



Common Cents

New Hampshire Fiscal Policy Institute Blog

State and Federal Governments Adjust Policies, Allocate Resources to COVID-19 Crisis Response

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Both the State and federal governments have taken key actions this week to stem both the [health](#) and [economic](#) harm generated by the COVID-19 crisis. Although many more resources will be needed to stem the widespread hardship already beginning to impact the country, these initial steps will be critical to supporting those who are most in need.

State of New Hampshire

As of Friday afternoon, Governor Sununu has issued [nine emergency orders](#), including:

- [Expanding access to State unemployment compensation benefits](#). Individuals eligible for unemployment benefits include those who are diagnosed with COVID-19, quarantined or self-quarantined, directed to quarantine by an employer, caring for someone who is quarantined, or caring for a family member or dependent who needs care due to a school or other facility closure. Partial unemployment benefits are also available for employees with reduced hours. The Governor's order also eliminates the one-week waiting period for benefits, allowing eligible individuals to access them immediately. New Hampshire Employment Security staff have also [indicated](#) the requirements to seek work while receiving benefits have been temporarily waived, and people with COVID-19-related separation from employment can [apply](#). The average unemployment compensation benefit paid per week in New Hampshire during February 2020 was [\\$339.17](#).
- [Prohibiting evictions and foreclosures](#). This order helps individuals remain in their homes during the crisis by preventing landlords or banks from removing individuals from housing due to lack of payment, but does not relieve individuals of their obligations to pay rent or mortgage payments.

- [Prohibiting disconnection or discontinuation of utility services](#). Utilities and other service providers cannot disconnect electric, gas, water, telephone, cable, internet, or VoIP service, or stop delivering fuels, due to lack of payment. No late fees will be charged for services unpaid during the emergency, and customers will have a period of at least six months to make up for late payments.
- [Establishing the COVID-19 Emergency Healthcare System Relief Fund](#). This Fund may disburse up to \$50 million in the form of grants or loans to provide emergency relief, following application to the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services and with the approval of the Governor and the New Hampshire Attorney General, to all aspects of the New Hampshire healthcare system.
- [Expanding access to telehealth services](#) and ensuring that health care providers delivering services through [telehealth](#) are reimbursed at the same rates as in-person visits.
- [Requiring temporarily that all public schools serving students Kindergarten through Grade 12 only engage in remote instruction](#). Remote instruction must begin by March 23, and will continue through April 3. A [second order](#) permits use of remote learning platforms that meet minimum standards set in State statute without regard to district data and privacy governance plans during the emergency.
- [Prohibiting gatherings of more than 50 people and most onsite food and beverage consumption](#). Restaurants may only provide take-out, delivery, and drive-through services through April 6.

The State of New Hampshire offers information resources on its [website](#).

Federal Government

The federal government is already providing resources to address this health crisis, support states fiscally, and mitigate the economic damage. The newly-enacted Families First Coronavirus Response Act gives states [broader flexibility](#) to supply Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. This includes allowing states to add additional benefits to SNAP, and to provide meal replacements for those students who attend currently-closed schools that would have received a free or reduced-price meal at those schools. The Act also [boosts federal funding](#) for Medicaid, which is likely to see both increased caseloads and increased service needs for those enrolled, as more people lose jobs, have lower incomes, and fall ill. Providing more federal Medicaid funds is one of the key ways the federal government can help New Hampshire fiscally, economically, and from a public health standpoint, as it will help ensure loss of health coverage does not damage individual finances or [ability to](#)

[access health services](#), and help make available resources in the State Budget for other urgent priorities or to absorb revenue losses.

With more health and income supports needed and [State revenues likely to decline sharply](#), whether the State Budget is only somewhat out of balance or dramatically in deficit will depend heavily on federal aid. Federal policymakers appear to be moving to provide additional fiscal and economic supports. The State Budget was not running a large surplus prior to the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis, and many families and individuals with low-incomes have [only recently seen their wages rise](#) back to inflation-adjusted pre-recession levels.

Prior to the onset of this crisis, more than one in every five households in New Hampshire had incomes below \$35,000 per year, and one in three households had less than \$50,000 per year in income. Many of these households were already struggling to make ends meet, and will likely be among the Granite Staters most vulnerable to both the health crisis and the economic shock currently underway.

NHFPI Resources

NHFPI has published several resources related to both the COVID-19 crisis and the economic context in which it is occurring, including:

- [Risk of COVID-19 Exacerbates Disparities in Access to Health and Other Services](#) - March 13, 2020
- [COVID-19 Crisis Threatens Financial Stability of the State and Residents](#) - March 17, 2020
- [Rainy Day Fund May Provide Resources for Emergency Supports](#) - March 19, 2020
- [New Hampshire's Workforce, Wages, and Economic Opportunity](#) - August 30, 2019
- [Census Bureau 2018 Estimates for Income, Poverty, Housing Costs, and Health Coverage](#) - October 9, 2019
- [Medicaid Home- and Community-Based Care Service Delivery Limited by Workforce Challenges](#) - March 15, 2019

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- *Phil Sletten, Policy Analyst*