

Premium Pay for MountainCare Adult Day Employees

RFP for Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds

MountainCare

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Application Form

Question Group

Buncombe County requests proposals for projects to help the community recover from and respond to COVID-19 and its negative economic impacts.

Buncombe County has been awarded \$50,733,290 in Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (Recovery Funding), as part of the American Rescue Plan Act. This infusion of federal resources is intended to help turn the tide on the pandemic, address its economic fallout, and lay the foundation for a strong and equitable recovery.

Buncombe County is committed to investing these funds in projects that:

- Align to county strategic plan and community priorities
- Support equitable outcomes for most impacted populations
- Leverage and align with other governmental funding sources
- Make best use of this one-time infusion of resources
- Have a lasting impact

Proposals shall be submitted in accordance with the terms and conditions of this RFP and any addenda issued hereto.

[Click here for the full terms and conditions of the RFP](#)

Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds*

Name of Project.

Premium Pay for MountainCare Adult Day Employees

Amount of Funds Requested*

\$118,000.00

Recovery Fund Eligible Category*

Please select one:

Small business and non-profit support

Brief Project Description*

Provide a short summary of your proposed project.

MountainCare, a local 501©3 non-profit, is seeking \$118,000 from the Coronavirus Recovery Funds to provide pay increases for its employees. Our organization operates Adult Day Care and Day Health Centers in Buncombe County and throughout Western North Carolina where we serve primarily older adults with neurocognitive conditions and chronic health concerns.

Though we consider all employees essential in providing services, we are prioritizing higher pay increases for workers requiring the most financial support. Hourly-wage employees who provided high-risk direct care before COVID-19 vaccinations were available will receive the greatest benefit. We are also seeking funding for an overall 2% retention pay increase in 2022. Like many other businesses and agencies, we have struggled with retaining and hiring qualified employees throughout the pandemic. Support from the Recovery Funds will enable MountainCare to stabilize its workforce and recruit job-seekers with competitive wages.

Project Plan*

Explain how the project will be structured and implemented, including timeframe.

In July of 2021, MountainCare awarded a 4% pay increase to all direct-care, hourly-wage employees who worked before the availability of vaccines. This change brings our lowest-paid employees to a hard-earned, fair living wage of \$15 per hour or higher. Direct-care employees hired or rehired after the availability of vaccines were given a 2% pay increase. Though these newer employees did not put themselves at the same level of risk, we feel that providing a pay increase for all direct-care staff is the most equitable action. Finally, salaried employees who worked through the pandemic were also given a 2% rate increase, and newly hired salaried employees were given a 1% increase.

As our 2021 budget illustrates, MountainCare is running on negative operating margins largely due to COVID-related revenue loss. Regardless of our financial standing, the decision to better compensate our team was absolutely necessary. Our wish is to receive funding to support this new payroll expense for the remainder of 2021.

Pre-COVID, MountainCare shared plans with its employees to offer 2 - 6% annual performance-based pay increases for all team members. Those plans were never actualized amid the pandemic. MountainCare wishes to provide its employees with a second increase in 2022, honoring our original promise as part of a larger recovery plan.

The total cost of providing a premium pay increase for our employees from July 2021 – December 2021 is \$33,000. An additional \$85,000 will sustain this pay rate increase through 2022, plus provide a 2% annual retention increase.

Statement of Need*

Describe the need that this project will address. Include data to demonstrate the need, and cite the source of the data.

Due to the pandemic, MountainCare Adult Day closed in mid-March of 2020. On July 1st, 2020, we reopened our doors at a limited capacity to serve families who were in desperate need of services. Staff were given the choice to return to work, or to remain home for longer based on their level of comfort.

It speaks to the character of our team that many chose to continue to provide services for our participants, at great personal risk and without clear financial benefit. Unfortunately, many Adult Day employees who chose to work throughout the pandemic received less income than their colleagues who received enhanced unemployment benefits. According to the Department of Labor, the average unemployment benefit for North Carolinians in 2020 was \$216. This means that some individuals were making over \$800/week after the Federal unemployment boost. The gross weekly income for a person receiving \$15/hour is just \$600.

Compensation is long overdue for workers who provided vital care during a time of unimaginable isolation and stress for older adults. The primary purpose of a rate increase is to express gratitude for

employees' sacrifice and compassion, but it is also hastened by difficulty retaining employees. Half of the original team providing services in 2020 resigned in 2021. In exit interviews, several employees cited pay as a significant factor in their decision to leave MountainCare.

Additionally, Adult Day is working hard to increase our daily census. Unfortunately, we are currently unable to attract new employees to meet the demand for services. The US is experiencing the highest number of job openings in over 20 years (Department of Labor), making it difficult for employers to compete in a tight market. With so many options available, the pool of available and qualified candidates is further limited. A general rate increase will help MountainCare attract new hires, maintain a stable team, and allow us to return to pre-COVID operations.

Link to COVID-19*

Identify a health or economic harm resulting from or exacerbated by the public health emergency, describe the nature and extent of that harm, and explain how the use of this funding would address such harm.

Adult Day's overall private pay revenue for 2020 was reduced by an average of 54% resulting in a loss of \$313,737 in private pay projections. Our doors were closed from mid-March until July 1, 2020, and again for 11 weeks this winter due to rising COVID-19 cases in the region. Our team experienced an overall reduction in force of more than 50%, and our services continue to operate at a significantly reduced capacity.

However, the greatest harm has been to our participants and their caregivers. When our doors closed, the difficult situation families already faced became much more dire. Adult Day reopened on July 1, 2020 to meet an urgent need for respite care, but in this initial phase enrollment was reduced to 20% of our normal capacity.

Adult Day staff continued to provide crisis outreach to the participants remaining at home. During wellness checks, caregivers reported greater isolation and increased burnout, and many struggled to safely complete simple errands or attend appointments. In the case of the medically vulnerable, it was risky or impossible to bring loved ones in public spaces. Many caregivers were unable to work and had to choose between paying an exorbitant amount for private duty care or risk losing their jobs. Our participants suffered from significant cognitive and physical decline without access to much-needed social, intellectual, and physical activity.

Today we are still operating at just 40% capacity and working to re-enroll pre-COVID participants. The program currently has a waiting list of over 40 new individuals with inquiries dating back to July of 2020. These families face incredibly difficult choices regarding care of their loved one if we are unable to increase our census to meet their needs. Resolving staffing issues will allow MountainCare to meet this urgent need for services in Buncombe County.

Population Served*

Define the population to be served by this project, including volume and demographic characteristics of those served.

MountainCare currently employs 31 individuals and 12 additional Rathbun House employees who receive operational support from MountainCare. Rathbun House employees have not been included in this proposal. Twenty-nine of the 31 employees of Adult Day are women and half of our employees reside in Buncombe County. One in 10 employees are persons of color – representative of the general population. Our leadership team is 100% women, with three out of eight leaders identifying as LGBT+.

Since this project improves the overall quality of our services, it also impacts our participants and their families. MountainCare provides care for some of the most chronically underserved, isolated members of our

society: the elderly, the dying, and the disabled. In 2019, our three Adult Day centers provided 28,986 unique days of service to nearly 400 adults across Western North Carolina – with 250 of those participants receiving services at our Buncombe County location.

Participants of Adult Day are often diagnosed with impairments such as dementia, stroke, Parkinson’s disease, depression, or diabetes and require safe and specialized care due to their physical, cognitive, medical, or social challenges. While most of our participants are older adults, we serve anyone over the age of 18 in need of care or social opportunities during the day. This population is particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 due to medical frailty and aging concerns.

Historically, over 65% of our participants come from low-income households and receive support to attend our program through the VA, the Home and Community Block Grant, Caregiver Respite Funding, and generous donations. No one is turned away due to a lack of funds.

Results*

Describe the proposed impact of the project. List at least 3 performance measures that will be tracked and reported. If possible, include baselines and goals for each performance measure.

1. Employee retention rates will improve.
 - a. Baseline: More than half of the Buncombe Adult Day employees who worked throughout the pandemic resigned in 2021. One was rehired.
 - b. Goal: To stabilize our workforce and maintain a turnover rate of less than the industry average of 12%.
2. MountainCare will hire additional direct care staff.
 - a. Baseline: We have been trying to fill open Program Guide positions since April with very few applicants. To date we have rehired two part-time and one full-time employee. This has maintained our current operations, but it does not meet the need for additional growth.
 - b. Goal: To hire up to 5 new Program Guides to support a census increase in Buncombe County.
3. Adult Day in Buncombe will increase its daily census due to greater availability of staff.
 - a. Baseline: The program is currently serving 44 adults, with a daily attendance of up to 27 individuals.
 - b. Goal: To return to pre-COVID enrollment and capacity as pandemic circumstances allow. In January 2020, 111 adults were enrolled in our Buncombe program. Our average daily attendance was 70, but our potential daily enrollment is 82.
4. Participants and caregivers of Adult Day Services will report improved quality of life.
 - a. Baseline: Most recently, nine out of ten caregivers reported reduced stress while their loved one is enrolled. One hundred percent of participants reported an improved quality of life.
 - b. Goal: To continue to improve the lives of those we serve.

Evaluation*

Describe the data collection, analysis, and quality assurance measures you will use to assure ongoing, effective tracking of contract requirements and outcomes.

MountainCare tracks Key Performance Indicators (KPI) to evaluate achievement of our goals and objectives. Monthly and yearly KPI measurements help us to identify and strategically address possible areas of improvement. This includes tracking the number of new employees, terminations, turnover rate, and the percent of employees who remain employed for the full year. For each adult day center, we track metrics such as total inquiries, new enrollments, the number of new days enrolled or added, the inquiry conversion rate, average daily attendance, occupancy rate, and discharges.

Participants and caregivers are surveyed on enrollment and annually about their experience through an online platform. We strive for a satisfaction rating in the top two levels (very satisfied or extremely satisfied -

a four or five) of 80% or more. We also ask respondents if participation significantly improved their quality of life, striving for a rating of 80% or greater. Caregivers unable to complete an online version of the survey will receive a printed copy with a postage paid envelope. Responses will remain anonymous, allowing caregivers and participants to express themselves more freely. We will continue to conduct our regular stress level surveys with our caregivers and will track the reduction in stress they experience, striving for an 80% success rate.

Equity Impact*

How will this effort help build toward a just, equitable, and sustainable COVID-19 recovery? How are the root causes and/or disproportionate impacts of inequities addressed?

MountainCare is committed to fostering a culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion for our team and those we serve. We are an equal opportunity employer with a zero-tolerance discrimination policy not only for staff, but also for other professionals on the premises such as physicians, residents, contract workers, vendors, and outside consultants. MountainCare values a proactive, anti-racist approach for inclusion, striving to make all people feel welcome to participate in and contribute to our programs. We recently developed an Equity Committee to review our policies and procedures, ensuring they reflect our values. When forming policies, we ask ourselves, "Who does this benefit? Who does this policy exclude?"

During the height of the pandemic, most of our employees of color were unable to work. People of color are historically over-represented in some of the highest risk occupations, and this is true for MountainCare as well. All our minority employees were front-line personal care workers who were hard hit due to preexisting conditions and known inequities in the healthcare system. Because of their high-risk status, Adult Day employees of color were unable to return to work during our reopening and were included in a major reduction in force in August of 2020. In 2021, we are prioritizing hiring and rehiring people of color to diversify our workforce and return to our pre-COVID diversity rates. We are including a 2% pay rate increase into our plan in effort to support rehired and newly hired employees who were unable to work last year.

Project Partners*

Identify any subcontractors you intend to use for the proposed scope of work. For each subcontractor listed, indicate:

- 1.) What products and/or services are to be supplied by that subcontractor and;
- 2.) What percentage of the overall scope of work that subcontractor will perform.

Also, list non-funded key partners critical to project.

N/A

Capacity*

Describe the background, experience, and capabilities of your organization or department as it relates to capacity for delivering the proposed project and managing federal funds.

MountainCare's award-winning Adult Day Programs have served more than 5,000 families throughout our 35+ year history. Our leadership team has a combined professional experience exceeding 100 years, and our Operations Team has over 40 years of combined experience with Adult Day Services in Western North Carolina, including more than 20 years of experience managing funding sources. State funding through the

Division of Aging and Adult Services and the VA comprise more than half of our regular operating revenue. We are experienced and diligent with complex tracking and reporting requirements.

MountainCare is also considered a leader within the aging community, with a reputation for operating the only adult day center in Henderson and Transylvania counties. Our Buncombe program is one of just two adult day cares in the Asheville area, and the only program with the ability to address complex medical needs and advanced stages of dementia. In the last two years, we have successfully transitioned from the Mission Hospital network into a stand-alone agency. We have survived the COVID-19 crisis, despite the many challenges we continue to face, because the need for our services never stops.

Budget*

Provide a detailed project budget including all proposed project revenues and expenditures, including explanations and methodology. For all revenue sources, list the funder and denote whether funds are confirmed or pending. For project expenses, denote all capital vs. operating costs, and reflect which specific expenses are proposed to be funded with one-time Buncombe County Recovery Funds.

Download a copy of the budget form [HERE](#). Complete the form, and upload it using the button below.

MountainCare Recovery-Funds-budget-template.xlsx

Special Considerations*

Provide any other information that might assist the County in its selection.

Adult Day has existed in Western North Carolina for more than 35 years. Before the HCA acquisition of the Mission Health Network, Adult Day Services were part of the larger healthcare system. When HCA purchased Mission Health, several key non-profit entities joined together to form MountainCare and remain not-for-profit.

During the separation from HCA, our service lines inherited an annual budget with a net loss of over \$1.8 million. Just 6 months into our independence, COVID-19 struck, and all our strategic planning and development efforts were put on hold to navigate the pandemic.

File Attachment Summary

Applicant File Uploads

- MountainCare Recovery-Funds-budget-template.xlsx

