

# Direct to You

Friday  
9/3/21

Patricia Wells, OHA Executive Director



**Good afternoon team!**

## **A Labor of Love**

As we head into the holiday weekend, I want to take a few moments to thank you all for efforts you put into serving the OHA community, in spite of the persistent challenges we face.

This Monday is Labor Day, a time for acknowledging the “labor” we all do to keep our Oakland community moving forward. These last 18 months have tested our resolve, but we still manage to carry through our work on our premises and remotely to do our jobs to the best of our abilities.

Over the last couple of weeks, I was able to launch an agency wide listening tour. During this week’s three sessions, I had the chance to talk with our team from Property Operations (OPO). It was extremely encouraging to see so many faces whom I had not seen often these past few months, and visually meet new members of the OHA family. The discussions were very insightful, giving me great feedback and ideas.

One reoccurring question was around the agency’s plan to re-open our doors to the public. What I can say is that because of the Delta variant and recent updates from the CDC and our local public health officials, we are slowing down our phased approach. In other words, we are still moving forward with plans to bring staff back into their normal work spaces for in-person service, but will do so a little more slowly and we’ll push out the date for returning to business as usual. The leadership team has been creating new methods of service delivery, so stay tuned for updates on those efforts.

All of you have demonstrated an unwavering commitment to the health and safety of our clients, and each other. I am sincerely proud of that. With the help of our Leased Housing team, we broke ground on a new development, Casa Sueños, providing nearly \$25 million dollars of housing choice voucher subsidy investment that will have an impact for generations. Another team that includes staff from Leased Housing, Family & Community Partnerships, Finance and the Executive Office, are hard at work executing a plan to connect the 515 Emergency Housing Vouchers allocated to OHA to some of our community’s most vulnerable people. These are just two examples of how our “labor of love” is making an impact and you can read more in the stories below.

What I want to make sure I say as we head into the Labor Day weekend, is that I am so excited to be a colleague of everyone in the OHA family. I know it isn’t easy. I understand that many of you are struggling with the emotions related to what might feel like a prolonged attack on our health, our economy and our way of life. But as we have done for the last year and a half, we will continue to lean on one another, uplift each other and work through this time, together.

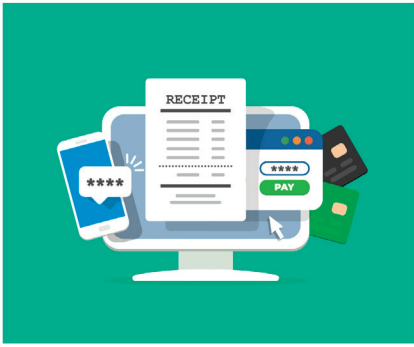
Have a safe and peaceful holiday weekend!

Patricia



All past issues of Direct To You are available on the OHA website for 24/7 access. In addition to the messages sent directly from the OHA executive director, you can also find links to other resources, articles, and up-to-date information about OHA operations and the ways we are addressing the current health crisis.





## Reimbursement for Certain Covid-Related Expenses

During the pandemic, many employees have reached out to the Human Resources team to discuss financial struggles they are facing and some of the many issues that continue to add stress to their mental health. High on the list are child care, elder care, and distance learning costs incurred due to COVID-19 and changes to their work arrangements. The HR, Finance, and PIC teams have worked together to develop a reimbursement plan to help offset these costs and hopefully provide some relief for our OHA team members.

The plan they created will provide a maximum of \$5,000 reimbursement to any employees who can provide adequate documentation that they have suffered increased costs for child care, elder care, or distance learning as a direct result of COVID-19.

An email about the program was sent out from OHAHR on Thursday with attachments that explain the program details and the form that needs to be submitted to register for the program.

Please continue to read Direct To You and your emails for updates for this and other resources, as we continue to implement programs to help staff through these unprecedented times. And also watch for more mental health and wellness related support to come in the near future.



## Peace in a Storm

We often talk about how every single member of the OHA staff is an important contributor to the overall success of the agency. No job is too large or too small to make a difference in the lives of our clients, or in the lives of our employees who spend most of the weekdays at work and at OHA properties. Steve Wilson brought that notion to life by sharing one of his passions with the staff at the 1619 Harrison office. He saw an opportunity and took it upon himself to fill the need.

Steve has always been one to point out when he sees things are out of place or in need of repair; his eye always towards making our workspaces more peaceful places to work. In noticing the empty planter boxes in the courtyard, Steve realized he could beautify the space with plants he had at home.

He saw an opportunity to add to our peace, amid the occasional storms of our daily work, through this personal contribution. There's an old quote, author unknown, that says, "Serenity is not freedom from the storm, but peace amid the storm."

We thank Steve for generously contributing the beautiful succulents from his own garden and praise his willingness to take the initiative to do something wonderful that will be appreciated by so many. Enjoying the new serenity of the courtyard during a work break or a peaceful lunch may be just the thing someone needs to make it through a rough day.



## Casa Sueños

On August 26, representatives came together for a community celebration of a project that was 30 years in the making. Casa Sueños, formerly known as Fruitvale Transit Village IIB, is the 2nd of 3 apartment communities, developed by the Unity Council in partnership with Bridge Housing. In 2020, OHA supported EBALDC and leased-up Casa Arabella, the 1st phase of the Fruitvale project.



This future home to 180 families is expected to be completed by the end of 2023 and will feature 28 studios, 78 one-bedroom, 40 two-bedroom, and 34 three-bedroom units. Forty-six of the homes are set aside for households earning up to 20% of AMI, targeting people who have experienced chronic homelessness, with permanent supportive services provided by Alameda County Health Care Services Agency.

OHA came into the program in 2018, after it had received an award through the Notice of Funding 2017-2019 of the City of Oakland, by awarding 75 Project-Based Voucher. At the groundbreaking event, our Executive Director Patricia Wells spoke, alongside Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf, Secretary Lourdes Castro Ramirez, Secretary of the Business, Consumer Services and Housing Agency State of California, and many other notable members of the housing community and elected officials. Patricia spoke of our staff's commitment to delivering safe, affordable housing, and our agency's investment in our community. When construction is complete, OHA will execute a Housing Assistance Payment for the project-based vouchers units with an initial term of 20 years and an optional extension of another 20 years.

Michelle Hasan and Ahmed Karimi, of Leased Housing, have taken the lead on getting this program off the ground. As the development gets further along other leased housing and finance teams will play a pivotal role in administering the vouchers, which will make a huge difference in the lives of many individuals and families at a time when they need it most.

## OHA's Emergency Housing Voucher Program

OHA was one of a selected group of housing authorities awarded 515 Emergency Housing Vouchers (EHVs) in May through the American Recovery Plan Act of 2021. These vouchers have operational differences from regular vouchers such as families can port immediately and OHA can accept delays in the typical verification methods. OHA is required to accept referrals for eligible families from the Alameda County Coordinated Entry System through a memorandum of understanding with Alameda County and OHA elected to include other local housing authorities for collaboration and synergy.



Families and individuals referred must meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Experiencing homelessness;
- At risk of experiencing homelessness;
- Fleeing or attempting to flee, domestic or dating violence, sexual assault, stalking or human trafficking; or
- Were recently homeless and have a high risk of housing instability.

OHA sprang into action and created a cross departmental team with representatives from PIC, Leased Housing, ORED, Finance, IT, FCP and the executive office to expedite the project. The result is the "Be Part of Something Good" campaign to promote the voucher program. The amount of admin fees OHA receives and continued funding for the vouchers is tied to how fast we can lease the vouchers and requires families remain stably housed—which will require long term efforts of all teams working together.

Leased Housing has received over 100 referrals from Coordinated Entry and is working through the steps to determine eligibility, inspect units and recruit new units from existing owners. To help facilitate and support these families, the team created new owner and tenant incentives. FCP will be distributing awards to tenants that lease by a certain date, pay rent on time and reach their first lease anniversary, while introducing their plethora of services to support these families. Finance and IT have been working to modify YARDI and set up the accounts and processes to track these new vouchers and the funding associated with them and help

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measure the utilization through dashboard reports. PIC and ORED are helping with project management, documentation and determining new workflows. All are working with the end goal to lease the new vouchers as quickly as possible to help some of Oakland's most vulnerable families, under the program's lead, Julie Christiansen from PIC.

This program provides a lifeline that will make a significant impact in addressing the needs of the unhoused population in Oakland.

## Employee Assistance Program

As we work through the many challenges we are facing in our home and professional spaces, individually and collectively, we may forget there is help out there if we need it. OHA offers 24/7 assistance through LifeWorks. From mental health to financial planning to childcare referrals and so much more, LifeWorks is a reliable source of free information, as well as free or discounted services.



## Travel During the Coronavirus Pandemic

This article ran in the last issue of Direct To You, but wanted to share it again, in case you have plans to travel over the holiday weekend...

With Labor Day just around the corner, many of us plan to travel as we take advantage of the final days of the summer season. But with the ongoing health crisis, there are some steps you can take to keep yourself safe and limit exposing others in your workplace and community to COVID-19 or its variants. Take the time to review the information and links below before you travel by car, rail or air.



**REMEMBER: if you have reasonable suspicion that you have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 or if you are experiencing symptoms of fever (100.4 Fahrenheit or higher), coughing, or shortness of breath, do not report to work. Immediately contact your primary care provider and then your supervisor for instructions on what you need to do next. If you have any questions regarding your schedule, please contact your supervisor or Director. If you have questions in regards to pay or leave time, please contact Human Resources at (510) 874-1575.**

## Direct From Me

Messages from OHA Employees to Leadership



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