

Governor Baker awards \$2 million for housing for homeless individuals

The Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) and the Department of Public Health (DPH) today announced \$2 million in grants awarded to two housing programs to increase access to low-threshold housing for unaccompanied adults experiencing homelessness and who are at high risk for HIV exposure.

Boston-based nonprofit organizations Commonwealth Land Trust and Victory Programs will provide housing and services for up to 60 individuals per year in Suffolk County with a focus on the Melnea Cass Boulevard and Massachusetts Avenue area in Boston. These are Housing First model programs, for which sobriety is not a requirement for accessing or maintaining housing.

“Safe and stable housing for individuals vulnerable to chronic health issues, like HIV, is crucial, especially as COVID-19 continues to impact communities,” said Health and Human Services Secretary Marylou Sudders. “Utilizing the Housing First Model connects these individuals with critical housing first without barriers while offering wraparound services to meet the complexity of their needs.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has created an extraordinary public health challenge in Massachusetts, adding complexity to the ongoing opioid crisis, contributing to homelessness, and exacerbating risk of HIV transmission among people who use substances, particularly in Suffolk County. Through this program, the Commonwealth aims to reduce homelessness, improve health outcomes, and advance health equity for residents of Suffolk County who are experiencing homelessness and substance

use disorder, and who are living with, or are at high risk for, HIV infection and co-occurring conditions.

“We continue to use data and every means possible to address the opioid epidemic,” said Public Health Commissioner Monica Bharel, MD, MPH. “As an important social determinant of health, housing instability makes it infinitely harder for individuals to access care for opioid use disorder.”

Commonwealth Land Trust and Victory Programs will receive a total of up to \$2 million annually for 1.5 years as they ramp up to providing housing/services for up to 60 individuals per year. The grant program includes options to renew until fiscal year 2026. The awards will be funded through the Massachusetts State Harm Reduction line item.

This effort is consistent with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) initiative to integrate HIV testing/prevention into more services. The CDC identified Suffolk County as a priority area of focus as part of its initiative to end the HIV epidemic in the United States.