

# Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Recovery Plan

# State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds 2022 Report

# COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANAS ISLANDS 2022 Recovery Plan

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#### **GENERAL OVERVIEW**

#### **Executive Summary**

The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) is a remote US territory in the Western Pacific whose economy is solely dependent on East Asian countries for tourism. The tourism industry is the major contributing factor of the CNMI's economic base. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has designated and classified all municipalities of the CNMI as Nonmetropolitan Difficult Development Areas, "an area which has high construction, land, and utility costs relative to area median gross income." With the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, the CNMI was negatively impacted socially and economically. East Asian countries have adopted COVID-19 rules and regulations that have made tourism travel difficult in small numbers. The tourism industry employs and supports the majority of the CNMI's population. Through the course of the pandemic, most of these businesses have either suspended or closed their establishments leading to furloughs of most of our population. Currently, a large number of local families have survived on Federal aid and family members that are employed with the CNMI government. With funding assistance provided through our federal partners with the recent passage of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA), the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (CSLFRF) would benefit the CNMI in ways that will provide our islands a clear path towards recovery. The CSLFRF provide substantial flexibility for each government to meet local needs-including support for households, small businesses, impacted industries, essential workers, and the communities hardest hit by the crisis. These funds can also be used to make necessary investments in water, sewer, and broadband infrastructure. As a US territory, the CNMI was allocated a total of \$481,876,521 with broad flexibility to decide how best to use this funding to meet the needs of their communities. The CNMI plans to use the fiscal recovery funding for the following categories based on Section 602 of the Act:

(A) To respond to the public health emergency with respect to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID–19) and its negative economic impacts, including assistance to households, small businesses, and non-profits, and aid to impacted industries such as tourism, travel, and hospitality.

B) To respond to workers performing essential work during the COVID–19 public health emergency by providing premium pay to eligible workers of the territory that are performing such essential work, and by providing grants to eligible employers that have eligible workers who perform essential work.

(C) For the provision of government services to the extent of the reduction in revenue of the territory due to the COVID–19 public health emergency relative to revenues collected in the most recent full fiscal year of the territory prior to the emergency.

(D) To make necessary investments in water, sewer, and broadband infrastructure.

Figure 1 below illustrates the CNMI's plans for spending the CSLFRF under each indicated category to date.

#### Figure 1: Spending Plan Allocations To Date



# **ALLOCATIONS TO DATE**

#### **Uses of Funds**

The CNMI is committed to using these funds in an effort to provide for a strong, equitable, economic and inclusive recovery that would meet the needs of our islands and their communities. In consultations with Governor Ralph DLG. Torres, the administration has provided its version of the ARPA Spending Plan on June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021 that was presented by the Secretary of Finance to members of all branches of the CNMI government, autonomous agencies, and media organizations who were present as part of our island's guiding principles. In order to maximize our programmatic impact, distribution and expenditure of these funds based on these principles to address areas significantly impacted by the pandemic and the needs of each islands' communities. Below are the following Intended Use of the Funds:

#### Intended Use of Funds

To date, the CNMI allocated the following funds for each section as indicated:

A. \$100 Million allocated to respond to the public health emergency with respect to COVID– 19 and its negative economic impacts, including assistance to households, small businesses, and nonprofits, or aid to impacted industries such as tourism, travel, and hospitality. The intention of these funding allocations will be to fund vaccine incentive programs, create programs to help small businesses, and provide direct assistance to nonprofits, travel, tourism, and hospitality industries.

Households
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Small Businesses	\$10,000,000
Nonprofits	\$10,000,000
Tourism, Travel and Hospitality	\$49,000,000

B. \$30 Million allocated to respond to workers performing essential work during the COVID– 19 public health emergency by providing premium pay to eligible workers of the CNMI that are performing such essential work, and by providing grants to eligible employers that have eligible workers who perform essential work.

To recover government costs for the premium pay extended to first responders performing essential work in responding to the public health emergency in FY 2021	\$25,500,000
To make grants available to private companies responding to the public health emergency partnering with the government performing essential work during the COVID-19 public health emergency	\$4,500,000

C. \$250 Million allocated for the provision of government services to the extent of the reduction in revenue of the CNMI due to the COVID–19 public health emergency relative to revenues collected in Fiscal Year 2019.

\$48,750,000
\$52,050,000
\$3,300,000
\$7,650,000
\$20,000,000
\$15,000,000
\$42,000,000
\$25,000,000
\$15,000,000

government such as applying for new or renewal of business licenses, drivers and boat operators license, vehicle and boat registration, application for zoning permits, paying for fines and citations, building code permits, fire code permits, and other licenses and fees	
To make funding available for government land taking for public access	\$21,250,000

D. \$101.9 Million allocated to make necessary investments in water, sewer, or broadband infrastructure.

Upgrade of communications infrastructure (towers, repeaters, etc.).	\$11,000,000
To make funding available for the repair of the water distribution.	\$21,000,000
Water catchment systems for the inhabited islands of Pagan, Alamagan, and Agrihan.	\$1,000,000
To make funding available for an Enterprise Resource Program and Cybersecurity systems.	\$10,000,000
To make funding available for the construction of sewer systems.	\$37,730,250
Land Compensation for expansion of water and wastewater systems.	\$20,146,271

# Actual Use of Funds

# Table of Expenses by Expenditure Category

Expenditure Category	EC28	Previous EC <sup>29</sup>	Cumulative expenditures to date (\$)	Amount spent since last Recovery Plan
1: Public Health				
COVID-19 Mitigation & Prevention				
COVID-19 Vaccination <sup>^</sup>	1.1	1.1	100,000	100,000
COVID-19 Testing <sup>^</sup>	1.2	1.2	1,200,038	1,200,038
Other COVID-19 Public Health Expenses (including Communications, Enforcement, Isolation/Quarantine) ^	1.7	1.8	4,196,971	4,196,971
2: Negative Economic Impacts				
Assistance to Households				
Household Assistance: Rent, Mortgage, and Utility Aid*^	2.2	2.2	7,500,000	7,500,000
Household Assistance: Cash Transfers*^	2.3	2.3	47,173,967	47,173,967

Assistance to Non-Profits				
Assistance to Impacted Nonprofit Organizations (Impacted or Disproportionately Impacted) ^	2.34	2.10	2,145,814	2,068,492
Aid to Impacted Industries				
Aid to Tourism, Travel, or Hospitality^	2.35	2.11	18,032,681	17,577,923
4: Premium Pay	I			
Public Sector Employees	4.1	4.1	23,958,493	21,958,493
Private Sector: Grants to Other Employers	4.2	4.2	1,010,912	1,010,912
5: Infrastructure				
Water and Sewer				
Water and Sewer: Other	5.18	-	9,102,664	9,102,664
6: Revenue Replacement				
Provision of Government Services	6.1	6.1	125,512,058	121,611,474

# Other Federal Recovery Funds under ARPA to Date

- The Commonwealth COVID-19 Emergency Rental Assistance (CCERA) received funding to continue providing assistance to qualifying individuals in the CNMI with rental, utilities, and other expenses related to housing incurred directly or indirectly due to COVID-19.
- The CNMI Public School System received funding that will enable them to quickly and safely reopen schools for full-time, in-person learning; meet students' academic, social, emotional, and mental health needs; and address disparities in access to educational opportunity that were exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic.
- The CNMI Nutrition Assistance Program received funding for the Pandemic EBT Program to
  provide reimbursements to eligible students to replace the cost of meals students would have
  received at school if not for the lack of in-person instruction or due to school closures during
  the 2020-2021 school year. P-EBT benefits are coupon benefits that are redeemable just as
  how NAP coupons are redeemed at NAP authorized retailers and vendors.

# **Promoting Equitable Outcomes**

Fun Fact: On November 3, 1986, President Ronald Reagan issued Proclamation 5564 granting the people of the CNMI its status as US Citizens.

Although the CNMI territory is an underserved/disadvantaged community, the CNMI government is committed to promoting equity in applying funds across all allowable use areas. The CNMI is a small community of 53,883 people as of the 2010 census. These programs are regularly advertised and discussed in the local news, social media outlets, and among the community.

Information on the intended use of funds was publicly presented and will continue to incorporate public input to benefit our local community.

Various projects from the use of funding include water and wastewater projects that will continue to provide essential services to the community, broadband projects to the benefit of all citizens to address impacts of the pandemic, funding assistance to non-profits for continued operations, direct financial assistance to households (food, housing, and other needs), assistance to impacted industries (such as fishing, farming, and the tourism sector), provide premium pay to our frontline workers, and provisions of government services which will allow for government operations to continue providing its' services to the community as a whole. Although the list above does encompass all the anticipated projects, all citizens will be given unfettered access to the benefits of the completed outcome. As the intent is to close gaps and reach universal levels of service, the CNMI remains committed to providing the community with as much assistance and service that is made possible with this new stream of funding.

The CNMI government prioritizes providing to disproportionately impacted communities the services needed to address health disparities and the social determinants of health, build stronger neighborhoods and communities (e.g., affordable housing), address educational disparities (e.g., online class, community schools, and academic, social-emotional, and mental health supports for high poverty schools), and promote healthy childhood environments (e.g., child care).

The COVID pandemic has caused great harm and widespread panic throughout the CNMI community, with the neighboring municipal islands of Tinian and Rota being hit the hardest as the funds for these island's municipalities will be used to help with their impacted industries. State level lockdowns were implemented, and curfew hours were enforced to curtail the pandemic forcing government shutdowns and business closures for months, in an effort to address health disparities and build a stronger neighborhood and community. Aside from the main hospital on island and private clinics, vaccine distributions have now been offered in various youth centers throughout the municipalities, and currently are now being offered and distributed in public schools in an effort to cater to our youths (12yr & above). Just recently, a campaign ad was created by the Public School System (PSS) about the importance of getting vaccinated for our youths and following the CDC guidelines of the importance of following the 3 W's (wear a mask, wash your hands & watch your distance).

Funding for the programs is targeted to benefit the community as a whole covering the main island of Saipan and neighboring islands of Tinian, Rota and the Northern Islands, with no barriers to a certain race, color or ethnicity.

# **Community Engagement**

The CNMI understands how important it is for our local community to be engaged and to avail of the programs that have been funded by ARPA. Our CNMI population is so diverse with limited English proficiency, that we did not adopt English as our official language until becoming part of the United States until 1985. The CNMI also has Chamorro and Carolinian as its official languages. We are constantly working to serve locally a population that has difficulties with English. Aside from the local population, the CNMI also regularly serves the immigrant population and takes into account their needs and comments.

As of July 31, 2022, Funds have already been invested in programs that will strengthen resources for community support that is vital for aiding the CNMI on its path towards recovery socially and economically in the long term.

One of these programs is the "Road to 80" vaccination campaign initiative, which launched in July and ran through August 27<sup>th</sup>, 2021. The program was created in partnership by government entities and private industry stakeholders in an effort to get the community involved in achieving herd immunity or vaccinating 80% of the adult population with the CNMI's ultimate goal of fighting against the COVID-19 pandemic. In a nutshell, individuals who have been vaccinated in the CNMI will have automatically been entered in the raffle drawing for a chance to win weekly cash prizes to a final grand prize drawing of a 2020 Nissan Rogue SUV on the final day of August 27<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

To programs that aid non-profit organizations such as the American Red Cross chapter of the CNMI, who have been negatively impacted by this pandemic where the organization had lost their funding from canceled fundraising event such as the Walkathon in 2020 and 2021, as well as the Club 200 which have experience a shortfall on fundraising going from in-person event to a virtual event due to this pandemic.

As well as other programs that include funding for operations to aid Tourism, Travel & Hospitality such as the CNMI's hosting of the Northern Marianas Pacific Mini Games for sports tourism industry to programs such as the Travel Investment Resumption Plan (TRIP) for operations in an effort to create a tourism travel bubble with South Korea and Japan to resume the CNMI lone revenue generating industry – Tourism & Travel.

# **Labor Practices**

The CNMI has awarded the Commonwealth Utilities Corporation (CUC) through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding assistance for investing in water and wastewater projects. Wastewater related infrastructure projects include investments to prevent aging and the collapse of sewer pipelines, reduce oil contaminants in the wastewater equipment, and increase response time to urgent customer related issues. CUC has also been able to extend water service lines to areas on the island, servicing customers who may not be able to pay for lengthy waterlines and laterals, as well as improvements to water storage facilities and units.

With the increase in such infrastructure projects, CUC has participated in hiring qualified professionals and staff internally to streamline the success of these projects. All these positions are advertised internally on their local website to encourage hiring of local citizens. For specialized positions such as engineers, these were advertised internally, locally, and nationally through channels including the American Water Works Association and the Water Environment Association. After more than eight months of active recruiting for engineers, CUC did not receive any qualified applications. Considering the extremely competitive market for positions such as professional engineers, CUC needed to reduce requirements for these positions, which resulted in the submission of multiple applications.

# Use of Evidence

The CNMI is in the process of reviewing the requirements of reporting on evidence-based interventions. Where appropriate, the CNMI may use program evaluations or evidence-based reporting to demonstrate the effectiveness of the approved programs funded with ARPA SLFRF.

Future versions of this Recovery Plan will include specific approaches for each program where appropriate and the CNMI looks forward to robust programmatic reporting and evaluation.

# **PROJECT INVENTORY**

# EC 1: Public Health

Project 8899210033: Road to 80 Vaccination Campaign

Funding amount: \$100,000

Project Expenditure Category: 1.1 COVID-19 Vaccination

# Status: Complete

# Project Overview

- A campaign launched to motivate CNMI residents who have not received their vaccinations to get their vaccinations by offering different incentives. The goal of the campaign is to help the CNMI get to herd immunity (80% of population fully vaccinated). An increase in vaccination sites was implemented to ensure all residents of the CNMI have easy access to these sites. All residents were eligible to receive the different prizes and incentives.
- Outputs:
  - Increased vaccination sites
  - Prizes and incentives
  - Awareness through social media and advertisements
- Outcomes:
  - Herd Immunity Goal Reached
  - 10% increase in vaccination because of the incentive
  - 80% of CNMI population vaccinated
  - 4,512 residents received their full vaccinations

# Project 8899210033: Community Based and Airport Arrival Testing

# Funding amount: \$1,200,038

# Project Expenditure Category: 1.2 COVID-19 Testing

# Status: Ongoing

- Costs incurred for community-based testing and airport arrival testing as a surveillance tool to help the CNMI COVID-19 Task Force and the Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation (CHCC) detect and contain the SARS-COV2 virus, the virus that causes COVID-19, within the CNMI. Such testing helped experts understand how widespread the virus is in the community and identified people who may be infected with the virus, especially those who may be pre-symptomatic or asymptomatic, in order to direct these people to the appropriate care, contain the virus, and prevent its spread using tools such as quarantine, isolation, and contact tracing.
- Outcomes:
  - Mitigate spread of the virus
  - Reduce risk of "immune compromised" individuals from contracting the virus

# Project AR88990004: COVID-19 Government Shutdown

#### Funding amount: \$1,737,975

<u>Project Expenditure Category</u>: 1.7 Other COVID-19 Public Health Expenses (including Communications, Enforcement, Isolation/Quarantine)

#### Status: Complete

#### Project Overview

- Costs of government workers isolating themselves at home to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 during the spike. Due to the sudden rises of positive community cases in the CNMI as a result of the COVID-19 public health emergency, the government limited services to limit contact through person-to-person interactions to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.
- Outcomes:
  - Mitigate spread of the virus
  - Limit person-to-person contact

# Project 8899210033: Pandemic Mitigation Platform (Safe Travel Marianas)

#### Funding amount: \$960,000

<u>Project Expenditure Category</u>: 1.7 Other COVID-19 Public Health Expenses (including Communications, Enforcement, Isolation/Quarantine)

#### Status: Ongoing

# Project Overview

- A web and mobile application (iOS and Android) that enables contact tracing by alerting travelers if they have come into close contact with COVID-19 cases declared by local government units under suspect, probable and confirmed cases. A person in close contact with someone who is infected with COVID-19 are at higher risk of becoming infected themselves, and of potentially infecting others. Closely watching these contacts after exposure to an infected person will help the contacts to get care and treatment, and will prevent further transmission of the virus
- Outputs:
  - Advanced contact tracing
  - Health condition reporting
  - Case management modules
  - Social distancing system
- Outcomes:
  - Mitigate spread of the virus through the advanced contact tracing, health condition reporting, case management modules, and social distancing system, to be customized for travelers

Project 8899210033: Emergency Response

#### Funding amount: \$163,996

<u>Project Expenditure Category</u>: 1.7 Other COVID-19 Public Health Expenses (including Communications, Enforcement, Isolation/Quarantine)

# Status: Ongoing

# Project Overview

- Purchase of emergency response vehicles to serve the CNMI by meeting the daily demands of the CNMI COVID-19 Taskforce such as the need for personnel, equipment, specimens, and personal protective equipment (PPE) to be transported to multiple locations daily to ensure the safety of personnel and the public. In more detail, such vehicles are being used to transport COVID-19 test kits, operational supplies, medical supplies, trauma bags, firefighting gear, medical kits, and more importantly used for contact tracing, transporting Emergency Medical Technicians that are trained and certified with
- Outcomes:
  - Mitigating spread of the virus through the advanced contact tracing and
  - Ensuring safety of the public through emergency response

# Project 8899210033: COVID-19 Careforce (CCF)

#### Funding amount: \$1,335,000

<u>Project Expenditure Category</u>: 1.7 Other COVID-19 Public Health Expenses (including Communications, Enforcement, Isolation/Quarantine)

# Status: Ongoing

#### Project Overview

- An outreach endeavor to bring testing, prevention, and inoculation to the residents of the CNMI. The CCF team will provide test kits, PPEs, trained and licensed clinicians who will be able to provide vaccination and booster shots, as well as offer assistance in the way of food supplies, water, and wheelchairs to give mobility to those who are not ambulatory. The program is also intended to provide education and resources to the underserved and impoverished residents, some of whom do not have transportation to acquire PPEs or vaccinations.
- Outcomes:
  - Provide PPEs, testing, and vaccinations to underserved communities
  - Mitigate spread of the virus

# **EC 2: Negative Economic Impacts**

# Project 8899210030: CNMI Utility Stimulus

Funding amount: \$7,500,000

Project Expenditure Category: 2.2 Household Assistance: Rent, Mortgage, and Utility Aid

Status: Ongoing

# Project Overview

• A program to assist all households with their utility bills due to the financial impact caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The CNMI provided utility assistance funding to the Commonwealth Utilities Corporation that provided a \$500.00 stimulus credit to all residential utility accounts.

- Outputs:
  - Apply \$500 utility credit to residential accounts
- Outcomes:
  - Provide financial relief to CNMI residents

Project 8899210030: CNMI Local Stimulus

Funding amount: \$47,173,967

Project Expenditure Category: 2.3 Household Assistance: Cash Transfers

# Status: Ongoing

# Project Overview

- A program to assist all CNMI families with financial hardships experienced due to the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Administered through the CNMI Department of Finance Division of Revenue and Taxation, two rounds of \$500 stimulus were distributed to all CNMI taxpayers and their dependents via prepaid debit card to promote spending these stimulus funds within the CNMI.
- Outputs:
  - \$500 stimulus per taxpayer and dependent
- Outcomes:
  - Provide financial relief to CNMI families

# Project 8899210004: Nonprofit Organizations Assistance

# Funding amount: \$2,145,814

<u>Project Expenditure Category</u>: 2.34 Assistance to Impacted Nonprofit Organizations (Impacted or Disproportionately Impacted)

# Status: Ongoing

# Project Overview

- A program to assist eligible non-profit organizations that have experienced financial hardship due to the negative economic impacts caused by the public health emergency, COVID-19. Funds awarded are intended to support operational costs to continue to provide vital services and annual programs that benefit communities across the islands, as many non-profits were unable to raise enough funds or experienced a significant reduction in donations due to the pandemic.
- Outcomes:
  - Nonprofit organizations recovering losses due to the pandemic
  - Nonprofit organizations continuation of operations

Project 8813210002: Tourism Resumption and Investment Plan (TRIP)

Funding amount: \$10,569,830

Project Expenditure Category: 2.35 Aid to Tourism, Travel, or Hospitality

Status: Ongoing

- A program administered by Marianas Visitors Authority (MVA) to provide incentives to stimulate economic recovery through the revitalization of the tourism industry, restoration of travelers' confidence in travelling to the CNMI, and increased overall destination exposure.
- Outputs:
  - Tourist incentives
  - Airline Incentives
- Outcomes:
  - To resume tourism industry
  - Generate local revenue

# Project 8899210023: Northern Marianas Pacific Mini Games

# Funding amount: \$5,262,851

Project Expenditure Category: 2.35 Aid to Tourism, Travel, or Hospitality

# Status: Ongoing

# Project Overview

- A program to provide sports tourism opportunities to the CNMI, where the tourism industry
  was significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. With the effects of the public health
  emergency, COVID-19, on the CNMI's tourism industry, this funding aims to support the
  pacific games in attracting tourists to the CNMI, a vaccinated tourism destination, to watch
  these games whilst spending money within CNMI, sparking local economic activity.
- Outputs:
  - Hosting of Northern Marianas Pacific Mini Games
- Outcomes:
  - To resume tourism industry
  - Generate local revenue

Project 8899210032: Saipan International Airport

Funding amount: \$2,200,000

Project Expenditure Category: 2.35 Aid to Tourism, Travel, or Hospitality

Status: Ongoing

- A program to assist the Saipan International Airport in continuing operations. Due to the negative effects caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, such as the drastic decline in passenger traffic, the Commonwealth Ports Authority (CPA) experienced a substantial decline in revenues, resulting to actions such as cutting employee working hours. The CNMI awarded CPA funds to fully restore employee hours to be readily able to maintain, develop, operate, and manage the ports during all efforts to restore affected industries such as tourism.
- Outcomes:
  - Continued operations
  - Fully restore CPA employee working hours

# EC 4: Premium Pay

Project 8899210034: Public Sector Premium Pay

Funding amount: \$23,958,493

Project Expenditure Category: 4.1 Public Sector Employees

Status: Ongoing

# Project Overview

- To provide public sector employees including CNMI Central Government Employees as well as autonomous agency employees with premium pay for essential services provided throughout the pandemic period beginning March of 2020 with cutoff being September of 2021.
- Outcomes:
  - To provide premium pay to public sector employees

Project AR88990003: Healthcare Sector Premium Pay

Funding amount: \$1,010,912

Project Expenditure Category: 4.2 Private Sector: Grants to Other Employers

# Status: Ongoing

# Project Overview

- To provide private sector employees deemed by the Governor of the CNMI as essential, such as private healthcare providers and pharmacies, with premium pay for essential services provided throughout the pandemic period beginning March of 2020.
- Outcomes:
  - To provide premium pay to healthcare sector employees

# EC 5: Infrastructure

Project 8899210003/28: Water and Wastewater Infrastructure

Funding amount: \$9,102,664

Project Expenditure Category: 5.18 Water and Sewer: Other

Status: Ongoing

- Programs awarded to the Commonwealth Utilities Corporation (CUC) to make necessary repairs, upgrades, and investments in water and sewer infrastructure. High priority projects are awarded to ensure the safety of distributing water to the public, as well as the necessary treatment of wastewater.
- Outcomes:
  - Investments to improve water and wastewater services to residents of the CNMI

# **EC 5: Revenue Replacement**

Project MI210001: Provisions of Government Services

Funding amount: \$125,512,058

Project Expenditure Category: 4.1 Public Sector Employees

Status: Ongoing

Project Overview

- To provide funding up to the amount of revenue loss experienced by the CNMI government due to the COVID-19 public health emergency by restoring reduction of hours, reinstating furloughed employees, and supporting all operations that would enable the CNMI government to continue to provide vital services to the general public.
- Outcomes:
  - Continue vital services to the public

Ineligible Activities: Tax Offset Provision

Item	Amount
a. Revenue-reducing Covered Changes	\$ O