



For Immediate Release

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Community Health Options Grants to Maine Nonprofits Help Pandemic Relief Efforts

Targeted grants already addressing critical needs statewide

Lewiston, Maine, May 20, 2020 – Lewiston-based Community Health Options (Health Options), the state's only nonprofit, Member-led health insurance plan, has awarded grants to nonprofit agencies supporting Maine communities and organizations experiencing some of the most troubling effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"As a community-based health plan, we see and hear daily how this pandemic is affecting Maine people throughout our state. We have targeted these grants to address clear and immediate needs such as food, shelter, and health," said Kevin Lewis, president and CEO of Health Options. "We've also directed funds to help the state's organic farmers continue to work and provide safe, secure, Maine-grown food. In addition, job losses and social distancing have intensified the need to help Maine people facing domestic violence, elder abuse, and child abuse, and our grants are meant to address these issues as well."

Grants have been awarded to the United Way organizations across the state, as well as the Maine Court Appointed Advocates and the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence.

"Thanks to the generosity of Community Health Options and our community, we've been able to quickly support organizations addressing urgent needs, including mobilizing food and supplies and providing access to safe and reliable shelter to individuals and families who desperately need it," said Liz Cotter Schlax, president and CEO of United Way of Greater Portland. "The impact of this experience will be felt long-term, especially for those who were already navigating health and financial challenges before COVID-19. We will continue to respond to the evolving crisis and be part of the mid- and long-term recovery plans."

Two organizations, The Good Shepherd Food Bank and Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association ("MOFGA"), were awarded grants for their work addressing access to food for all people in Maine.

"The pandemic has exposed the weaknesses in our current food system, and at MOFGA, we've ramped up our work to support organic farmers who are experiencing huge disruptions to how they operate," said Sarah Alexander, MOFGA executive director. "Our staff are also helping to support an increased interest in gardening, and more people growing their own food. All of this is happening at a time when we've had to cancel all of our in-person events, and the income and donations from those events are critical to our operations. We appreciate the grant from Community Health Options, which will allow us to continue our programming to support our farming and gardening community."

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About Community Health Options – Community Health Options is the only Maine-based, nonprofit, Member-led health plan providing comprehensive, Member-focused health insurance benefits for individuals, families, and businesses. Health Options awards grants and makes donations as part of our Community Benefit Expenditure Fund, administered by the Maine Community Foundation. For more information about Health Options, visit the website: HealthOptions.org.