

Actions to take in a Financial Crisis

During this time of crisis, the goal of the NeighborWorks Montana Network is to ensure that our communities are equipped with the knowledge and tools they need to remain in their homes and get the support they need to sustain. Please use this guide to help you navigate the uncertainties inherent with this crisis, and don't hesitate to reach out to us if you need help!

FOUR STEPS TO TAKE CONTROL AND HAVE A PLAN

1. Create a Budget: prioritizing needs that must be met first
2. Make a list of all your creditors including their name, contact information, and account number and payment information
3. Plan to contact different service providers and creditors to see if they have assistance or deferral plans in place - many will work with you
4. Research other assistance that might be available in the community to take some of the strain off your finances

Step 1: Create a budget

When your income changes and you have more bills than money, having a budget in place becomes critical. Taking care of your basic needs is your top priority - food, shelter, transportation, etc. These should be the first items you budget for.

This may require hard decisions and looking at your budget to see where you can make temporary cuts (such as memberships, streaming services, eating out, etc.) is the best place to begin. Another great tip when budgeting is to set a grocery budget and plan your shopping/meals accordingly. Meal planning helps you stay on budget, reduces food waste, and can establish good health habits. It will also be critical to ensure you in deciding the best course of action for any relief money that you might receive from the Coronavirus Relief Legislation.

With the Coronavirus Relief Legislation relief money being given, it is critical to have a plan for this money that includes essential needs and savings. It is also important to remember that the crisis does not mean you are able to stop paying your bills.

Recommended article to help clients plan:

- **Consumer Finance:**
 - <https://www.consumerfinance.gov/about-us/blog/protect-yourself-financially-from-impact-of-coronavirus/>

Crisis Budget

Food	You and your family must eat. Begin by meal planning and do an internet search for ways to stretch a food budget, find coupons, and plan inexpensive meals. We have also included a statewide list of food pantries in our resource section.
Shelter	There is a federal hold on evictions in public housing and foreclosures for at least 60-days. Governor Bullock has also issued a state directive suspending termination for rentals, and suspending foreclosures, at least through April 10, 2020. However, this money will come due. If you can make these payments, they should still be a priority. You cannot just stop making your mortgage or rent payment. Work with your landlord or mortgage company. See step two for a page to get you started.
Transportation	You may be able to defer your car payment depending on your lender, contact them directly.
Phone, Email, Video	Communication is key right now! Are you unable to make a payment? Can you schedule a job interview? Can you lower your plan costs by changing plans? Call your service providers directly to see if they are deferring payments, etc. Be sure to watch your email for messages from service providers as well.
Medications	Prescriptions and other health supplies are essential. Do not sacrifice your health during this stressful time. Read http://www.news.sanofi.us/What-to-Do-When-You-Cant-Afford-Your-Chronic-Disease-Medication or https://www.verywellhealth.com/what-to-do-when-you-cant-afford-your-medication-1942844 .
Insurance	Life still happens, do not let your insurance lapse. Call your provider for assistance or possibly less coverage for the short-term to keep yourself protected.
Utilities	Governor Bullock has issued a directive, at least through April 10, 2020, that no electricity, gas, sewage disposal, water, telephone, or internet service may be turned off due to non-payment. Furthermore, no fee or charge for late payment may be billed or collected. However, it is best practice to call your provider to make them aware, as well as take advantage of assistance they may be offering.
Clothing	If you have clothing to wear and can make do for a few months this should be an expense that can be moved to a secondary priority or put on hold all together.
Estimate Bills	If your bills vary month to month, you can look at the last few months of payments and use an average to help set your budget.
Other bills	It is good to evaluate your need for some services during a time of crisis to lessen the burden to your household budget. Are there things you can cut out? Has the directive to stay at home already helped reduce your spending?
<p>TIPS: If you cannot pay all your bills, prioritize by essential services. One technique is a rotation of paying each one as additional funds allow and making your way down the list with a single payment. This is after prioritizing essential needs and consequences of defaulting. Another is to divide any additional income by the number of bills and pay that amount to each. Here are a couple resources for processes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dave Ramsey Article: https://www.daveramsey.com/blog/what-to-do-when-you-cant-pay-your-bills • CFPB - https://www.consumerfinance.gov/about-us/blog/behind-bills-three-steps-help-you-make-tough-choices-tight-moments/ 	



YOU ARE PROTECTED: Personal and Credit Card Loans should **not** take precedence over shelter and food. The Fair Credit Collection Practices Act protects you from harassment or unethical debt collection practices. You cannot be threatened, subjected to violence or obscene language, they cannot contact you outside of the hours of 8 am and 9 pm, they cannot misrepresent who they are and they cannot contact your work if told verbally or in writing that is not allowed. For more information On Fair Credit Collection visit the FTC [HERE](#).

BEWARE OF SCAMS: Predatory lenders and Scammers will try to take advantage of this time of crisis. Always verify information and double check credibility of credit offers or bailout offers you get. The Federal Trade Commission has [tips to protect yourself from possible coronavirus-related scams](#). The FTC and the Food and Drug Administration have also [cautioned consumers to be on the look-out for sellers of unapproved and misbranded products, claiming they can treat or prevent coronavirus](#). Learn more about how to [prevent, recognize, and report fraud and scams](#).

Be careful of taking on more to credit to solve your problems. High interest loans, payday loans, other options may compound your problems long-term. <https://www.consumerfinance.gov/consumer-tools/payday-loans/> Please follow our steps and work with creditors before taking high interest or payday loans.



Emergency Budget

Income	April	May	June	July	August	September	October
Paycheck							
Unemployment							
Savings withdrawal							
Other sources:							
Total Income							
High Priority Budget Items							
Food (include pet food)							
Shelter (Mortgage/Rent)							
Transportation (payments, gas, maintenance, etc.)							
Phone & Internet							
Medications (Rx and over the counter)							
Utilities (electricity, gas, sewer, garbage, etc.)							
Insurance (home/rental if not part of shelter total)							
Insurance (vehicle)							
Health Insurance (if not part of your paycheck)							
Total							
Remaining (Income minus Total)							
<small>*If remaining balance is negative reach out to creditors, landlord and check 211.org resource listed in additional resources section for help in these areas.</small>							
Other expenses:	April	May	June	July	August	September	October
Household cleaning and paper supplies							
Toiletries							
Medical expenses							
Clothing							
Other							
Total							
Balance (Remaining funds minus other expense total)							
<small>*If balance is negative, go back and create a plan month-by-month to pay what you can when you can.</small>							



Step 2: Create a list of all creditors and their contact information. You will need this in order to effectively take advantage of relief programs and negotiate with lenders.

DO NOT DO NOTHING! CALL YOUR FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS IMMEDIATELY TO SEE HOW THEY CAN HELP YOU!

US Orders Up to a Yearlong Break on Mortgage Payments - On Morning Edition as of 3/27/2020

Homeowners who have lost income or their jobs because of the coronavirus outbreak are getting some relief. Depending on your situation, you should be eligible to have your mortgage payments reduced or suspended for up to 12-months. As of right now Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac are ordering lenders to offer homeowners flexibility. The move covers about half of all home loan in the U.S. – those guaranteed by Fannie and Freddie. But regulators expect that the entire mortgage industry will quickly adopt a similar policy. The forbearance is up to 12-months depending on your situation.

HOMEOWNERS, YOU CAN NOT JUST STOP PAYING YOUR MORTGAGE!!

You must contact your servicer to talk with them and create a payment plan.

Lender/Creditor Contacts

(this list is not exhaustive)

Name	Link to Website	Phone Number
Ally Bank	https://www.ally.com/	Auto: 1-888-925-2559 Bank: 1-877-247-2559 Home: 1-855-256-2559
American Express	https://www.americanexpress.com/	1-800-528-4800
Bank of America	https://www.bankofamerica.com/	1-800-432-1000
Capital One	https://www.capitalone.com/	1-877-383-4802
Chase	https://www.chase.com/	1-800-432-3117
Chrysler Financial	https://chryslercapital.com/	1-855-563-5635
Discover	https://www.discover.com/	1-800-347-2683
First Interstate Bank	https://www.firstinterstatebank.com/	1-855-342-3400
Fannie Mae	fanniemae.com	1-800-232-6643
Freddie Mac	freddiemac.com/about/covid-19	1-800-424-5401
Glacier Bank	https://www.glacierbank.com/	1-800-735-4371
Opportunity Bank	https://www.opportunitybank.com/	1-888-750-2265
Stockman Bank	https://www.stockmanbank.com/	1-877-300-9369
Synchrony Bank	https://www.synchrony.com/	1-866-419-4096
Toyota Financial Services	https://www.toyotafinancial.com/us/en.html	1-800-874-8822
US Bank	https://www.usbank.com/index.html	1-800-872-2657
Wells Fargo	https://www.wellsfargo.com/	1-800-869-3557



My Account Contacts

Type	Company	Phone/ email/ website	Acct Number	Payment Amount
Unemployment	MT Unemployment Insurance Claim Office	(406) 444-2545 uid.dli.mt.gov/claimants		
Mortgage or Rent Payment				
Auto Loan				
Electric				
Gas				
Water/Sewer				
Phone Company				
Internet Service				
TV Service				
Vehicle Insurance				
Home/rental Insurance				
Health Insurance				
Life Insurance				
Credit card				



Step 3: Reach out to Creditors to see if they have assistance or deferment plans you can take advantage of to reduce the pressure and stress of the situation.

1. Be prepared to explain your specific hardship.
 - a. For example, layoff due to slow economy caused by COVID-19 shutdown.
2. Let them know you are following a budget but need their assistance. Ask specifically for what kind of help they may be able to offer.
 - a. For example: Some auto lenders are deferring payments for a few months, adding those payments to the end of the loan. You still must pay them, but not right now. The length of your loan is extended.
3. Be patient. We have found wait times and response times are longer due to high demands.
4. Be kind. These are unique times, and everyone is under additional stress. A little kindness goes a long way to making a conversation more tolerable and productive.
5. Do not commit to a payment plan you are not sure you can meet. You can always thank the lender for their information and help and let them know you will be in contact as you continue to work on things.

Step 4: Research additional sources for relief and aid. Here is a quick list of resources we have put together. This list is not exhaustive, so check these links regularly.

Name	Type of Service	Phone Contact & Website
Montana 211	Statewide source for all kinds of resources and referrals for services	2-1-1 montana211.org
Montana Unemployment	Place a claim for unemployment	(406) 444-2545 uid.dli.mt.gov/claimants
Montana Food Bank	List of statewide local pantries	(406) 720-3825 mfbn.org
Montana Free Financial Help	Help paying heating & utilities	freefinancialhelp.net/montana-heating-and-utility-bill-assistance
Montana Works	Job Service	(406) 444-2840 montanaworks.gov
Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services		dphhs.mt.gov dphhs.mt.gov dphhs.mt.gov/contact/hotlines
Montana Governor's Page	Links to resources in the state.	http://governor.mt.gov/
NeighborWorks Montana	This is our info!	Email: info@nwmmt.org Phone: (406) 604-4540 Website: nwmmt.org Facebook: facebook.com/NeighborWorksMT



United Way	There are several counties that have a United Way offices.	unitedway.org/local/united-states/montana
Montana Suicide Prevention Lifeline	You are not alone!	1-800-273-8255 dphhs.mt.gov/suicideprevention/suicideresources
USDA Rural Development COVID-19	Available Resources	www.rd.usda.gov/coronavirus
HUD	Communications, guidelines and resources	(202) 708-1112 hud.gov/states/coronavirus
NCSHA	Summary of Federal Coronavirus Relief Legislation and what is included.	Relief Legislation
Centers for Disease Control		1-800-232-4636 cdc.gov
Ready.gov	Disaster preparedness related to the pandemic	https://www.ready.gov/pandemic
HOPE Inside Disaster	Help resources	https://www.hopeinsidecovid19.org/recovery#scroll-Get-Connected
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services		1-877-696-6775 hhs.gov
Help with Bills	National resource for finding help paying bills	1-844-872-4681 usa.gov/help-with-bills

NWMT Statewide Network:

Our housing counselors can offer guidance. If possible, please complete steps one thru three before you call us for assistance so we can better meet your needs. With many of us working from home, emails have been listed as the best form of initial contact.

Location	Organization Name	Housing Counselor
Billings	The Home Center	Carrie Sharp csharp@hrdc7.org
Bozeman	Homeownership Center HRDC 9	Roselle Shallah rshallah@hrdc9.org
Browning	Blackfeet Housing Authority	Mike LaMere, Sr. mlamere@blackfeethousing.org
Butte	Headwaters RC&D	Courtney Loeffler cedwards@headwatersrcd.org
Great Falls	NeighborWorks Great Falls	Rosie Kiernan rkiernan@nwgf.org



Hamilton	Bitter Root RC&D	Sara Briggs sabbriggs10@gmail.com
Havre	HRDC 4	Alma Garcia garciaa@hrdc4.org
Helena	Rocky Mountain Development Council	Beverly Dashnaw bdashnaw@rmdc.net
Kalispell	Community Action Partnership of NW Montana	Naomi Valentine nvalentine@capnwmt.org
Lame Deer	Northern Cheyenne Housing Authority	Rachael Two-Two rtwotwo@gmail.com
Lewistown	Snowy Mountain Development Corporation	Diane Pennell pennell@snowymountaindevelopment.com
Missoula	Homeword	Julie Pavlish jpavlish@homeword.org
Missoula	Human Resource Council	Eric Childress hrcxi@montana.org
Ronan	Salish & Kootenai Housing Authority	Kyle Hendrickx khendrickx@skha.org
Wolf Point	Great Northern Development Corporation	Brianna Vine brianna@gndc.org

We hope these resources help you find the assistance you may need. We want you to know that you are not in this alone. NeighborWorks Montana is committed to providing resources and education to help you during this time. Visit nwmt.org to learn more about our services.