

**PRESS RELEASE**  
**For Immediate Release**

**Contacts:**

Alison Foreman - Executive Director Ypsilanti Meals (Phone: 734-217-4453 or email [info@ymow.org](mailto:info@ymow.org))

Pam Smith, CEO United Way of Washtenaw County [psmith@uwwashtenaw.org](mailto:psmith@uwwashtenaw.org)

Beth Ann Hamilton, Communications Coordinator, Washtenaw County Health Department, [hamiltone@washtenaw.org](mailto:hamiltone@washtenaw.org)

Eileen Spring, CEO Food Gatherers, [eileen@foodgatherers.org](mailto:eileen@foodgatherers.org)

**Four Washtenaw County Organizations Receive  
Rapid Response Initiative Grants To Address Racial Disparities**

October 21, 2020; Four Washtenaw County organizations received Rapid Response Initiative Grants from the Michigan Coronavirus Task Force on Racial Disparities. The applications will allow the organizations to continue to respond to community needs associated with the disparate impacts COVID-19 has had on communities of color. Together, the United Way of Washtenaw County, Ypsilanti Meals on Wheels, Food Gatherers and the Washtenaw County Health Department (WCHD) received over \$1,000,000 in funds from a competitive grant cycle.

“Working collaboratively throughout the pandemic with an equity lens has led to the additional support from MPHI to address the racial and health inequities that persist in our community,” noted Pam Smith of United Way of Washtenaw County.

United Way of Washtenaw County (UWWC) received a \$500,000 grant to support the established COVID-19 Community Recovery Fund, meant to provide ongoing support to local human service nonprofits, community groups and UWWC. Prioritizing response efforts that address racial inequity remains a central tenant in United Way’s response efforts. This work includes meeting basic needs, focusing on financial stability, and supporting K-12 educational needs.

“The Washtenaw County Health Department received \$248,000 to expand the department’s ability to engage with marginalized communities through increasing access to pop-up testing and flu vaccine clinics, and “through the integration of trained Community Health Workers,” says Jimena Loveluck, MSW, Health Officer at WCHD. “A particular focus is African American and Latinx communities and people living in the 48197/48198 zip codes.COVID-19 has had a significant impact on our communities of color and in the Ypsilanti area, and we are delighted to have more support to address this.”

Ypsilanti Meals on Wheels will use its \$144,600 in Rapid Response funding to meet the increased needs of our community’s Under-60 homebound population. The wait list for service among this age group grew from 4 to 38 in the months following the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. A grant-funded social worker will assist eligible Under-60 clients in obtaining Medicaid and other support services. The funds will also be used to support the installation of fire alarms and carbon monoxide detectors in clients’ homes. Alison Foreman, the Executive Director of Ypsilanti Meals on Wheels, commented, “the needs are so great, and during the Stay At Home orders many of our most vulnerable had difficulty getting their basic needs met.”

Food Gatherers, the food bank and rescue organization serving Washtenaw County, leads and provides free food to a network of more than 170 hunger relief providers. Their \$150,000 grant will help underwrite costs associated with providing meals to people experiencing homelessness and for grocery distributions to neighborhoods most impacted by COVID-19. “Since the pandemic began, requests for food assistance have increased by as much as 300% at some food pantries” noted Eileen Spring, Executive Director of Food Gatherers.

Alice Asberry Payne, Washtenaw County Racial Equity Officer and a member of the Michigan Coronavirus Task Force on Racial Disparities Community Action Team, commented “The \$1M coming to Washtenaw County means that we can continue to stand up testing, expand contact tracing and provide families with other essential needs. The funding ultimately means reducing cases across our county and among our most vulnerable populations, ensuring our response to the pandemic centers equity. And at the state level and locally, that is and has always been the goal.” The Michigan Coronavirus Task Force on Racial Disparities was appointed by Governor Whitmer and is chaired by Lieutenant Governor Garlin Gilchrist.

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