



# RECOMMENDATIONS TO MITIGATE THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE HOUSING SECTOR



Between **May - October 2020**, NVAHA conducted **a series of 3 surveys** assessing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the operations, staff and clients of **35** affordable housing developers and homeless and other human service providers in the Northern Virginia region. In **November - December 2020**, NVAHA partnered with the Northern Virginia Apartment Association to survey owners of small, market-affordable properties in our region regarding the impact of the pandemic on their businesses and tenants. The recommendations below are based on the findings from these surveys.

## 1. ADDRESS BARRIERS TO RENTAL ASSISTANCE

We commend state and local policy makers for rapidly standing up and continually working to improve rental assistance programs to protect **thousands of households** across the Commonwealth from eviction for non-payment of rent. However, steps must be taken to ensure **ALL** residents can access support, including: **simplifying application processes & eligibility requirements**, **increasing staff capacity** at state and local call centers, and ensuring outreach and application **materials are available in a variety of languages and formats**. Assistance is also needed for expenses other than back rent, including **security deposits**, **first month's rent** and **application fees** (to help reduce vacancy rates), and **legal fees** and **court costs** for households that must go to court to avoid displacement during the pandemic.



## 2. PROVIDE TAX RELIEF

Jurisdictions should consider temporary real estate tax relief for owners of committed and market affordable properties to offset the financial effects of the pandemic, including **lost rental revenue**, **increased vacancy rates** and **increased cleaning and safety-related expenses**.



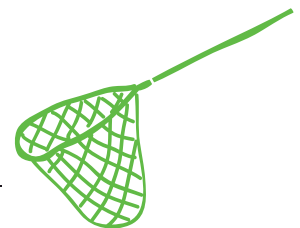
## 3. CREATE REGIONAL ACQUISITION FUNDS

Jurisdictions should stand-up a **regional acquisition fund** to purchase and **preserve at-risk market affordable housing**. Due to the financial impact of the pandemic, these opportunities are likely to arise in the coming months, but non-profit, mission-driven developers are not well-positioned to capitalize on such opportunities.



## 4. STRENGTHEN SOCIAL SAFETY NETS

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed many holes in our nation's social safety net. In Northern Virginia, families are worried about meeting their basic needs, and non-profit organizations have stepped up to meet an unprecedented demand for services. **71.43%** of the organizations we surveyed indicated that the aid funding they received was **not sufficient** to mitigate the **long-term financial impact** of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additional funding should be allocated to ensure the financial future of these organizations, which are vital to the stability of our region.



## 5. REDEFINE "ESSENTIAL" SERVICES

Beyond housing, food and health care - the pandemic has demonstrated the essential nature of access to **affordable child care**, and access to **broadband & appropriate devices** with which to engage in telework, e-learning and tele-health appointments, and to complete employment and aid applications. These services are necessary for households to survive and thrive during the pandemic and beyond. Jurisdictions must take steps to ensure equitable access to these resources for households across our region.

