



## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Mayor and City Council

**FROM:** Veronica Briseño, Chief Economic Recovery Officer, City of Austin

**DATE:** December 8, 2020

**SUBJECT:** Update to Resolution No. 20200604-040, Worker and Customer Safety Program

This memorandum provides an update regarding the Worker and Customer Safety Program, which Council created via [Resolution No. 20200604-040](#). This program is intended to expand access to counseling services for workers with COVID-19 related mental health challenges (Employee Medical Assistance Program). This \$1.5 million fund is targeted to low and moderate-income employees in customer-facing industries (e.g., food service, retail, and personal services). The City must incur all program costs by December 30, 2020 due to federal CARES Act guidelines.

### Selection Process

To the greatest extent possible, Economic Development Department (EDD) staff continue to prioritize equity, need, and vulnerability as they create and implement COVID-19 related programs. Due to the imminent CARES Act spending deadline, EDD staff solicited third-party services in a manner to ensure programs would be successfully deployed and yield the greatest benefit to Austin workers.

EDD staff initially sought to modify existing City contracts with mental health and wellness service providers. Upon concluding that no current contracts could be modified, EDD staff sought providers with existing programs and service structures that could be expanded while meeting the intent of Council's direction. Through partnering with Austin Public Health and the Human Resources Department, EDD staff identified several local providers serving large, diverse, and local populations.

EDD staff interviewed Health Alliance for Austin Musicians (HAAM) and Alliance Work Partners (AWP). EDD staff also contacted the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) but did not receive a response. The interviews consisted of ten open-ended questions, which were designed to ensure the selected third-party administrator could provide the following:

- Outreach, Marketing and Education (with equitable reach as a consideration)
- Existing Program Services
- Expertise and Qualifications
- Program Management and Communications
- Intake and Eligibility
- Case Management
- Data Collection and Reporting

Additionally, EDD staff inquired about possible conflicts of interest; the providers' experiences with administration, organizational capacity, overall understanding of the City's desire to provide services to

those most in need in accordance with the City's equity values; and whether the providers could execute services quickly.

### **Worker Safety Programs**

EDD staff executed a contract with [Alliance Work Partners](#), not to exceed \$500,000, to provide access to a COVID-19 Health and Wellness Support Line providing short-term counseling and support to Austin workers and families whose mental health has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. EDD staff will seek Council ratification of this contract on December 10, 2020. Under the terms of this contract, residents living in an [Austin City Council District](#) can speak with a counselor from Alliance Work Partners through a confidential 24-hour support line. The support line opened on November 19, 2020 and will close on December 30, 2020. Services are free to the public and available in more than 150 languages. Alliance Work Partners' counselors support individuals experiencing stress, depression, anxiety, domestic violence, alcohol and drug abuse/dependency, marital and family issues, and more. Counselors also provide resources and referrals for various needs, including childcare, eldercare, legal, and financial support. Additionally, Alliance Work Partners counselors will work with Integral Care staff to ensure seamless delivery of services in a crisis and emergency. Low and moderate-income employees and former employees working in customer-facing industries like food and beverage service, retail, hospitality, and personal services (i.e., barbershops, salons, residential cleaning, etc.) are highly encouraged to access these free resources.

EDD staff also executed a contract with [Health Alliance for Austin Musicians](#) (HAAM), not to exceed \$500,000, towards HAAM's Healthcare Access Program. EDD staff will seek Council ratification of this contract on December 10, 2020. Under the terms of this contract, HAAM will enable insurance plan enrollment and monthly premium payments covering March 1, 2020 to December 30, 2020. Additional services include expert assessment, guidance, and resource navigation and deployment for healthcare access, funding, and troubleshooting, mental health and wellness resources and services, COVID-19 prevention, testing, and treatment, basic needs, housing, food and nutrition, legal, financial, and tax assistance, family and child and eldercare, job, unemployment, and city, county, and federal stimulus grants and programs, insurance literacy (development, deployment, coaching) and reporting.

### **Next Steps**

Resolution No. 20200604-040 authorizes the City Manager to use CARES Act funds flexibly to maximize the lawful use of federal funds within the framework established by Council. Thus, EDD will use any remaining Worker and Customer Safety Funds to distribute grants up to \$40,000 to the existing pool of [Austin Small Business Relief Grant](#) applicants. The grant distributions will occur before the federal government's December 30, 2020 deadline.

### **Conclusion**

Please contact me at [Veronica.Briseno@austintexas.gov](mailto:Veronica.Briseno@austintexas.gov) if you have questions regarding this update.

cc: Spencer Cronk, City Manager  
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