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## **USC Report: \$300 Million Riverside County COVID Rental Assistance Program Served as Critical “Stopgap” for Tens of Thousands of Residents**

**COACHELLA, CA** – A [new report](#) released today by the USC Sol Price School of Public Policy highlights Riverside County’s \$300 million United Lift COVID Rental Assistance Program (United Lift) as a crucial “stopgap” for 35,000 households, representing 120,000 residents, who “benefited greatly” from “lower rates of housing instability and homelessness,” and improved food security and mental health.

[Click here to read Evaluation of the United Lift Rental Assistance Program in Riverside County](#)

“The pandemic affected all communities, but it impacted low-income and disadvantaged communities the hardest especially when it came to covering rental costs,” said Heather Vaikona, Executive Director of Lift to Rise. “Our team at Lift to Rise, in partnership with SoCal United Way and Riverside County, jumped into action to provide assistance to Coachella Valley residents who needed it the most. We are proud that this report shows that United Lift worked and helped safeguard tens of thousands of residents from homelessness and improved housing stability, food security, and mental health.”

“California has clear evidence that emergency rental assistance programs across our state protected hundreds of thousands of individuals and families from the devastating economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Gustavo Velasquez, Director of the California Department of Housing. “This level of protection would not have been possible without collaboration among federal, state and local jurisdictions and community-based organizations, like the successful partnership with Riverside County, Lift to Rise, and SoCal United Way that protected 120,000 county residents from housing instability and homelessness.”

“There are two key findings that I would like to highlight from the Emergency Rental Assistance evaluation,” said Dr. Gary Painter, Professor in the USC Price School of Public Policy and Director of the Homelessness Policy Research Institute. “First, the program served low income tenants effectively. Many of these tenants were precariously housed before the pandemic, and this program kept them in their apartments. However, these tenants are likely to become housing insecure since this program ended. Second, this program was very important for small landlords, but many small landlords struggled to get connected to the emergency rental assistance. This suggests that targeted outreach to these critical stakeholders is needed in the event of future crises.”

“The United Lift rental assistance program served as a useful source of rent debt alleviation, and it was particularly true to its goal of prioritizing those who needed it most,” reads the report. “There is abundant evidence from the data that shows receiving assistance benefitted recipients greatly. Receiving rental assistance was associated with greater housing stability for survey respondents.

Riverside County launched the Emergency Rental Assistance Program in partnership with Lift to Rise and SoCal United Way to provide financial assistance to county residents.

### **Key Findings**

- There was a strong, and disproportionate, need for a rental assistance program such as United Lift in Riverside County.
- Rent was the highest priority for most respondents, even over other bills, with nearly 90% of the respondents reporting being unable to afford rent at the time of their application for assistance and nearly 20% reporting rent increases.
- The United Lift program targeted specific populations in need for their rental aid, and the samples show that the program was effective in doing so.
- Receiving aid from United Lift seemed to act as an adequate stopgap, providing salient benefits for renters including lower rates of housing instability and homelessness and improved food security and mental health.
- Respondents used a range of strategies to cover rent—most commonly, they sought assistance from family and friends, used savings, paid rent with a credit card, or took out a loan.
- Black respondents reported higher rates of eviction and rent increases than other racial groups and were disproportionately likely to apply for and receive assistance.
- Program applicants disproportionately identified as female.
- About half of program participants and survey respondents were single parents.
- Nearly half of households applying for assistance reported earning less than 30% of AMI.
- Over 40% of those that received assistance reported cutting back on food expenses to afford the rent, compared to 52% of those that had not received assistance.
- More than two-thirds of respondents reported cutting back on clothing and entertainment expenses, delaying bill payment, and going into debt to cover rent.

### **About the Report**

Researchers from the USC Sol Price School of Public Policy contracted with Riverside County to help evaluate the United Lift Rental Assistance Program. The evaluation incorporated a range of surveys and interviews, which were conducted with landlords and tenants across various points in the rental assistance program, to further understand the experiences that they faced with regard to United Lift and the Riverside County rental market conditions.

### **About Lift to Rise**

Lift to Rise is a nonprofit organization in the Coachella Valley which brings together community and institutional leaders to collaboratively solve the underlying causes of poverty and inequality. Lift to Rise strives for a future where all Coachella Valley families are healthy, stable, and thriving.

Since 2018, Lift to Rise has convened the Housing Collaborative Action Network (CAN), a network of over 60 cross-sector partners organized around shared goal of reducing regional rent burden by 30% through the production of 10,000 units of affordable housing in the Coachella Valley by 2028. Together Lift to Rise and the Housing CAN have built We Lift: the Coachella Valley's Housing Catalyst Fund, a revolving loan fund that blends public and private capital to deploy low-interest, flexible loans to spur affordable housing development. The Fund recently secured a \$15 million allocation from the California state budget with the support of Assemblymember Eduardo Garcia (AD-36) and has already spurred the development of more than 600 units of affordable housing.

Lift to Rise also implements United Lift, Riverside County's Emergency Rental Assistance Program, in partnership with Riverside County and Inland SoCal United Way. Since June 2020, United Lift has disbursed \$300 million in rental and utility assistance to upwards of 120,000 low-income renters in Riverside County who have been financially impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.