

Mentally ill people with HIV will get help with housing

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DON COLBURN
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Oregon has landed a federal grant to help people with both HIV/AIDS and mental illness find affordable housing.

The grant, totaling \$1.2 million over three years, is one of four awarded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Piecemeal services exist for mentally ill HIV/AIDS patients who also need housing help, but health officials say the new program will be the first dedicated to seamless, coordinated care for this group.

Affordable housing is often the most pressing need for such people, said Jim Hlava, vice president of residential services for Cascadia Behavioral Healthcare, the leading provider of mental health and addictions services in the Portland area.

"It's hard for people to get better unless they have good stable housing," Hlava said. "They can survive, but they don't get better."

Without safe, affordable shelter, he said, people facing HIV/AIDS and mental illness also have more trouble holding a job and keeping friends, he said.

The official grant recipient is the state Department of Human Services. That agency will funnel the money to two collaborating sponsors: Cascadia Behavioral Healthcare and Cascade AIDS Project, the largest community-based provider of HIV services in Oregon and southwest Washington.

Cascadia will provide the mental-health services, and Cascade AIDS Project will provide the housing support.

The new program is aimed at as many as 30 residents of the five-county Portland metropolitan area and as many as 20 in eight other counties along the Interstate 5 corridor. Those areas have the state's highest concentration of people living with HIV/AIDS.

"This program," Hlava said, "will help them find affordable housing, keep it and thrive."