

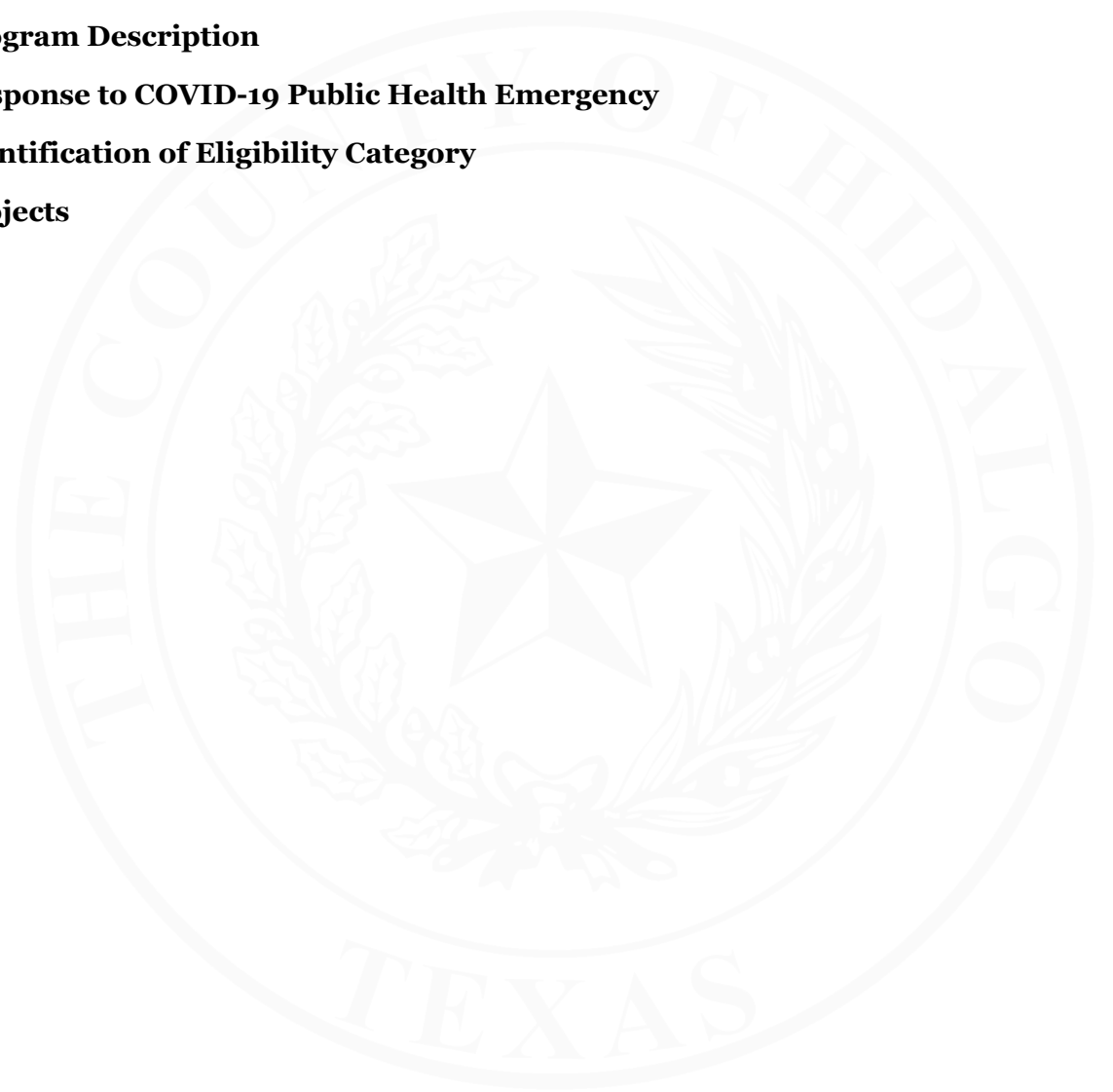


**Hidalgo County American Rescue Plan Act Expanding Access to
Healthcare Program**



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Background Information

In the last two years, COVID-19 has greatly impacted the nation and, in particular, regions of low socioeconomic status. Currently, 26.9% of Hidalgo County's population lives below the poverty line¹ and the impact of the pandemic on the county's public health is evident. The pandemic has placed a great strain on the quality and availability of basic health care needs. For example,² fewer children are receiving routine vaccinations, health centers are in need of equipment for personal protective equipment (PPE) and local health care providers are unequipped to address pandemic-induced mental illnesses.

Moreover, minority communities are at higher risk of infection due to the lack of accessibility to public health resources that allow individuals access to COVID-19 vaccines, targeted interventions, educational information and treatment for COVID-19 patients.

The long-term health impacts of COVID-19 will continue to require a dedicated public health response, including a response to the negative effects that the pandemic has exacerbated in terms of behavioral health. Additionally, the pandemic has shown the need to address behavioral health disparities within the community, including substance abuse and domestic violence.³ Behavioral health disparities are not new, but have become exacerbated due to the pandemic. Lastly, there is a lack of outreach to medically indigent communities that are bearing the brunt end of the pandemic's effects. The lack of essential resources has made it incredibly difficult to mitigate COVID-19 without further investment in local health care.

Program Description

The Hidalgo County American Rescue Plan Act Expanding Access to Healthcare Program mission is to undertake COVID-19 mitigation efforts that include, but are not limited to, the continuation of vaccination campaigns and programs, medical care, testing and support for vulnerable populations to have access to medical and/or public health services. As a direct result from COVID-19, emergencies in mental health, as well as improvements to primary care facilities have risen noticeably and there is a need for public health measures.

Through this program, the investments in mitigation efforts will be prioritized as communities are in need of these services. These efforts include vaccination programs, medical care, testing and support for vulnerable populations to access medical or public health services. By investing in local health care operations Hidalgo County can help mitigate COVID-19. Moreover, by providing capital investments for Hidalgo County clinics will enhance health care capacity and

¹ U.S. Census Bureau quickfacts: Hidalgo County, Texas ... (n.d.). Retrieved November 30, 2021, from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/hidalgocountytexas,US/PST045219>.

² Malini DeSilva, Association of the COVID-19 Pandemic with Routine Childhood Vaccination Rates and Proportion Up to Date with Vaccination across 8 US Health Systems in the Vaccine Safety Datalink. Retrieved November 18, 2021.

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1s4TXtXAZPRkpEKXIofdo84C5PVNSJ7gu6il1JMFPqQ/edit>

³ Department of the Treasury. (n.d.). Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds. (pg. 19)



pandemic operational needs. Operational needs can be met through renovation or adaptations to public health clinics.⁴ Also, local government services are needed to meet behavioral needs exacerbated by the pandemic and respond to other public health impacts. These services include mental health treatment, substance misuse treatment, overdose prevention and behavioral health primary care.

Low-income and socially vulnerable communities have seen the most severe health impacts. For example, communities with high poverty rates also have the highest rates of COVID-19 cases. The reason being individuals in low-income communities are often the “essential workers” putting themselves at a higher risk of contracting COVID-19. The high rates of infection are associated with underlying health conditions that are prevalent in low-income communities. Programs that address underlying health issues can help directly mitigate COVID-19.

The Hidalgo County American Rescue Plan Act Expanding Access to Healthcare Program will be making necessary physical plant improvements to buildings to implement COVID-19 mitigation tactics, including modifications to unused buildings to establish new Hidalgo County clinics. The physical plant improvements will allow the establishment of services or programs which directly address current health-related issues.

The Hidalgo County American Rescue Plan Act Expanding Access to Healthcare Program will also facilitate access to resources that improve health outcomes, including services that connect residents with health care resources and public assistance programs and build healthier environments. Improvements to health care access will also help address social determinants of health.⁵

Response to COVID-19 Public Health Emergency

The COVID-19 pandemic has put acute strain on the Hidalgo County health care system. In response, the Hidalgo County American Rescue Plan Act Expanding Access to Healthcare Program will address the need for accessible public health services.

Identification of Eligibility Category

In accordance with the U.S. Treasury’s Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds Interim Final Rule, the Hidalgo County American Rescue Plan Act Expanding Access to Healthcare Program falls under the Public Health category. The Fiscal Recovery Funds provide resources to meet and address emergent public health needs through measures to counter the spread of COVID-19.

⁴ Department of the Treasury. (n.d.). Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds. (pg. 17)

⁵ Department of the Treasury. (n.d.). Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds. (pg. 9)



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Projects

Multiple projects will be included as part of the Hidalgo County American Rescue Plan Act Expanding Access to Healthcare Program, including but not limited to the projects listed below:

- El Paraiso Health Clinic Improvement Project-Project Number: ARPA-21-340-019
- Schuerbach Health Clinic Improvement Project-Project Number: ARPA-21-340-020

