direct assistance subgrants, ERAP funds were able to be utilized for “Housing Stability” services, with other types of supports provided. To further culturally competent outreach, provide assistance in completing applications, and deliver legal assistance and eviction prevention, the following agencies were subcontracted:

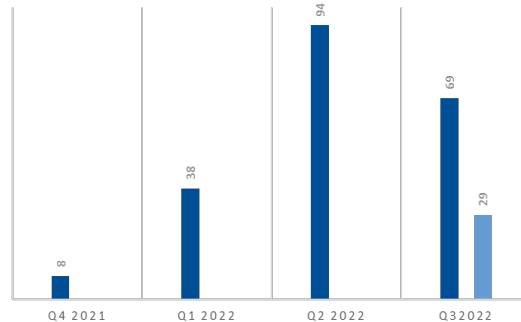
Watsonville Law Center
California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA)
COPA
Mujeres en Acción
Hartnell College Foundation

ERAP Housing Stability funds were also used to provide eligible households with case management and other services intended to keep households stably housed. Such services included: Eviction prevention and eviction diversion programs; Mediation between landlords and tenants; Housing counseling; Housing navigators or Promotoras that help households access ERA programs or find housing; Case management related to housing stability; Legal services or attorney’s fees related to eviction proceedings and maintaining housing stability. *Smart Referrals* to housing and economic mobility services.

Local Promotoras were the life blood of the program. They were the trusted messengers who helped translate complicated bureaucracy, complete applications, and reach thousands of vulnerable residents with information on program benefits. Many of these Promotoras were unemployed and were previously working in low wage agriculture and hospitality jobs. They developed professional knowledge, skills and abilities and were employed by local agencies after their programs ended.

Housing Stability Services – Round 1 Results

CLIENTS SERVED - EVICTION SERVICES



Outreach and Systems Navigation

Mujeres en Accion
 Communities Organizing for Relational
 Power in Action (COPA)
 Hartnell College Foundation

- **20** tailored outreach application events in 2021, targeted to underserved populations
- **480** clients served at outreach application events

Legal Assistance

238 clients served

Watsonville Law Center

California Rural Legal Assistance

As the ERAP 2 funding was winding down, additional Housing Stability grants were made. The following agencies are funded to provide additional case management, housing navigation, deposit assistance and landlord mediation:

Monterey County Office of Education
 Goodwill Central Coast
 City of Greenfield
 Community Human Services
 Gathering for Women
 City of Salinas
 Hartnell College Foundation

These grants are still in progress and services continue to be delivered. Funds will be fully expended by Spring of 2025.

Challenges

Given the circumstances of rapidly standing up a multimillion program during a pandemic, there were various challenges along the way, with a few of the highlights below:

Cash flow – the initial terms from the Department of the Treasury required aggressive spending goals. The program launched in March 2021 with a \$28 Million allocation (\$13M federal, \$15M state) and required that 65% of the state funding be obligated by August 1, 2021, and 65% of the federal funding by obligated by September 30, 2021. Such an extremely aggressive spending deadline required cash advances for United Way to provide to subgrantees to allow payments to be made immediately and within the timeline. Although unusual, the \$7.1M advance from the County allowed this to happen and was paid back as of June 30, 2023.

Organizational capacity – in addition to the funding, human resources were critically important at the subgrantee level as well as with UWMC. Staffing this program was a challenge in several ways. Some agencies could train existing staff, others had to hire new staff. Given the pandemic restrictions, both the client facing work as well as the fiscal operations were required to be conducted remotely in many cases. Once agencies added staff capacity, it was hard to maintain staff. The administrative and emotional burden of the program structure and working through individual client situations was very taxing and led to staff burnout and turnover.

Software – We were able to stand up this program quickly because of the original software developed by UWMC. Our Smart Referral Network (SRN) software was designed to make referrals and was upgraded with an ERAP specific application. It served as the central referral hub for receiving applications and assigning them to the various ERAP partners for processing. However, as the federal and state benefits, reporting and eligibility requirements evolved, it became increasingly difficult to provide the data needed for those reports. In March of 2022, a new software program (Neighborly) was introduced to support the program. Data was migrated from the SRN to Neighborly. In providing final data on ERAP, sometimes the data sets between the two systems need to be reported separately. Some of the more in-depth demographic analysis is only available from March 2022- onward.

Reporting Requirements – During the implementation of the ERAP program, State and Federal requirements continued to evolve. Frequent communication with the State (HCD) was needed to track the regulations as they were being defined. Seemingly each month and each quarter, the reporting process shifted, requiring an inordinate amount of time from UWMC and DSS staff to supply the data appropriately. This was a team effort, and the work was done very collaboratively, yet was very tedious.

Testimonials

The following is a small sample of case success stories mixed with client testimonials. They represent the many different types of situations that created need for the program and show example outcomes ranging from dollars to restoring hope. Names have been changed for privacy protection.

Susana had to stop daycare work in her home. Due to shelter in place restrictions her landlord prohibited her from taking in children who were not part of her household. As a result, she had no income and could not look for work because her children were home, and she had to supervise their remote learning. The city was able to assist with \$5,000 in rent.
Assisted by King City 9/14/21

Maria is a mother to three young girls. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the shelter in place orders, her husband, who's self-employed, was unable to work. They rented a home from a "mom and pop" landlord who depends on the rental income to help cover her bills. They owed \$14,150, and the City of Seaside was able to assist them with \$10,675 and secure their housing for the near future.
Assisted by City of Seaside 4/28/2021

Ana was a successful sales department manager for a large catering company. She had built a career over many years in hospitality. Those achievements came to a halt when hospitality businesses shuttered due to the pandemic. Her husband Nathan was a vendor at CSUMB, and when the university shifted to distance learning, his business closed as well. They owed \$13,975 in back rent, and the City was able to pay \$10,341.30 in rental assistance and \$2,595.69 in utility assistance to preserve their home and relieve some stress for them and their three young children.
Assisted by City of Seaside 4/28/2021

*"I just wanted to take some time to write my sincerest thanks for everything you've done for my husband and I these last three months. My husband and I both work in hospitality, and both lost our jobs due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Fortunately, my husband was able to get a job at our local Safeway as a checker, but we took a significant income cut when he started at Safeway and me on unemployment; with a lot of uncertainty. In April, I saw that United Way was offering partial Rental Assistance to those in need. My husband and I were fortunate to be approved for the program (through the City of Monterey) and were able to receive 3 months of assistance. Please know that my husband and I were able to stay in this beautiful area because of United Way -- in a place where we hope to raise a family one day."
*Assisted by City of Monterey 4/2021**

I cannot thank you enough. This is by far the best news I have had all year. With these funds towards my housing, I can now begin to see a way forward. You have given me hope." – Assisted by Goodwill 5/2021

"The pandemic affected my family in different ways. Being a self-employed masseuse, I lost clients due to the client being sick and afraid to be in close contact even after the restrictions lifted. Due to some of those restrictions, I needed to stay home and care for my children apart from the different times we tested positive for COVID. It is because of this that I lost a steady stream of income. I fell behind on my bills. The rent assistance program was a

blessing to have qualified and received aid. I was able to remain housed. The program was frustrating at first, but once all of the information was obtaining the process was easy.”

Assisted by Goodwill 9/2022

Marcela’s childcare provider contracted COVID-19. Marcela was unable to find a replacement to care for her child, so she had to stay home. The city was able to assist with \$2,160.00 in rent.

Assisted by King City 5/11/22

Estoy muy agradecida por la gran atencion y ayuda que me brindaron el Community Center en Castroville, durante la pandemia enferme, mi trabajo bajaron las horas asta quedarme descontrolada emocionalmente y economicamente, soy Mamá soltera de 4 hijos y sostenia mi hogar con mi trabajo sin ayuda de estampillas o dinero del gobierno, para mi a sido un gran alivio su ayuda gracias por todo, gracias por ayudarme con Renta y Luz. -Yansi y Familia

Translation: I am very grateful for the great care and help that the Community Center in Castroville gave me, during the pandemic I became ill, my work hours dropped until I was emotionally and economically destabilized, I am a single mother of 4 children and I supported my home with my work without help of stamps or government money, for me your help has been a great relief, thank you for everything, thank you for helping me with Rent and utility. -Yansi and Family

Assisted by North County Recreation and Park District—June 2021

“ERAP was a huge success in the City of Greenfield for the community in many ways, but also for our agency. Because of this program we were able to fund two new positions. This allowed us to kickstart a now permanent department called the Community Engagement Department. After more approvals from city council and careful staff budgeting, the Community Engagement department is now a 3-person department that oversees up to 12 interns per year. I believe this is in large part because of ERAP - although it only funded the program staff, we were able to see a need for growth after participating.”

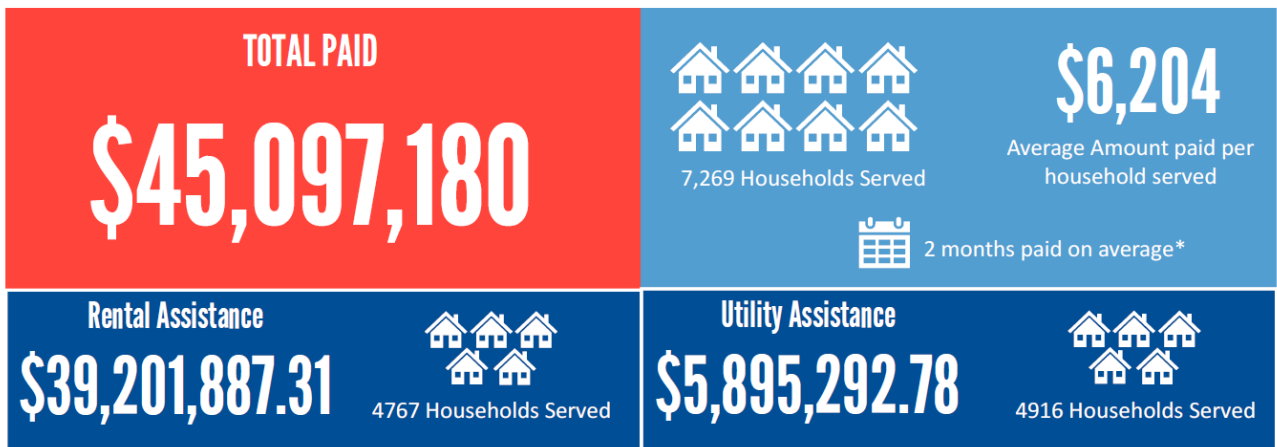
– Fabiola Lopez, City of Greenfield

Results

More than 7,269 households received direct assistance from the ERAP program. Some received rent only, others utility support, with many of them receiving help with both rent and utilities. This represents approximately 5.5% of all households in Monterey County, or 17% of households considered below the [Real Cost Measure](#) in Monterey County.

Average direct assistance received was \$6,204 per household.

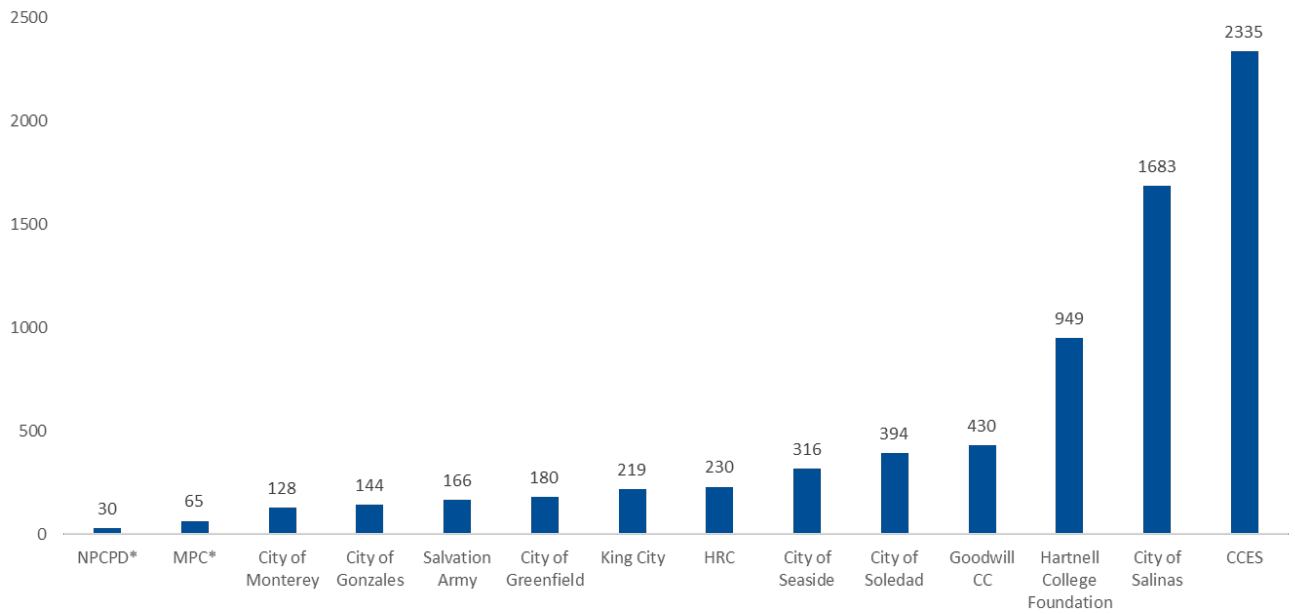
Direct Assistance



*This is estimated based on average rent prices for the program

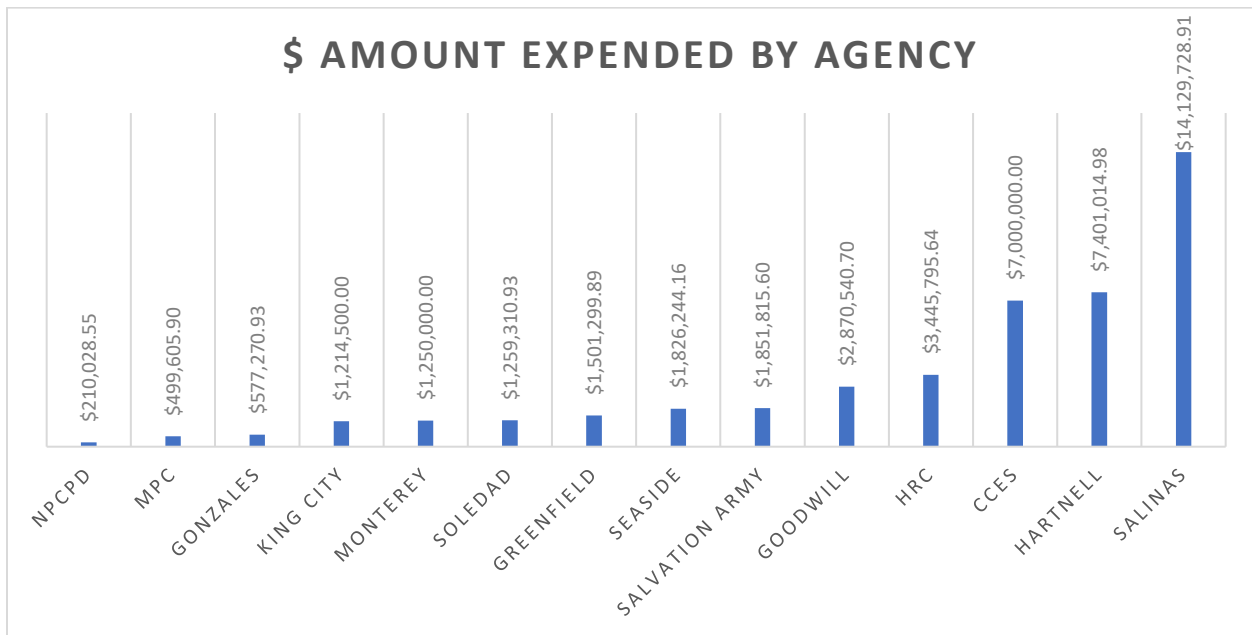
Subgrantees served a wide range of clients as shown by the following charts.

Households Served by Agency



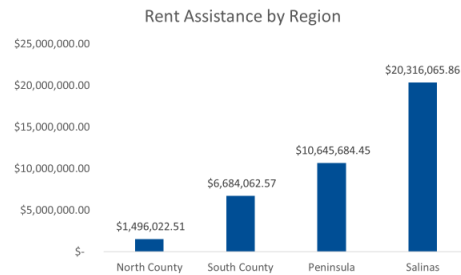
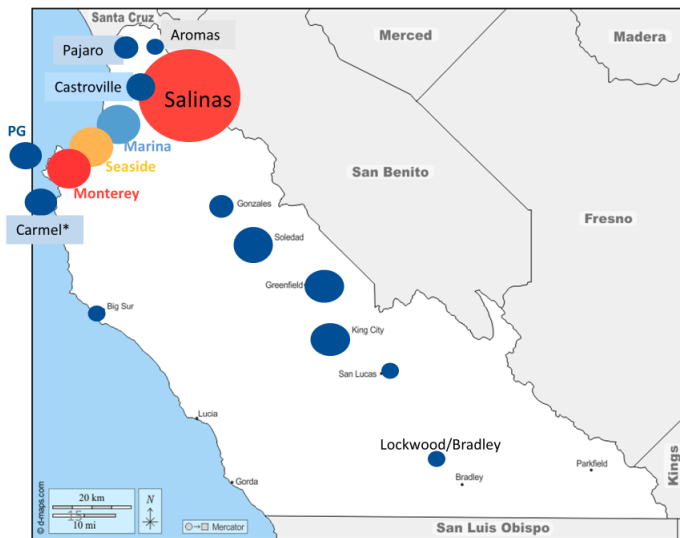
- *NMCRPD = North Monterey County Recreation and Parks District
- *HRC = Housing Resource Center
- *CCES = Central Coast Energy Services
- *MPC= Monterey Peninsula College

\$ AMOUNT EXPENDED BY AGENCY



Subgrantee partners had been selected and applications distributed to ensure broad geographic range throughout Monterey County. While the Cities primarily served their jurisdictions, the nonprofit organizations had more flexibility and served broader regions.

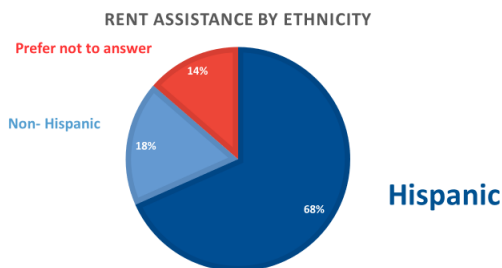
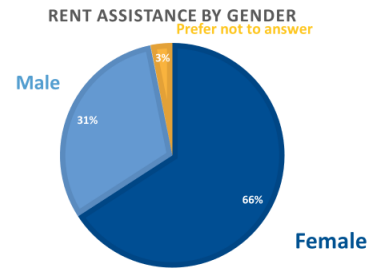
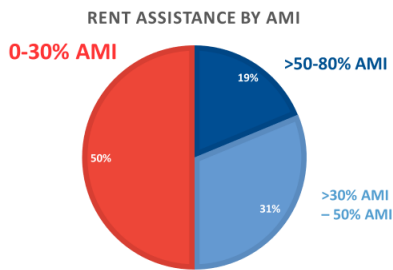
Geographic Distribution



*higher \$ amount in peninsula cities vs. South County cities due to higher average rent on Monterey Peninsula

The following is a snapshot of the income levels, gender, and ethnicity of applicants. This data were collected during the latter portion of the program with the second software platform.

Rental Assistance – Demographics*

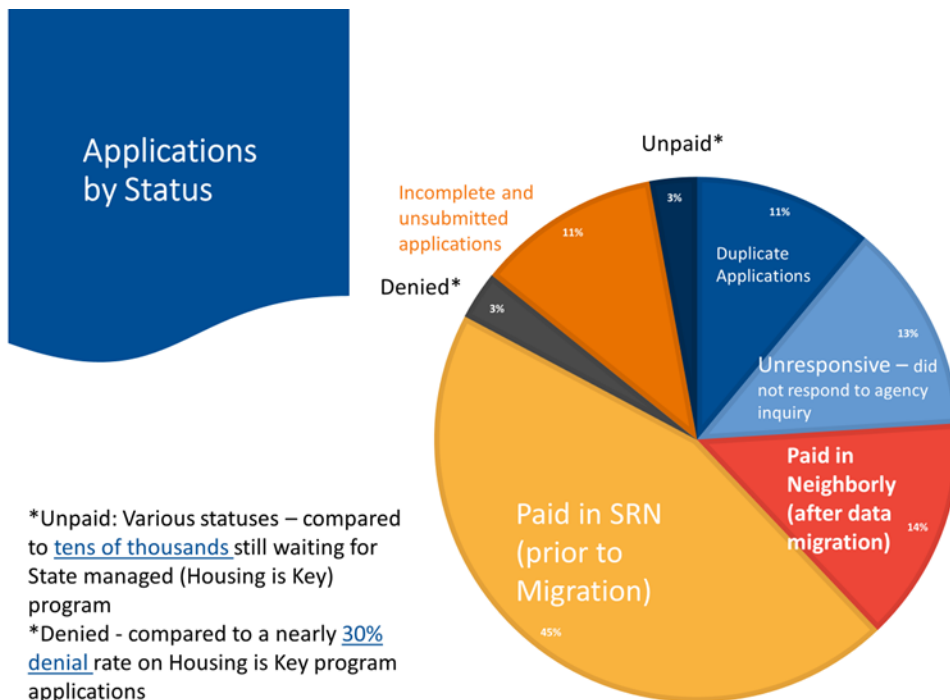


*these data from March 2022 – December 2023 only

Landlords and Property Owners received significant benefit from the program. Property management companies and small businesses in Monterey County received over \$24 Million in direct payments. Individual landlords were paid over \$14 Million. There were more than 700 “mom and pop” landlords who received payments through the program.

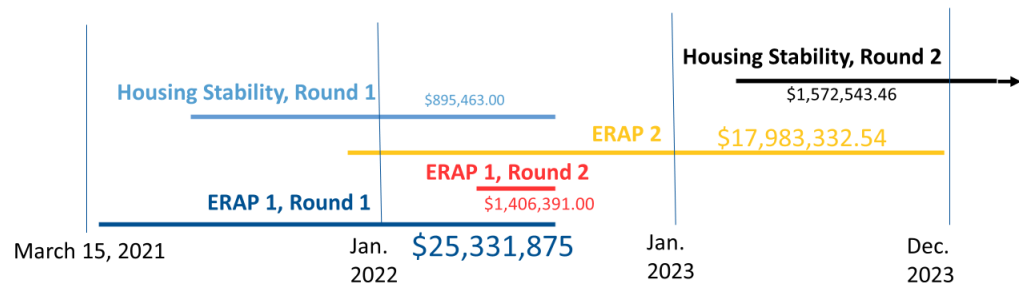
The productivity and access provided by the Monterey County Emergency Rental Assistance Program compares favorably to the state administered programs in other communities. We believe that our community residents were better served by this local solution through culturally competent outreach, locally designed systems, and investments into our local health and human service delivery organizations.

The application portal was opened in March, 2021. It was closed on 4/15/2022. By that time, it was determined that all funds had been obligated by existing applicants. Not all applications resulted in benefits paid. The following chart shows the outcomes of the total application pool:



Funding Timeline

- ERAP 1, Round 1 – COVID Rental and Utility Assistance
- ERAP 1, Round 2 – COVID Rental and Utility Assistance - Reallocated Funds
- ERAP 2 – Emergency Rental and Utility Assistance (No COVID impact required)
- Housing Stability, Round 1 – Outreach, Systems Navigation, Eviction Services, Legal Support
- Housing Stability, Round 2 – Housing Navigation Assistance, Deposit Assistance, Case Management



Wind Down

As of May 1st, UWMC has approximately \$895,000 remaining for Housing Stability services. All funds will be fully spent by UWMC and subgrantees no later than June 30th 2025. Activity, financial, and outcome reports on the remaining Housing Stability grants are part of the ongoing work between UWMC and DSS as we finalized spending and close out the contract by June 30, 2025.