

## *Housing Opportunity Grant Program (HOP) Annual Report - State Fiscal Year 2020 July 2019 – June 2020*

The Vermont Department for Children and Families, Office of Economic Opportunity administers Vermont’s Housing Opportunity Grant Program (HOP). The program provides a blend of state and federal<sup>1</sup> funding to support operations, staffing, and homelessness prevention and rapid re-housing assistance at approximately 48 non-profit emergency shelter, transitional housing, housing navigation, re-housing and prevention organizations serving all regions of the state. This past year, just over \$2 million in funds from the General Assistance (GA) Emergency Housing program was strategically invested under the Housing Opportunity Grant Program into community-based programs designed to decrease reliance on motels to shelter homeless persons and families. These GA funds supported 19 initiatives, and the outcomes from these projects are included as part of this statewide report.

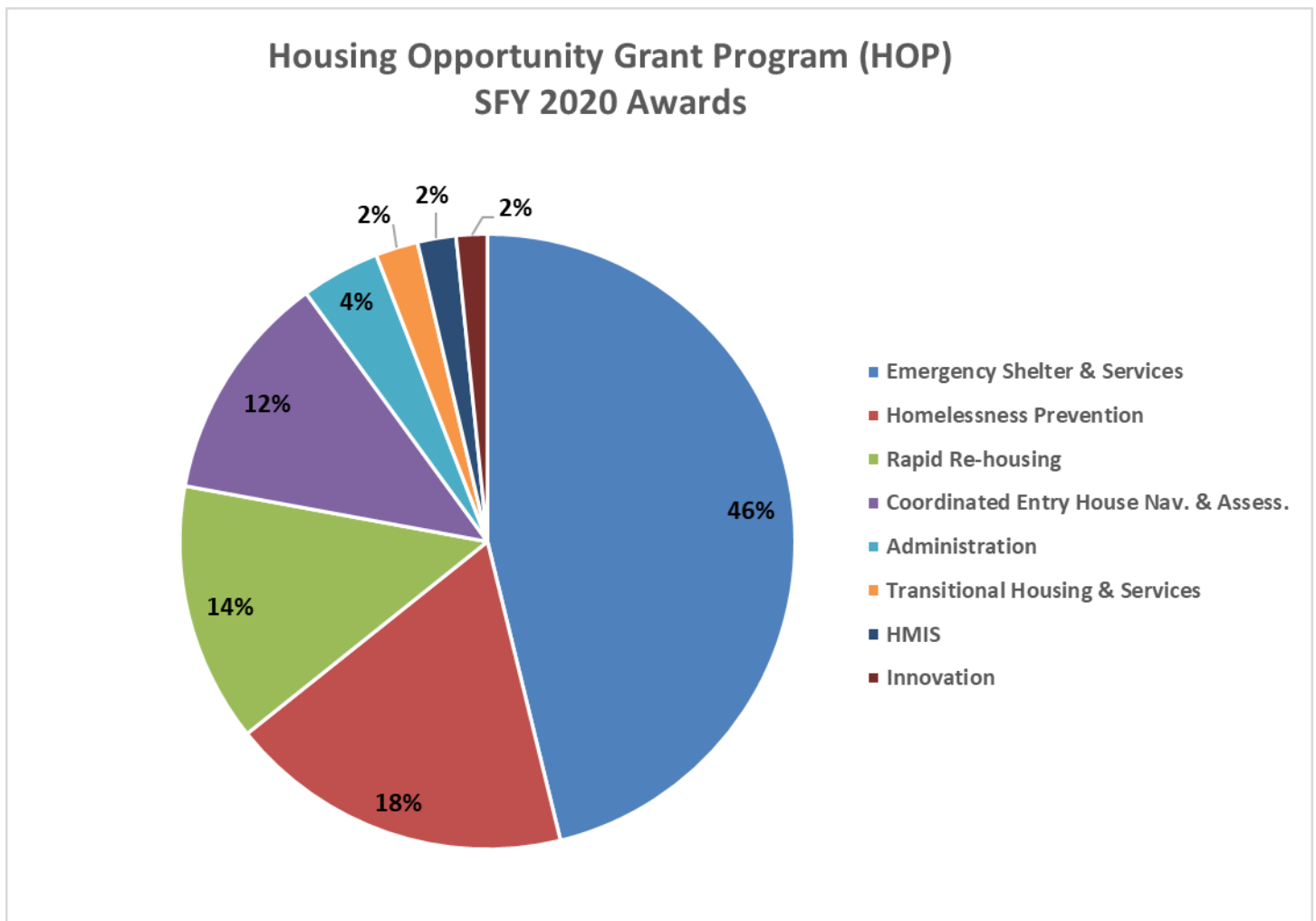
The State Office of Economic Opportunity works in close partnership with both HUD-recognized Homeless Continua of Care – Chittenden County and the Balance of State (i.e., the Chittenden Homeless Alliance and the Vermont Coalition to End Homelessness) - to consult on performance measurement, data management, and developing coordinated entry within both systems of care. This report details the services and shelter provided by publicly funded, privately operated non-profit partners. It provides insight into changes in the population experiencing homelessness in Vermont, as it details the level of service and results achieved by this system of care. It is best understood in tandem with reports from the General Assistance program and the statewide homeless Point-in-Time count.

---

<sup>1</sup> US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Emergency Solutions Grant and Continuum of Care Grant and Global Commitment Investment

## Funding & Program Summary

In SFY2020, more than \$7.6 million in state and federal funding was awarded under the Housing Opportunity Grant Program.



Housing Opportunity Grant Program funds support basic operations and essential services at 30 overnight emergency shelters, including 11 warming shelters open only during cold weather months. A total of 11 shelters for persons fleeing domestic/sexual violence were funded, including seven motel pools operated by these agencies. Finally, 6 programs provided emergency shelter in twenty-one scattered site apartments, ranging in size from 1 to 3 bedrooms. Shelters range in size from only a few rooms for families to more than 46 beds for single adults.

\$2 million in funds from the General Assistance Emergency Housing program was invested in 19 projects through the Housing Opportunity Grant Program to create or expand community capacity to meet emergency shelter needs in the following AHS districts: Addison, Barre, Bennington, Burlington, Brattleboro, Hartford, Newport, Rutland, Springfield, St. Albans, St.

Johnsbury and Lamoille. This was an increase of over \$600,000 over SFY 17 GA community investments.

Approximately 51% of all HOP funds supported direct service staff, such as shelter case managers or housing specialists. Just under 14% of funds supported basic shelter operations, such as utilities, rent, building insurance, shelter supplies or routine maintenance.

Other HOP-funded programs provide homelessness prevention and rapid re-housing assistance such as housing support services and financial aid to prevent eviction or help a family enter new housing. More than \$1.37 million was provided in client financial or rental assistance such as security deposit, rental or utility arrearages, and/or short- and medium-term rental assistance. Homelessness prevention targets assistance to those who are “imminently homeless” or “at-risk of homelessness” (e.g., “couch surfing”, exiting an institution, or facing eviction) whereas rapid re-housing serves those experiencing literal homelessness (e.g., sleeping in a place not meant for habitation or staying in an emergency shelter). These activities provided housing stability for 3,518 households. Approximately 28% of these households were literally homeless, similar to 31% in SFY 2019.

Both homelessness prevention and rapid-rehousing strategies provide housing relocation and stabilization support such as housing search and placement; landlord-tenant mediation, housing case management, follow-up or supportive services to help maintain housing; money management and financial assistance such as security deposits, utility payments and deposits, moving costs, rental arrearages and from one to twenty four months of rental assistance.

Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing services in this report reflect only those paid for in whole or part with Housing Opportunity Grant Program dollars. Numbers do not reflect other activities by these grantee providers paid for with funding such as Crisis Fuel, Vermont Rental Subsidy, FEMA, or Community Services Block Grants. Though in reality, community-based providers often combine these various resources in order to meet the presenting needs.

Nearly \$900,000 supported Coordinated Entry to streamline access to homeless assistance resources (intake and assessment services) and to re-house homeless individuals and families in permanent housing as quickly as possible (housing navigation services).

The remaining funds (approximately \$280,000) supported the implementation of HMIS and innovative projects such as landlord liaisons.

The Housing Opportunity Grant Program ended State Fiscal Year 2020 with programmatic changes resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. To comply with public health requirements, bed capacity was reduced in several shelter programs while hours of operation were extended in many others. In some cases, shelters closed or relocated operations to motels to provide non congregate sheltering. Motel-based services and outreach grew significantly. Seasonal shelters, typically providing congregate shelter during cold weather months and overnight only, closed

or shifted their operations to motel-based and 24/7 operations. Activities as part of the COVID response and recovery efforts included:

- A continued partnership with the Vermont Department of Health to provide guidance, training and technical assistance, including site-specific support on infection prevention and control.
- Provision of supplies, including thermometers cleaning supplies, and personal protective equipment.
- Maintaining expanded capacity for non-congregate sheltering options through the General Assistance (GA) Emergency Housing Program, and creating alternative housing capacity to quarantine and isolate households with suspected or confirmed COVID-19.

Nearly \$1.5 million of additional funding supported expanded services, hours of operation and COVID-19 related costs during the third quarter of SFY2020. The majority of these funds supported the addition of over 60 full time positions statewide to support expanded capacity as shelters adjusted operations and to reach out to households staying in motels through the GA Emergency Housing Program.

## **Emergency Shelter Persons Served, Demographics, Bednights & Length of Stay**

Between July 1, 2019 and June 30, 2020, Vermont's publicly funded emergency shelters, domestic violence shelters, and youth shelters, reported the following:

- **2,869** persons (59% individuals and 42% in families with children) sheltered for a total of **154,674** bednights.<sup>2,3</sup>
- **2,187** were adults and **682** were children under the age of 18.
- The average length of stay was **59** days.
- Approximately 56% of sheltered children (385) and 52% of families (228) spent their stay at a domestic/sexual violence shelter.

The total number of shelter bednights decreased significantly from the previous year. Changes were driven by shelter decisions to close or reduce capacity to mitigate the impact of COVID-19. The General Assistance Emergency Housing Program expanded eligibility in order to meet the emerging needs and ensure that all Vermonters had a place to “stay home, stay safe”. Although not the purview of this report, the General Assistance Emergency Housing Program reported a significant increase in the number of households served during the same period. HOP-funded emergency shelters capacity is expected to remain significantly reduced in SFY 2021.

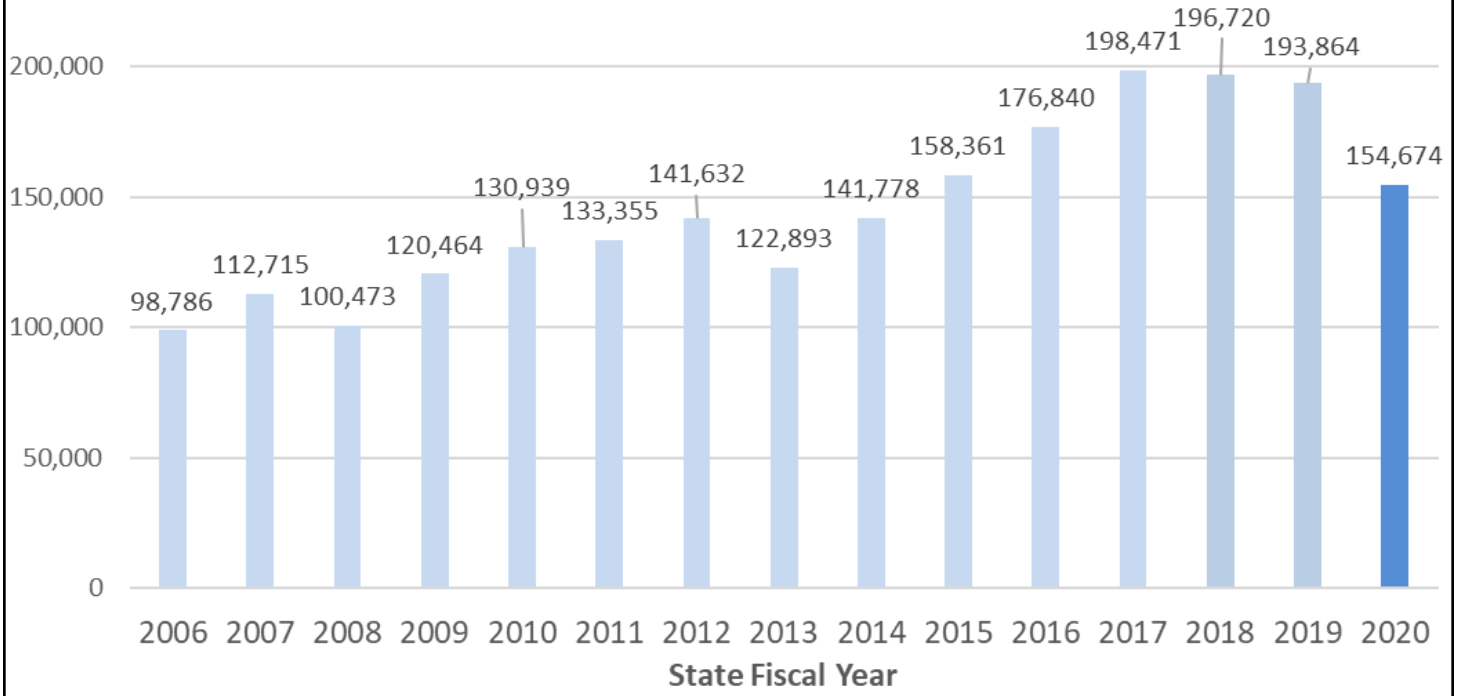
Separately, the percentage of children spending their stay at a domestic/sexual violence shelter is increasing. That increase is an effect of the expanded partnerships with domestic violence shelters to directly provide motel stays for households who would otherwise use the GA Emergency Housing Program when the shelter was full. In this way, it may not reflect an overall increase of children experiencing homelessness due to domestic violence, but an increase in those children served by shelter programs. Additionally, the overall shelter capacity in family homeless shelters was reduced during the fourth quarter due to COVID-19 as previously discussed.

---

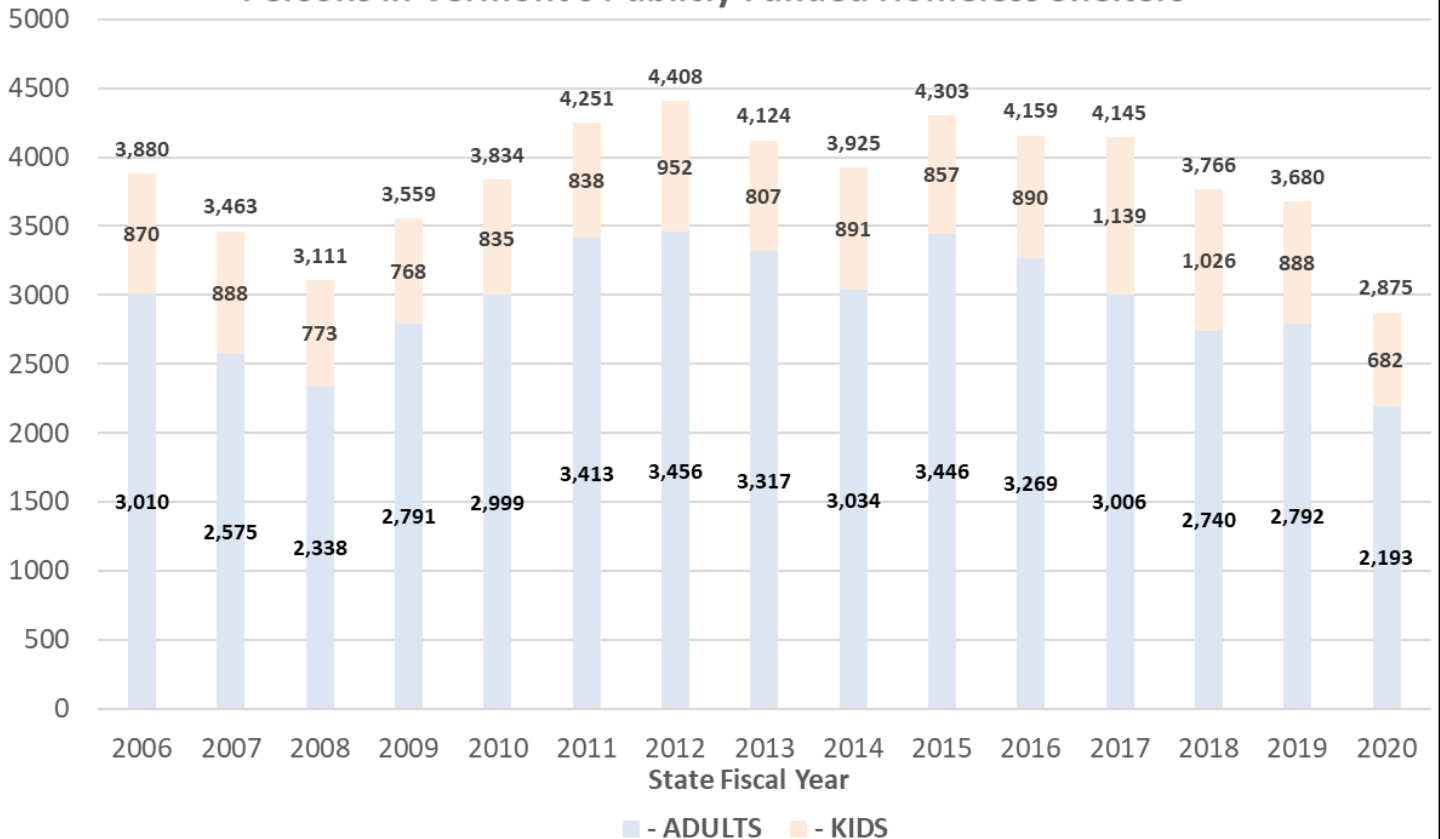
<sup>2</sup> One bednight = One person sheltered for one night. Total bednights = Number of persons x the number of nights sheltered.

<sup>3</sup> In 2017, the Department for Children and Families began to partner with domestic violence shelters to grant those programs the funds to directly meet emergency housing needs for all victims fleeing domestic/sexual violence (including through motel vouchers) rather than referrals to the General Assistance Emergency Housing Program. In SFY 20, the number of domestic violence shelter programs with a “motel pool” grew to five. These bednights are included in the total.

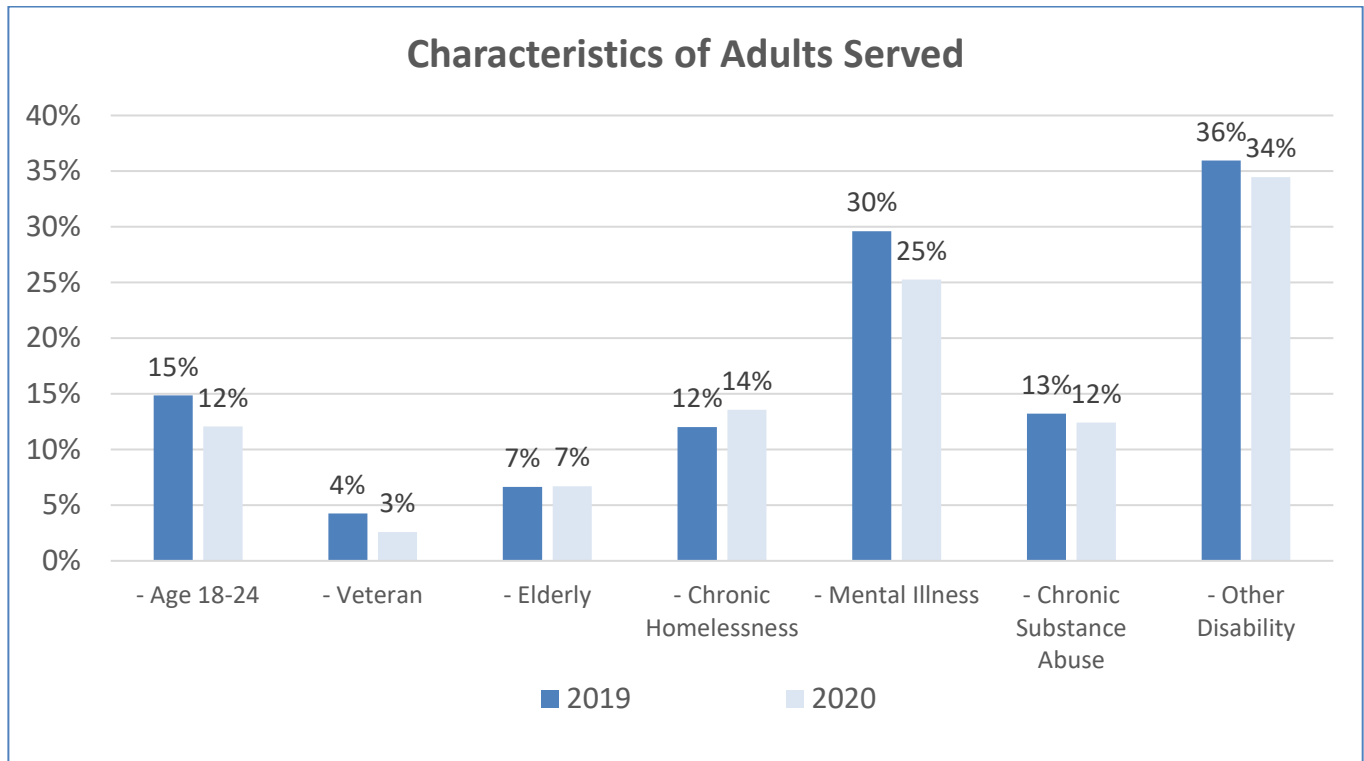
## Shelter Bednights: Vermont's Publicly Funded Homeless Shelters



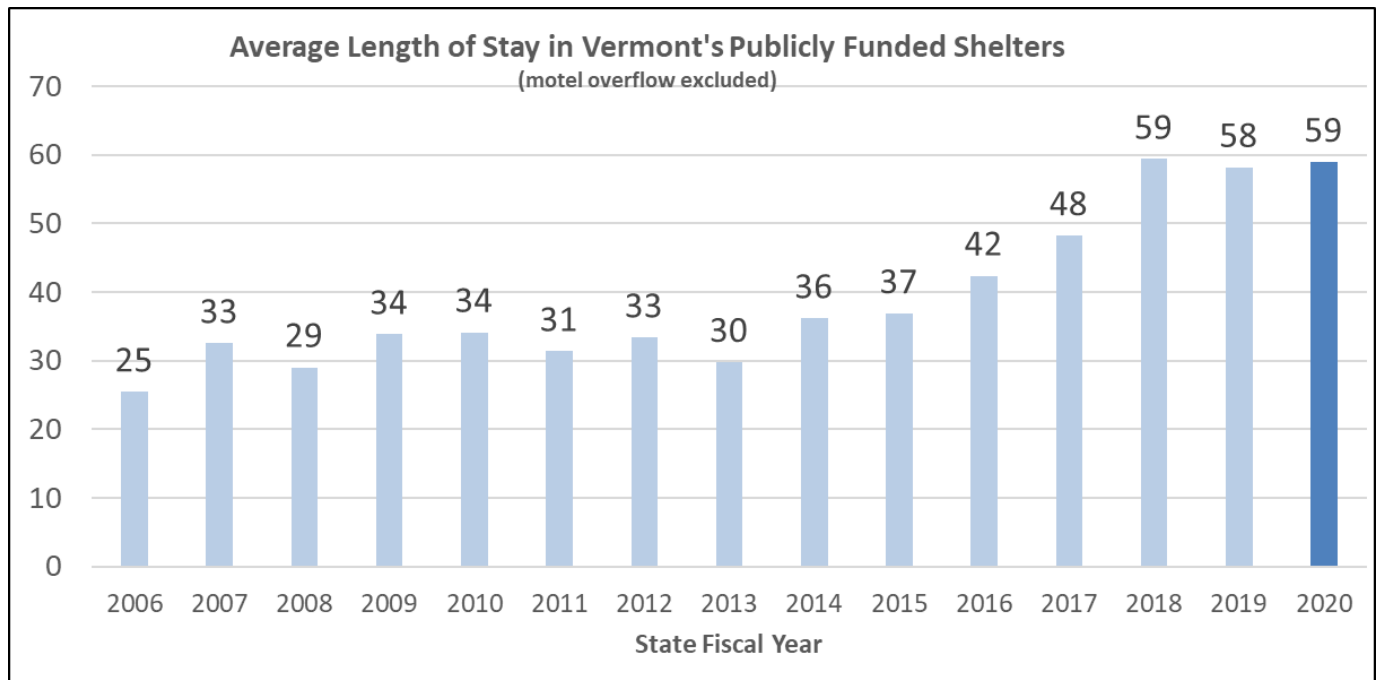
## Persons in Vermont's Publicly Funded Homeless Shelters



The below chart reflects a sampling of demographics for all adults (2,187) served by emergency shelters, homelessness prevention, or rapid re-housing programs.



The average length of stay in homeless shelters remains at its highest level in more than 18 years, nearly double what they were less than 10 years ago. There continue to be significant barriers for shelter guests to move out of emergency settings into housing including the lack of available rentals, the high cost of rent, very low incomes, and tenant history.



## Housing Opportunity Grant Program Performance

Grantees report on measures tied to the category of funding received: Shelter Operations, Case Management, Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing. Performance targets and 2020 performance are included below. By reporting the “% of Grantees Meeting Target”, the Office of Economic Opportunity is able to better understand which areas the network may require training and support to improve or where targets may need to be reconsidered.

Performance Measures by Activity	Target	State FY 2020 Performance		% of Grantees Meeting Target
<b>EMERGENCY SHELTER OPERATIONS</b>				
Shelter households (individuals or families) will have an initial meeting with a case manager (or equivalent) within 3 days of entering the program	90%	Emergency	76%	72%
		Transitional	100%	100%
		Youth	95%	80%
Households who exit emergency shelter, exit to stable permanent or transitional housing	baseline	28%		n/a
<b>YOUTH SHELTER &amp; SERVICES</b>				
Youth exiting the program will have “safe exits” as defined by one of the following: college, friends, home with family, independent living, job corps, military, relative’s home, or residential treatment/rehab	70%	74%		60%
<b>ESSENTIAL SERVICES CASE MANAGEMENT<sup>4</sup></b>				
Homeless households referred for case management will meet with a case manager within 3 days of the referral.	90%	79%		54%
Within 90 days of referral, households receiving case management will have at least 1 adult who is employed, OR enrolled in an educational or training program, OR has qualified for income benefits such as TANF, SSI or GA	70%	37%		18%
Households receiving case management will be stabilized in transitional or permanent housing	70%	22%		0%
Households stabilized or re-housed will continue to be in stable housing at least 90 days following assistance	70%	58%		21%
<b>HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION<sup>5</sup></b>				
Households at-risk of homelessness will have their housing stabilized or be safely re-housed	70%	37%		44%
Households stabilized or re-housed will continue to be in stable housing at least 90 days following assistance	70%	70%		55%
<b>RAPID RE-HOUSING<sup>6</sup></b>				
Homeless households will be safely re-housed	70%	56%		33%
Households re-housed will continue to be in stable housing at least 90 days following assistance	70%	74%		67%

<sup>4</sup> Only organizations that receive HOP funding for essential services case management report on these performance measures. In 2019 this measure was changed to include all households who were stabilized instead of just those stabilized within 90 days. Prior to 2020, the denominator in case management % calculations was “households referred” in 2020 this changed to “households met with case manager” which is consistent with the Grant Agreement Performance criteria.

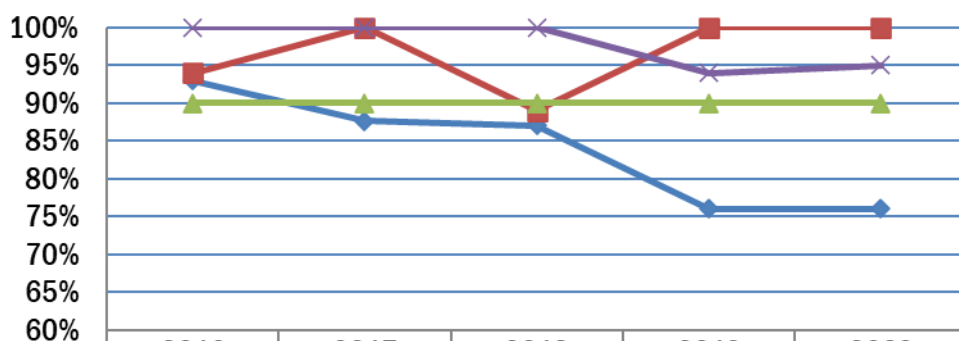
<sup>5</sup> Only households receiving services and financial/rental assistance (vs. services only) were included in SFY 2019 and subsequent year reporting.

<sup>6</sup> In 2020 the calculation changed from “% of those served” to “% of those enrolled” reducing duplication that existed in previous years.



The impact of COVID-19 on the operations of year-round and seasonal emergency shelters was significant. In past years, shelters have occasionally needed to close or reduce capacity for maintenance and repairs or to resolve public health issues but in the past four years the average percent of calendar days that the shelter was open, staffed, insured, clear of safety violations and available to residents has only fluctuated between 96.7-99.2% with 92-95% of shelters staying open all 365 days a year. During the initial months of the COVID-19 outbreak in Vermont, however, shelters greatly reduced capacity to take appropriate health and safety measures. Nine shelters closed between March and April, a combination of both seasonal and year-round shelters, with four re-opening before the end of the fiscal year. While agencies limited or closed their physical spaces, all shifted operations provide support onsite at area motels as well as at one campground location. These agencies received COVID-19 Supplemental Housing Opportunity Grant Program funding to support these activities between March 15-June 30, 2020 and the fourth quarter reports were impacted by this change in the nature and scope of the work. There has been, and will continue to be, significant changes in bed capacity statewide during the pandemic.

### Housing Opportunity Program Performance: Shelter Operations, Service Referral

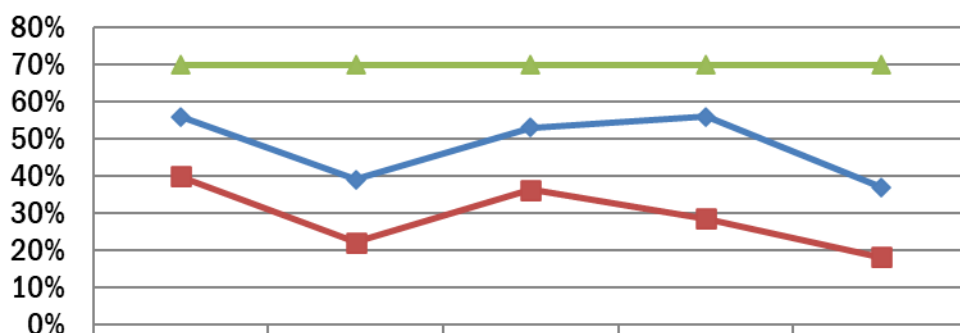


	2016 Performance	2017 Performance	2018 Performance	2019 Performance	2020 Performance
◆ Emergency Shelter: % of new HH who met with a case manager or advocate within 3 days of entrance	93%	88%	87%	76%	76%
■ Transitional Housing: % of new HH who met with a case manager within 3 days of entrance	94%	100%	89%	100%	100%
✕ Youth Shelter: % of new HH who met with a case manager within 3 days of entrance.	100%	100%	100%	94%	95%
▲ Target	90%	90%	90%	90%	90%

Some emergency shelters provide services onsite, while other programs refer guests to another service provider for case management support. The Housing Opportunity Grant Program aims to ensure all shelter guests can meet with a case manager or advocate quickly after entry into a

program (i.e., within 3 days). Quickly connecting to case management helps to meet the basic needs of all guests and connect guests to a permanent housing pathway. For those emergency shelters that do not provide services onsite, most referred households were connected to a case manager within 3 days (76%), with 72% of these grantees meeting this target. Many emergency shelter programs provide essential services case management onsite; in these cases, most household connected to a case manager within 3 days (79%), however, only 54% of grantees met that target. As part of the COVID-19 Supplemental HOP funding awarded in April 2020, many shelters and providers were funded to expand their service array to include additional essential services. This work included meal delivery and other services to ensure Vermonters were getting their basic needs met. The increased volume and challenging nature of the work environment impacted the delivery of more traditional case management services and the outcomes historically achieved.

### Housing Opportunity Program Performance: Case Management for Homeless Households (HH), Income

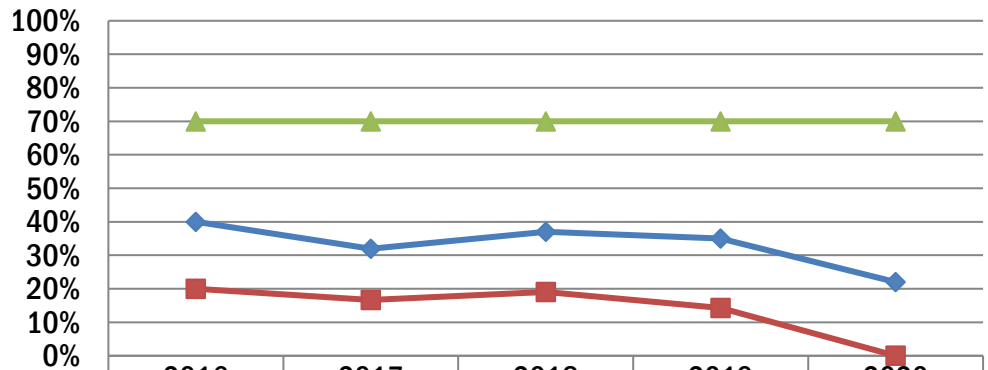


	2016 Performance	2017 Performance	2018 Performance	2019 Performance	2020 Performance
◆ % of HH who - within 90 days of case management - have at least 1 adult who has found employment OR enrolled in education or training OR qualified for income benefits (e.g, TANF, SSI, GA)	56%	39%	53%	56%	37%
▲ Target	70%	70%	70%	70%	70%
■ % of Grantees Meeting Target	40%	22%	36%	29%	18%

The percentage of households who found employment, enrolled in education/training, or increased their income due to benefits enrollment within 90 days of receiving case management decreased this year and remains below the program goal. OEO will continue focus additional training and technical assistance in the next few years on improving connections between homeless shelter/service providers with employment training and support resources and strengthening referrals to mainstream case management resources to leverage additional capacity. Anecdotally, grantees report that most clients already are connected to benefits and/or are employed, and that increasing income within 90 days is very challenging. COVID-19 also created challenges as businesses closed or paused operations and the processes for accessing

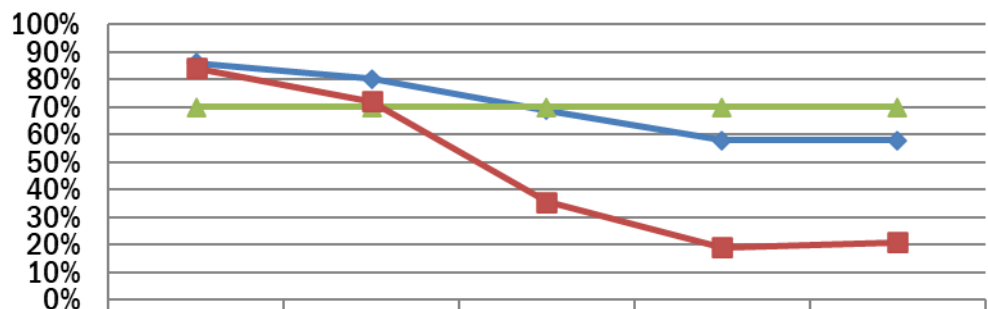
benefits changed to mitigate the public health concerns. Traditional employment and training programs suspended operations and many clients who were employed lost work hours.

### Housing Opportunity Program Performance: Case Management for Homeless Households (HH), Housing



	2016 Performance	2017 Performance	2018 Performance	2019 Performance	2020 Performance
◆ % of households who, after meeting with a CM, were stabilized in transitional or permanent housing	40%	32%	37%	35%	22%
▲ Target	70%	70%	70%	70%	70%
■ % of Grantees Meeting Target	20%	17%	19%	14%	0%

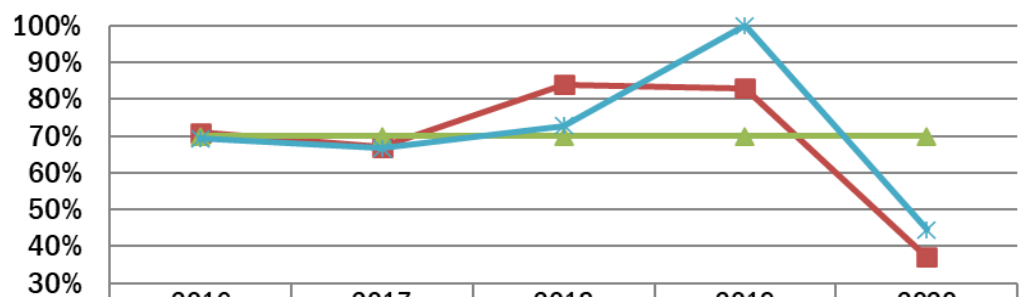
### Housing Opportunity Program Performance: Case Management for Homeless Households (HH), Housing Stability



	2016 Performance	2017 Performance	2018 Performance	2019 Performance	2020 Performance
◆ % of households who were stabilized in transitional or permanent housing AND remained stably housed for at least 90 days (DV Excluded)	86%	80%	69%	58%	58%
▲ Target	70%	70%	70%	70%	70%
■ % of Grantees Meeting Target	84%	72%	36%	19%	21%

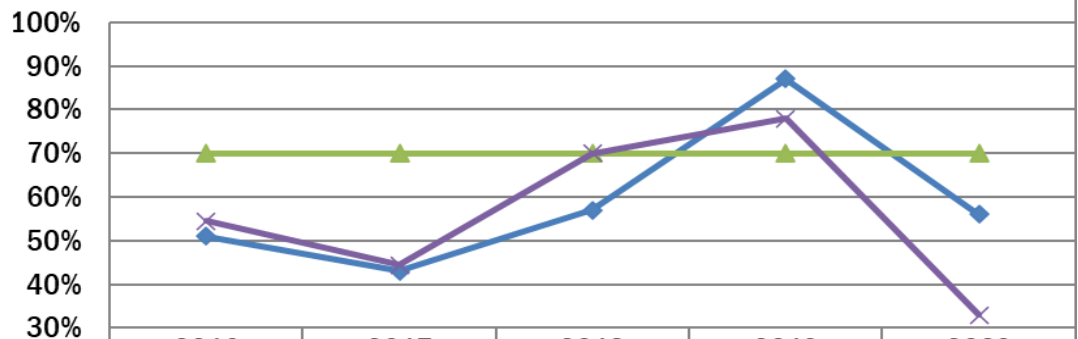
In 2020, 45% of households who were stabilized in housing continued to be stably housed for at least 90 days. There was a marked decrease in the percentage of grantees able to meet the target of (70%). Expansion of warming shelters in the past few years accounts for some of the decline of performance in this area. Shelters have worked to lower barriers and become more accessible to those who need help the most, which often includes those with more complex needs who face added barriers to permanent housing.

### Housing Opportunity Program Performance: Homelessness Prevention



	2016 Performance	2017 Performance	2018 Performance	2019 Performance	2020 Performance
<span style="color: red;">■</span> % of households at-risk of homelessness who were stabilized or rehoused	71%	67%	84%	83%	37%
<span style="color: green;">▲</span> Target	70%	70%	70%	70%	70%
<span style="color: blue;">✱</span> % of Homelessness Prevention Grantees Meeting Target	69%	67%	73%	100%	44%

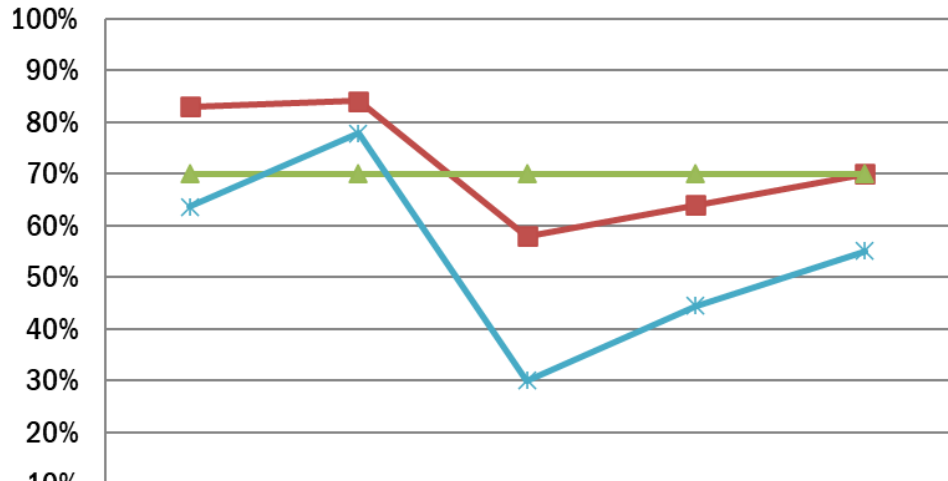
## Housing Opportunity Program Performance: Rapid Re-Housing



	2016 Performance	2017 Performance	2018 Performance	2019 Performance	2020 Performance
◆ % of new homeless households who were re-housed.	51%	43%	57%	87%	56%
▲ Target	70%	70%	70%	70%	70%
✕ % of Rapid Rehousing Grantees Meeting Target	55%	44%	70%	78%	33%

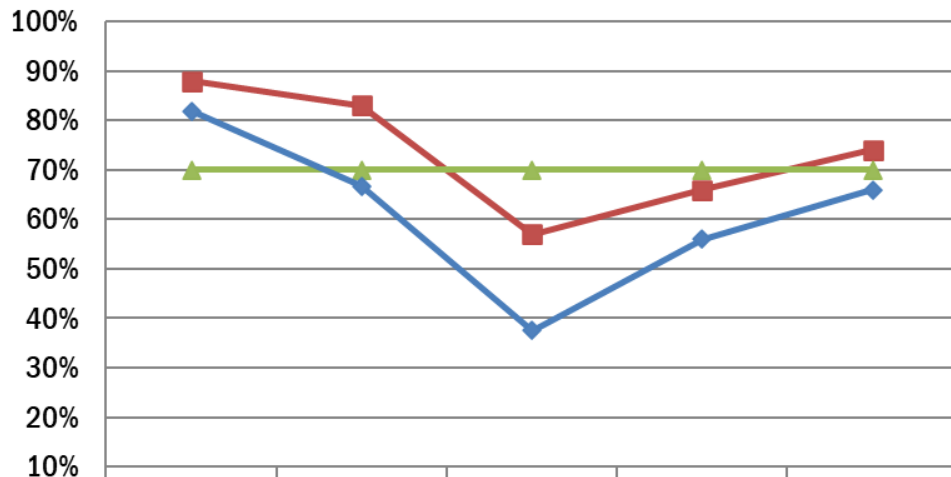
Between 2013 and 2017, OEO reported a steady decline in the percentage of households able to be stabilized in permanent housing within 28 days of program entry. Based on analysis and feedback from stakeholders, OEO adjusted reporting on this measure for 2018. While the target to stabilize at least 70% of households within 28 days remains an important aspirational benchmark, HOP grantees also report on the percentage of all households who attained stable housing regardless of the 28-day goal. In SFY 2020, HOP grantees reported significant declines in achieving stability of both households served by Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Rehousing were stabilized in permanent housing. Outcomes reported here for SFY20 reflect households receiving both services and financial/rental assistance. Although not reflected above, the average length of time clients spent in the program prior to stabilization was 56 days.

## Housing Opportunity Program Performance: Homelessness Prevention - Housing Stability



	2016 Performance	2017 Performance	2018 Performance	2019 Performance	2020 Performance
■ % of HH at-risk of homelessness who remain in stable housing 90 days after assistance (prevention)	83%	84%	58%	64%	70%
▲ Target	70%	70%	70%	70%	70%
* % of Homelessness Prevention Grantees Meeting Target	64%	78%	30%	44%	55%

## Housing Opportunity Program Performance: Rapid Re-Housing - Housing Stability



	2016 Performance	2017 Performance	2018 Performance	2019 Performance	2020 Performance
■ % of those re-housed who remain stably housed 90 days after assistance	88%	83%	57%	66%	74%
▲ Target	70%	70%	70%	70%	70%
◆ % of Grantees Meeting Target SFY20	82%	67%	38%	56%	66%

Housing stability outcomes for Rapid Re-Housing and Homelessness Prevention programs continued to improve and build on progress seen in 2019. While stabilizing or re-housing households is proving increasingly challenging, those who are stabilized/re-housed are showing stability in their housing status.

Full implementation of coordinated entry has helped to identify appropriate levels of assistance based on the household need. In SFY 2020, new performance measures for Coordinated Entry Housing Navigation services were introduced. Baseline data reveals success helping households successfully exit homelessness into permanent housing, but challenges in meeting the goal to help households stabilize within 28 days. On average, households are homeless four months before the access housing. Factors impacting this data echo those impacting shelter length of stay including the lack of available rentals, the high cost of rent, very low incomes, and tenant history.

<b>2020 HOP Coordinated Entry Housing Navigation Reporting</b>			
<b>Number of Households Served</b>	<b>% of Program Exits to Permanent Housing</b>	<b>% Households Served that were Re-housed or Stabilized within 28 Days</b>	<b>Average Number of Days from Program Enrollment to Rehoused or Stabilized</b>
2,724	52%	3%	125

While it is difficult to draw broad conclusions about the efficacy of all homeless assistance programs from these performance measures, it is clear that some strategies are successful. Access to case management and supportive services is critical for households experiencing homelessness; however, financial assistance and services together through rapid re-housing demonstrates an effective combination of resources to help families achieve and maintain housing stability. COVID-19 also had a profound impact on outcomes in SFY2020 and cannot be overlooked. Vermont’s homeless shelter and service providers rose to meet this challenge and in partnership with the State and other local service providers have significantly increased services and assistance to help meet the needs of vulnerable Vermonters.