

Use of the Emergency Housing Program by families receiving Reach Up

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Summary

One in four families who started Reach Up in 2013-2014 had used Vermont's Emergency Housing Program during the year beforehand or went on to use it during their first 2 years of Reach Up assistance.¹ The most common timing of Emergency Housing Program use among the families was during their first year of Reach Up. The median total number of nights of Emergency Housing Program use per family during this 3-year period was 24.

When they started Reach Up, almost all (94%) of the families who subsequently used the Emergency Housing Program were experiencing one of the following housing hardships: (1) lack of independent housing (i.e. such as doubling up or in emergency housing) or (2) paying more than half of their total income to rent a home or room from a private landlord.

After two years in Reach Up, families' housing situations showed improvement both in terms of affordability and housing type. Many moved into publicly-supported housing which limits tenant-paid rent to a more sustainable 30% of family income. Publicly-supported housing is also subject to federal/state housing quality standards.

Fig. 1: Housing conditions at Reach Up start most correlated with subsequent Emergency Housing Program use

| | Families who used Emergency Housing Program in next 2 years as % of all families starting Reach Up |
|--|--|
| No housing costs (i.e. lack of independent housing) | 28% |
| Paying more than half of income for private rental unit | 20% |
| Paying more than half of income to rent private room | 12% |

Families who use Vermont's Emergency Housing Program stay in motels until their housing situation stabilizes. Because this study focused on families who used the Emergency Housing Program, its scope did not identify families who experienced homelessness but used other types of emergency shelter. For this reason, the portion of families who were homeless at some point during the year beforehand or first 2 years after starting Reach Up is higher than the 24% who used the Emergency Housing Program because some families used other forms of emergency shelter. During the December 2015 one-night shelter count, 34 families receiving Reach Up were staying in Vermont's publicly-funded emergency shelters, according to the Vermont Department for Children and Family's Office of Economic Opportunity.

Methodology

This study focused on the 622 families who started Reach Up for the first time in 2013-2014 and continued in the program for at least two years. We relied primarily on data available electronically through the Vermont Department for Children and Families (DCF). Our source of information about use of the Emergency Housing Program was DCF's monthly General Assistance/Emergency Assistance caseload files. Due to the arrangement of data in these

¹ Our study group consisted of all families who started Reach Up for the first time in 2013-2014 and continued in the program for the next two years.

files, we focused on total nights of Emergency Housing Program use by families rather than number of stays or length of stay because many families had stays contiguous with each other.

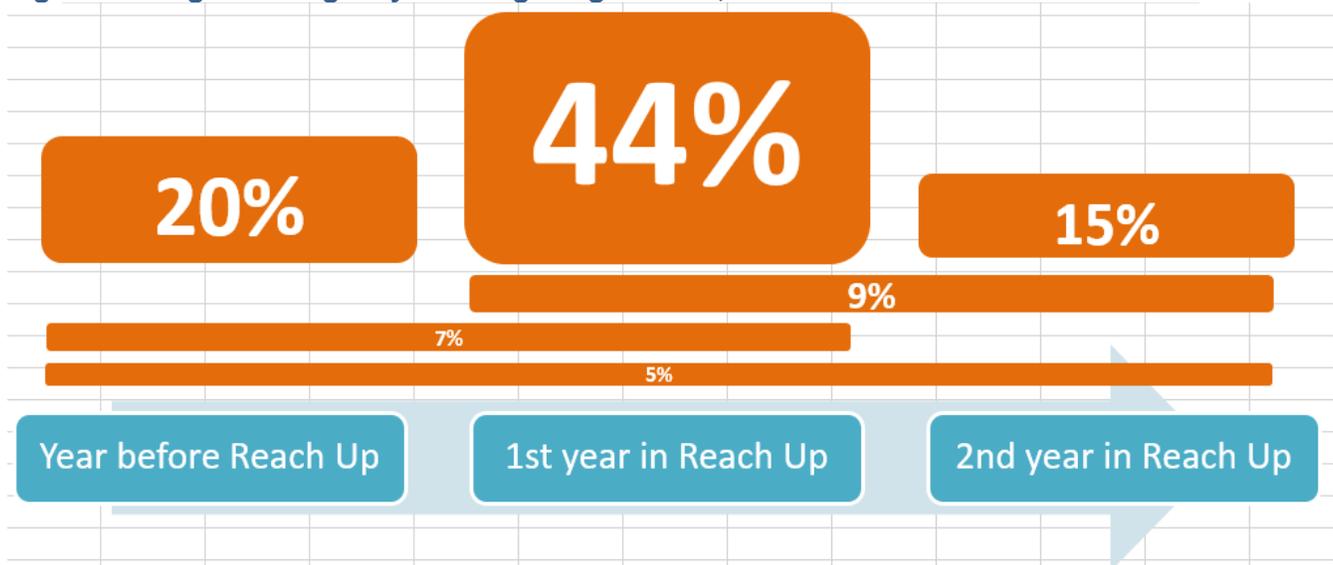
Results

Emergency Housing Program use among families receiving Reach Up

Among the families receiving Reach Up, 24% used DCF’s Emergency Housing Program during the three-year period comprised of the year before starting Reach Up and the first 2 years after starting.

Among this subset of families who used both the Reach Up and Emergency Housing programs, 44% used Emergency Housing during the year immediately following their Reach Up start and not during the year before starting Reach Up or during the second year after starting Reach Up.

Fig. 2: Timing of Emergency Housing Program use, 2012-2016



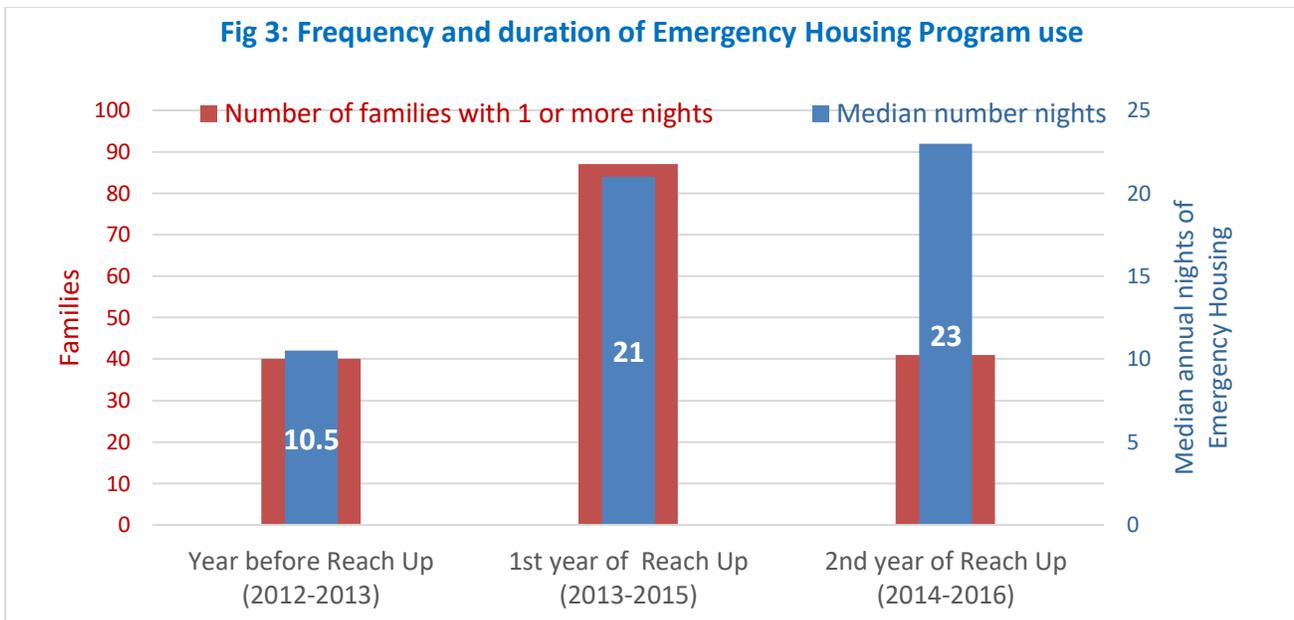
A family is counted as using Emergency Housing during a year if they used the program for one or more nights that year. Not shown are the 1% of families who used Emergency Housing during the year before and the 2nd year after starting Reach Up, but not in the 1st year.

Universe = All 149 families who started Reach Up in 2013-2014, continued assistance for 2 years and used the Emergency Housing Program at some point during the 3-year period (year before and first 2 years after starting Reach Up).

Total nights of Emergency Housing use

Among the families who used Emergency Housing at least once during the 3-year period (the year before starting Reach Up and the first two years in Reach Up), the median total nights of Emergency Housing was 24.

Fig 3: Frequency and duration of Emergency Housing Program use

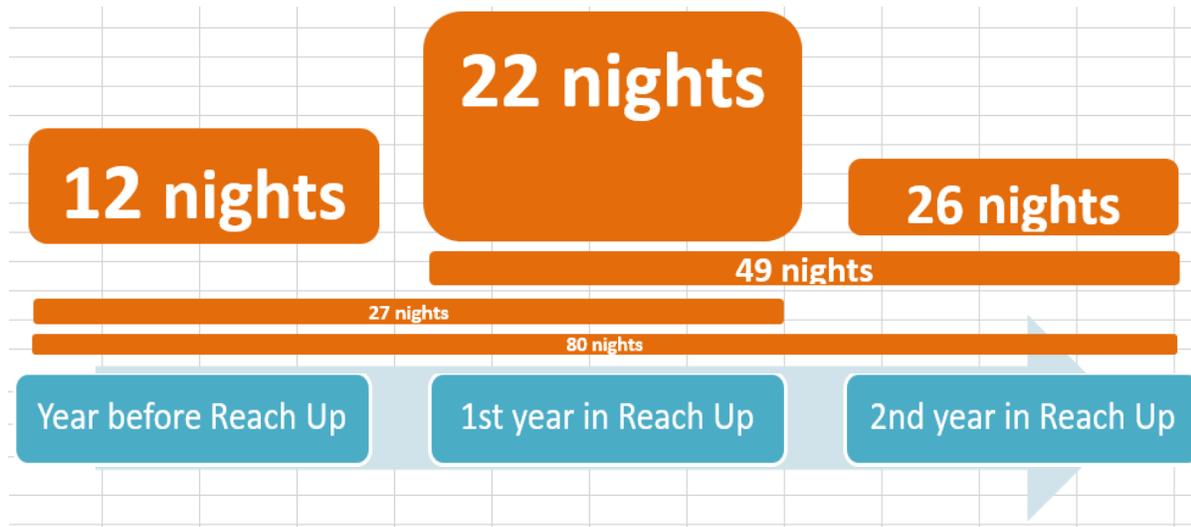


The median nights of Emergency Housing increased significantly after families started Reach Up, from 10.5 nights during the year before starting Reach Up to 21 in the first year of Reach Up and 23 in the second year of Reach Up.

Among the families who only used Emergency Housing in the year before starting Reach Up, the median total nights was 12. Among those who only used it during the first year of Reach Up, the median total nights was 22. Among those who only used it during the second year of Reach Up, the median was 26.

Although few families receiving Reach Up used the Emergency Housing Program for more than 50 nights per year, the program allows households up to 84 nights of use per year. Among families who used the Emergency Housing Program only during the year before Reach Up, nine used it for 50 nights or more. Among families who used the Emergency Housing Program only during the first year of Reach Up, eighteen used it for 50 or more nights. Among families who used the Emergency Housing Program only during the 2nd year of Reach Up, one family used it for 50 or more nights.

Fig. 4: Median nights of Emergency Housing Program use among families receiving Reach Up



Overall median: 24 nights

Universe = All 149 families who started Reach Up in 2013-2014, continued assistance for 2 years and used the Emergency Housing Program at some point during the 3-year period (year before and first 2 years after starting Reach Up).

According to DCF staff responsible for the Reach Up program, families with more complex challenges, such as domestic violence, are likely to use the Emergency Housing Program most often.

Housing conditions and trends among families receiving Reach Up

Self-sufficiency shelter ratings

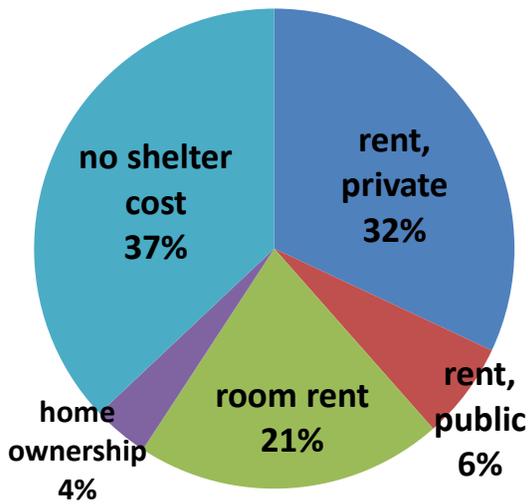
Reach Up is correlated with improved shelter ratings among families who entered the program in 2013-2014. After 1-2 years in Reach Up, 51% percent of families experienced improvement in their housing situation, according to the self-sufficiency "Family Support Matrix" shelter rating assigned by the families and caseworkers.

Among the subset of families who used Emergency Housing during the year before Reach Up or the first two years in the program, 37% experienced an improvement in their housing situation according to their family support matrix shelter self-sufficiency rating.

Housing type

When they started Reach Up, 32% of the families were renting homes from a private landlord without public rental assistance, despite their extremely low incomes. Only 6% of the families were living in publicly supported rental units. These units are more sustainable for families because they are subject to housing quality requirements and rents are limited to no more than 30% of a tenant's total income.

Fig. 5: Housing type when starting Reach Up



*Note: "Rent, public" includes families receiving tenant-based Section 8 vouchers as well as families living in apartments that are affordable through project-based public subsidies.
Universe = 622 families who started Reach Up in 2013-2014 and continued assistance for 2 years.*

227 (37%) of the families had no shelter costs when they started Reach Up. About a quarter of these families were using the Emergency Shelter program when they started Reach Up or used it shortly thereafter. The remaining families with this "housing type" were likely living in unstable conditions, such as doubled up with friends or family.

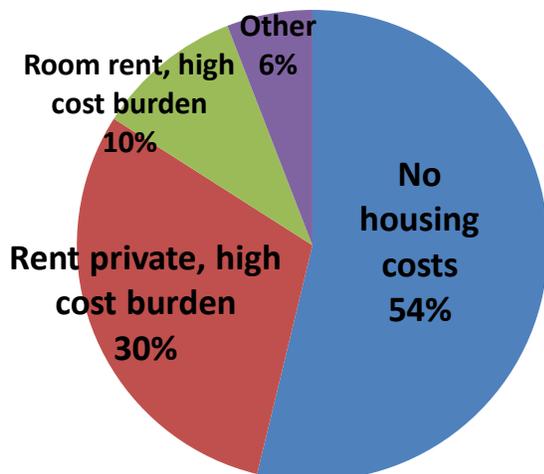
Among families who lacked independent, stable housing when starting Reach Up, 28% used the Emergency Housing Program at some point during the next two years.

Forty percent of the families who used Emergency Housing during the two years after starting Reach Up were paying **more than half** of their total income to rent a home or room from a private landlord when they started Reach Up. Spending this much for housing is typically referred to as a "severe cost burden" because it leaves little funds for other necessities and is highly correlated with homelessness, eviction and frequent moving. Rarely sustainable, it is little surprise that this housing situation preceded the use of emergency housing by these families.

After two years in Reach Up, families' housing situations showed improvement both in terms of affordability and housing type. Many moved into publicly-supported housing which is far more likely to have rents that do not consume more than 30% of family's total income and that undergo inspections to monitor compliance with state and federal housing quality standards.

After two years in Reach Up, far fewer families lacked independent housing as indicated by a lack of shelter costs altogether. The percentage of families

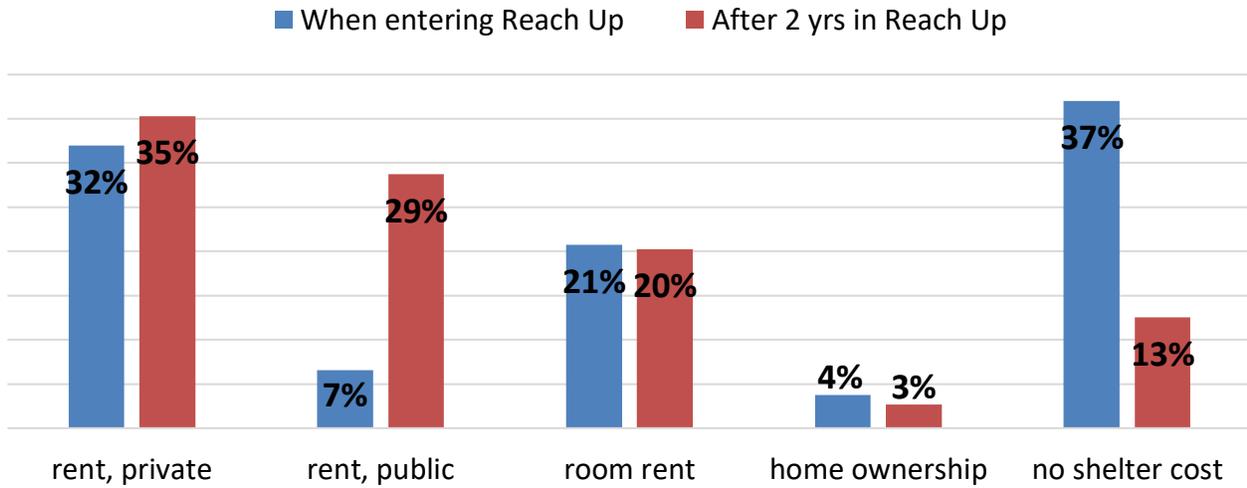
Fig. 6: Shelter type at Reach Up entry of families who subsequently used Emergency Housing



Universe = 119 families who started Reach Up in 2013-2014, continued assistance for 2 years and used Emergency Housing Program at some point during the 2 years after starting Reach Up.

in this situation dropped from 37% when starting Reach Up to 13% after 2 years in the program.

Fig. 7: Housing type of families receiving Reach Up

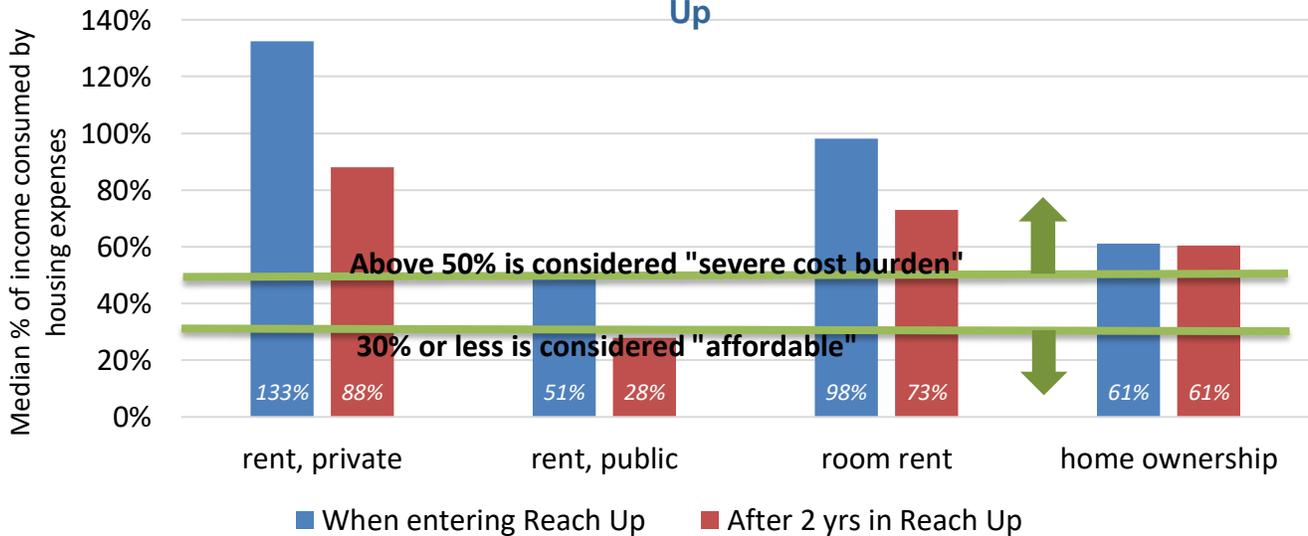


Universe = 622 families who started Reach Up in 2013-2014, continued assistance for 2 years.

Housing costs

Median housing cost burden (i.e. percentage of total income spent for housing) decreased among families living in all shelter types, but remained high for families renting private homes or rooms without public subsidies.²

Fig. 8: Median housing cost burden among families receiving Reach Up



Universe = 622 families who started Reach Up in 2013-2014 and continued assistance for 2 years.

² Total income consists of all earned and unearned income including the Reach Up benefit amount.

Vermont Rental Subsidy Program

The Vermont Rental Subsidy program was used by some families after they started Reach Up. Although none were using the program when they started Reach Up, 10 families (1.6%) of the 622 families we studied were receiving the Vermont Rental Subsidy six months after starting Reach Up. The Vermont Rental Subsidy program provides temporary rental assistance through the DCF's General Assistance program for Vermonters with serious unmet housing needs. Families participating in the Reach Up program receive high priority for Vermont Rental Subsidy.³ Many families use Vermont Rental Subsidy to cover the gap between their income and rent until they can be awarded a federal Section 8 voucher or move into an apartment with project-based rental assistance.

None of the 10 families who used the Vermont Rental Subsidy six months after starting Reach Up later used the Emergency Housing Program.⁴ In fact, at least 7 of these families used the Vermont Rental Subsidy exactly as it was intended—to help pay for housing temporarily until they could obtain federal Section 8 rental assistance.

Several of these families used the Emergency Housing Program prior to the Vermont Rental Subsidy Program. For these families, the Vermont Rental Subsidy may have helped them avoid a costly return to the Emergency Housing program during the wait for federal rental assistance.

Homeownership

Few of the families (4%) owned their homes when starting Reach Up. However, those that did own homes had few housing changes over the course of their first two years in Reach Up. None of them used Emergency Housing either during the year before or the two years after starting Reach Up.

Families who owned their homes had a median housing cost burden that remained at 61% throughout their first two years of Reach Up. Although this level is well above the 30% threshold widely considered “affordable,” it is lower than the median cost burden among other families receiving Reach Up who rented private homes or rooms (88% and 73%, respectively, after 2 years in Reach Up).

Of the 23 families who owned their homes, 9 lived in mobile homes on rented lots.

³ Although there are several types of households who receive priority under the Vermont Rental Subsidy program, the single highest priority category are Reach Up families, according to [DCF procedures](#).

⁴The scope of this study extended to the 24th month after Reach Up start.