

Reach Up Emergency Rental Assistance: FAQs for Tenants

The Department for Children and Families (DCF) has federal stimulus funds to help most Reach Up households pay their current rent, back rent (*arrears*), and security deposits.

Who is eligible?

To be eligible, you must:

1. Live in Vermont and have to pay rent.
2. Be enrolled in Reach Up, Reach First, Reach Ahead, Reach Up SSI, or PSE.
3. Have household income at or below 80% of [Area Median Income \(AMI\)](#).
4. Have at least one household member who experienced financial hardship due, directly or indirectly, to the Covid-19 pandemic (e.g., qualified for unemployment, had increased expenses).

You are not eligible for this assistance if the only Reach Up benefit you get is a Child-Only Caretaker Grant.

What can be paid? **UPDATED**

- Up to 18 months of rental assistance (*or fewer if the funding ends*).
- Assistance can be a combination of current rent, future rent, and past-due rent (*arrears*) incurred on or after March 13, 2020.
- A security deposit required to secure the unit.

What's the best way to apply?

The best way is using our online application. You'll need an email address, Internet access, and an email address for your landlord/property manager.

If you don't have all the above, email AHS.DCFESDReachUpERA@vermont.gov or contact your Reach Up Case Manager to ask for a paper application or fillable form.

How do I apply online? **UPDATED**

1. Gather the information you'll need to complete the application. It will timeout after 15 minutes of inactivity and you can't save it. You'll need:
 - Your date of birth, Social Security number, and email address.
 - The full names and dates of birth of all other household members.
 - The complete physical address of the place you are renting.
 - The amount of your monthly rent, the amount of past-due rent you'd like us to pay, and the amount of any security deposit you want help paying.
 - Your household's gross monthly income (=income before deductions like taxes).
 - The full name and email address of your landlord/property manager.
2. Complete the online *Tenant Application*.
3. We send you an email telling you if your application has been accepted.

If your application is accepted:

- a. We email a request for information to your landlord/property manager.
- b. Your landlord/property manager completes and submits the *Landlord Certification*.
- c. We notify you once that process is complete.
- d. Reach Up Central Office reviews for final eligibility determination and issues payment if no further verification is needed.

What if I have a disability and need help applying? **NEW**

If you have a physical or mental/learning condition that makes it hard to do the things we ask you to do, we can make changes to help you.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Vermont law say that we must make changes so people with disabilities can get public benefits. These changes are called accommodations.

Here are some examples of changes we can make:

- Someone can write down your answers if you can't.
- We can give you more time or help you get the documents you need to give us.
- You can have a support person with you when you talk to us.
- We can send documents with a larger print so you can read them.
- We can meet with you in your home or by telephone, so you do not have to come into the District Office.

If you need us to make changes so you can get the benefits you need, call the Benefits Service Center at 1-800-479-6151. People who are deaf or hard of hearing can call the statewide relay service at 711.

What if I have a rental obligation that is not to a landlord/property owner?

If you pay rent to someone other than the landlord or property owner (e.g., someone you share an apartment with or rent a room from), you can still apply. However, the property owner will need to complete the Landlord Certification for payments to be approved. We cannot pay another renter.

What if I owe back rent (arrears) to a former landlord/property owner?

Complete a separate application requesting the amount of arrears you want us to pay. You will need to provide the same information above for that rental property.

Remember, we can't pay more than 18 months of total rent. This includes any combination of:

- Current rent
 - Future rent
 - Back rent (*arrears*) owed to a current or former landlord/property owner
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Will my landlord be able to see what I enter on my application?

Your landlord/property manager will only see:

- Your full name
- The physical address of the property you are renting
- Your portion of monthly rent
- Any rent you owe (*arrears*) and have asked us to pay
- Any security deposit you've asked us to pay

They will not see the other personal information on your application.

What if I already receive a housing subsidy?

This assistance can only cover your portion of monthly rent. It cannot take the place of a housing subsidy.

Where is the payment sent?

Payments are sent directly to the landlord/property owner.

When will my landlord/property owner get paid? UPDATED

Applications will be processed in the order they are received. Processing time is usually 30 days from the date the application is approved. This can't happen until all documentation has been received, reviewed, and verified as complete.

The first payment will include any approved arrears and security deposit. Future rent will be paid one month at a time.

Is this taxable?

You will not need to claim money paid to the landlord as income. You will also not be able to claim the assistance paid to the landlord on a renter's rebate claim.

Do I need to have a lease?

Your landlord/property owner will need to submit a lease or rental agreement when completing the Landlord Certification. The rental agreement can be a written declaration stating the renter's name and address, amount of rent, and the name and address of the person rent is paid to.

Can lot rent be covered?

Yes.

Are mortgage payments covered?

No, this is only for people with a rental obligation.

Will this affect my other benefits?

This assistance will not affect any benefits you receive from Reach Up, 3SquaresVT, or Fuel Assistance.

What if I disagree with your decision regarding my application? **NEW**

If you disagree with our decision, you can request a fair hearing with the Human Services Board. If you request a hearing, the Human Services Board will review the facts of your case in a fair and objective manner and decide whether the department's decision should be upheld or reversed.

To request a fair hearing, call the Benefits Service Center at 1-800-479-6151 or the Human Services Board at 1-802-828-2536. You must make the request within 90 days of being notified of the decision you're appealing. And you may ask someone you trust to help you make the request.

Who do I contact if I have questions?

You can speak to your Reach Up case manager or supervisor from the local Reach Up Economic Services District Office. You can also email AHS.DCFESDReachUpERA@vermont.gov.

What other related assistance is available?

- The Vermont Public Service Department has funds to help with utility arrears.
<https://publicservice.vermont.gov/>
 - The Vermont State Housing Authority has funds to help other low-income Vermonters with rent.
<https://www.vsha.org/>
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Where do I complete the online application? **UPDATED**

Go to <https://reachupera.vermont.gov/>.