

Housing Opportunity Grant Program (HOP) Annual Report - State Fiscal Year 2021 July 2020 – June 2021

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 federal¹ funding to support operations, staffing, and homelessness prevention and rapid re-housing assistance at approximately 45 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 16 initiatives, and the outcomes from these projects are included as part of this statewide report.

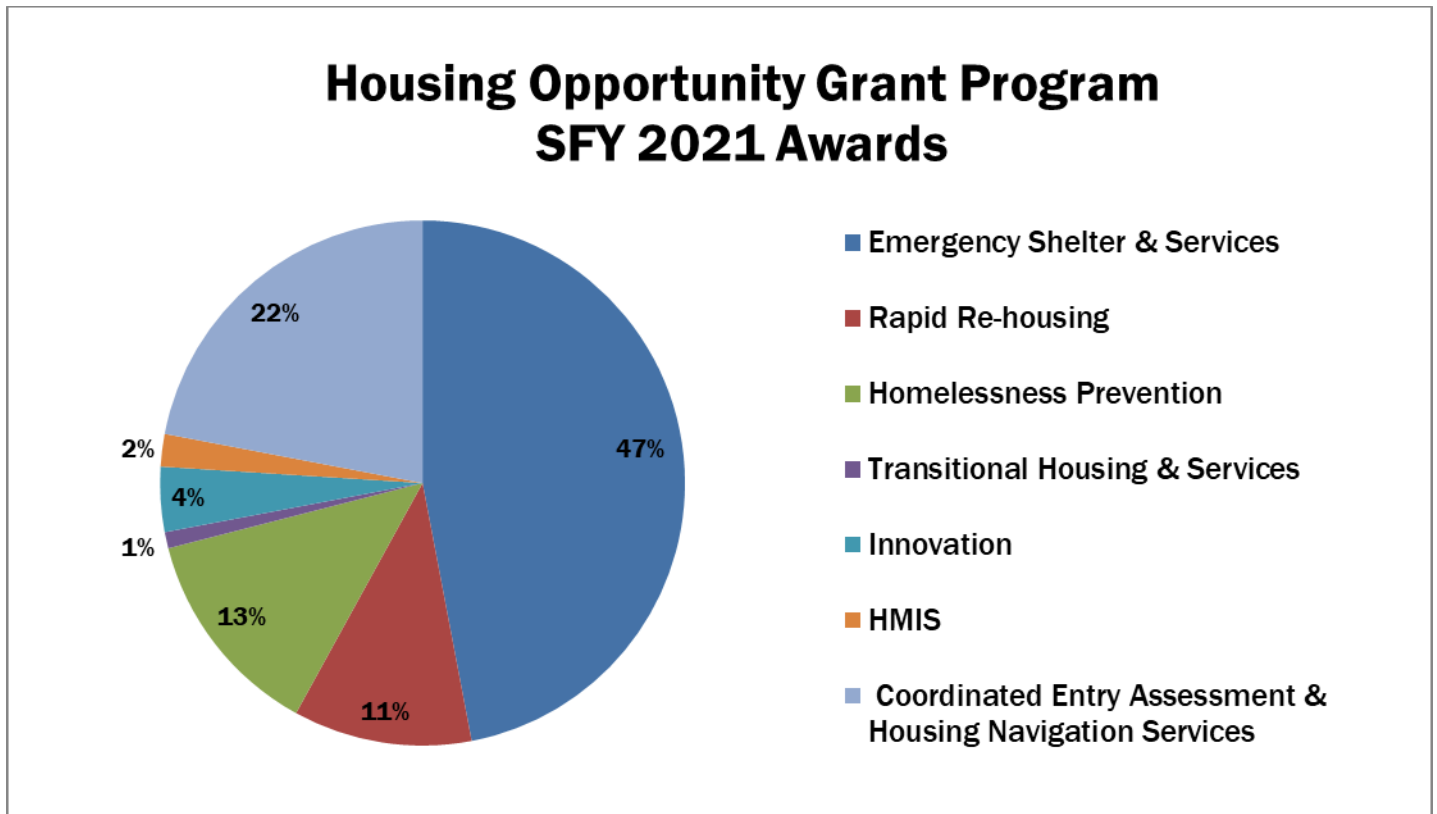
The Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) awarded over \$3.5 million in supplemental funding in State Fiscal Year 2021 under the Housing Opportunity Grant Program (HOP) to support COVID-19 related costs at 29 non-profit community organizations in Vermont. These Coronavirus Relief Funds (CRF) met the immediate need for expanded essential services and housing navigation services to help families and individuals experiencing homelessness and in motels due to the COVID-19 public health crisis. These efforts were implemented in conjunction with programs such as the ESG CARES Housing Project, which provides rental assistance vouchers; the Rapid Resolution Housing Initiative, which provides flexible financial assistance to assist households in exiting motels; and Non-Congregate Shelter Wrap Around Services contracts, which provide onsite support to guests in motels through the General Assistance program

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.

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

Funding & Program Summary

In SFY2021, more than \$11 million in state and federal funding was awarded under the Housing Opportunity Grant Program, including the supplemental COVID-19 funding.



The Housing Opportunity Grant Program supports basic operations and essential services at 23 overnight emergency shelters, including 9 shelters for persons fleeing domestic/sexual violence and seven motel overflow pools operated by these agencies. Shelters range in size from only a few rooms for families to 50 beds for single adults. Five programs provided emergency shelter in twenty-one scattered site apartments, ranging in size from 1 to 3 bedrooms. \$2 million in funds from the General Assistance (GA) Emergency Housing program was invested on 15 organizations as part of the Housing Opportunity Grant Program to create or expand community capacity to meet emergency shelter needs across Vermont. In general, emergency shelter bed capacity was reduced in SFY21 to respond with public health recommendations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Approximately 58% of all HOP funds supported direct service staff, such as shelter case managers or housing specialists. Just under 9% of funds supported emergency shelter operations, such as utilities, rent, building insurance, non-case management staff, shelter supplies or routine maintenance.

The Housing Opportunity Grant Program also supports homelessness prevention and rapid re-housing strategies. Both 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. These activities provided housing stability for 746 households. Approximately 43% of these households were literally homeless, an increase from 28% in SFY 2020. More than \$1.38 million was awarded in client financial or rental assistance.

Over \$2.4 million supported Coordinated Entry to streamline access to homeless assistance resources (intake and assessment services) and to help re-house homeless individuals and families in permanent housing as quickly as possible (housing navigation services).

The remaining funds (approximately \$620,000) supported the implementation of HMIS and innovative projects such as landlord liaisons.

Vermonters experiencing homelessness or housing instability continue to face significant challenges. These include the lack of available rentals, the high cost of rent, and very low incomes. These factors impact outcomes across Housing Opportunity Grant Program and were exacerbated by COVID-19.

Program changes that were implemented in State Fiscal Year 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic continued into State Fiscal Year 2021. To comply with public health requirements, bed capacity was reduced in several shelter programs while hours of operation were extended in many others. Motel-based services and outreach grew significantly. Most seasonal shelters, typically providing congregate shelter during cold weather months and overnight only, did not operate. Activities as part of the COVID response and recovery efforts included:

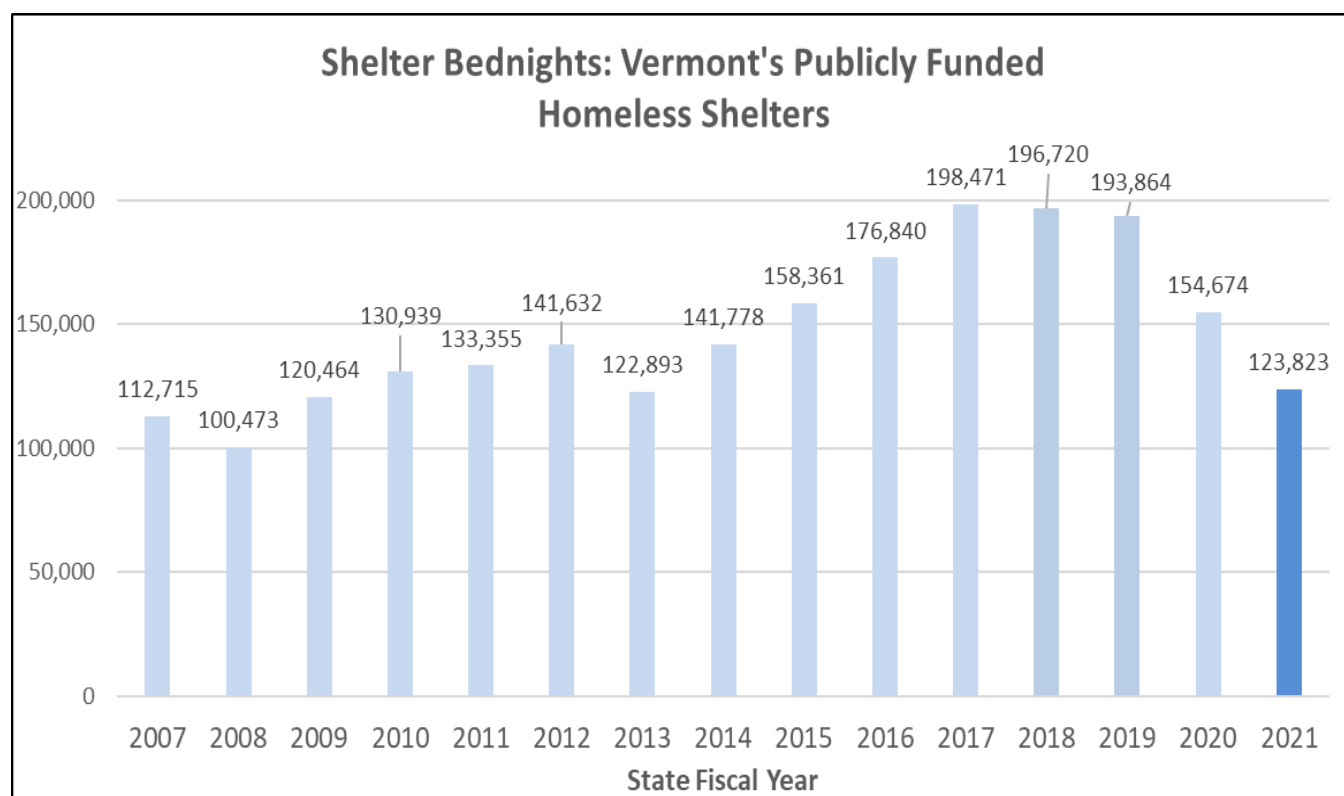
- A continued partnership with the Vermont Department of Health to provide guidance, training and technical assistance, including site-specific support on infection prevention and control.
- Provision of supplies, including thermometers, cleaning supplies, HEPA air purifiers and filters, and personal protective equipment.
- Maintaining 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.

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

Between July 1, 2020 and June 30, 2021, Vermont’s publicly funded emergency shelters, domestic violence shelters, and youth shelters, reported the following:

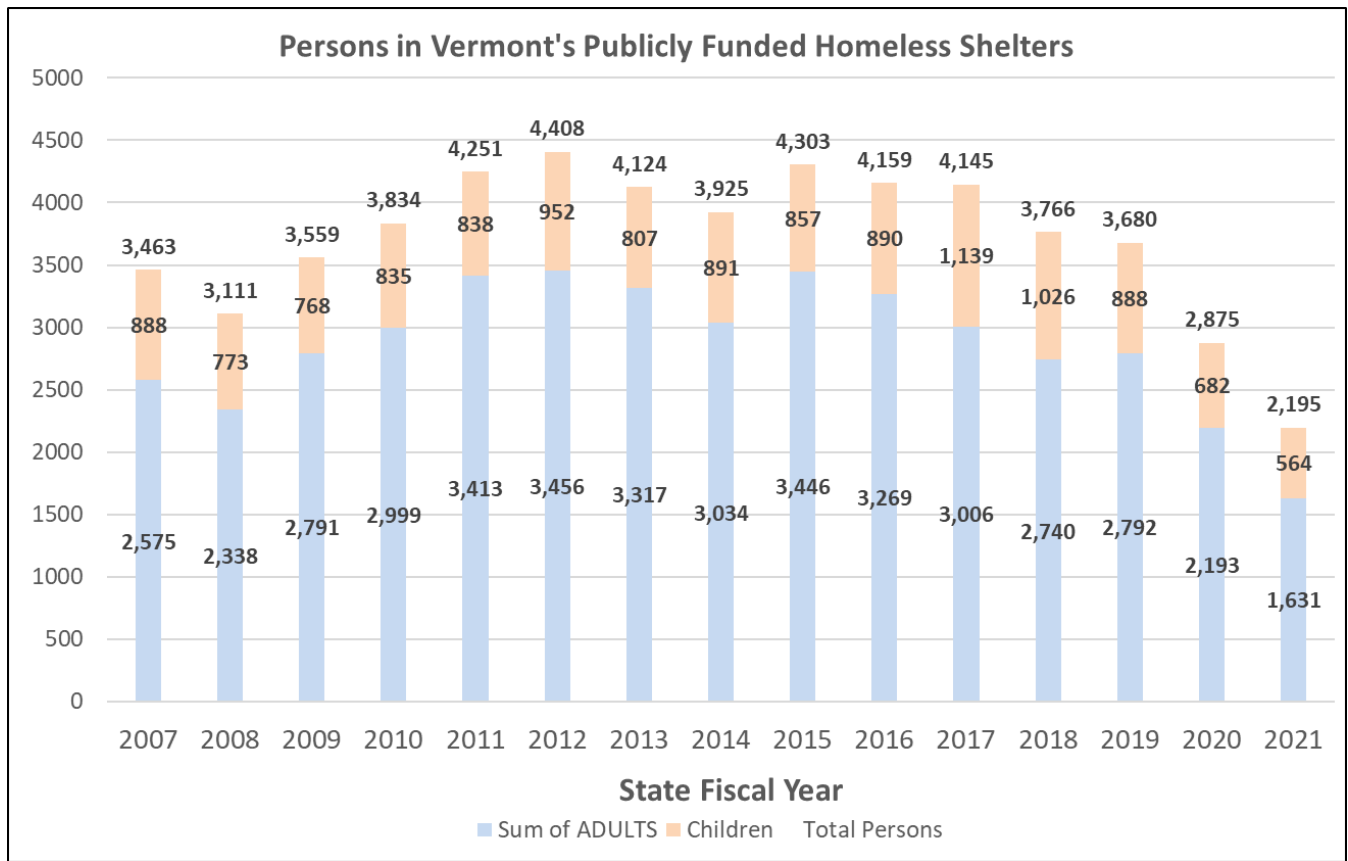
- **2,195** persons (57% individuals and 43% in families with children) sheltered for a total of **123,823** bednights.²
- **1,631** were adults and **564** were children under the age of 18.
- The average length of stay was **63** days.
- Approximately 27% of sheltered children (154) and 24% of families (79) spent their stay through domestic/sexual violence shelter.³

The total number of emergency shelter bednights provided decreased significantly from previous years. Changes were driven by shelter decisions to operate during the year with reduced capacity to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 as well as a significant reduction in seasonal shelter capacity. For comparison, 27,351 bednights in SFY 2019 were attributed to seasonal shelters, with only 250 bednights provided at seasonal shelters in FY2021. It is notable that year-round emergency shelter bed capacity in Chittenden County increased significantly during the year due to new capital investments. Although not the purview of this report, the General Assistance Emergency Housing Program saw a significant increase in the number of households served during the same period as part of the State’s pandemic response. Emergency shelter capacity has also increased in SFY 2022.

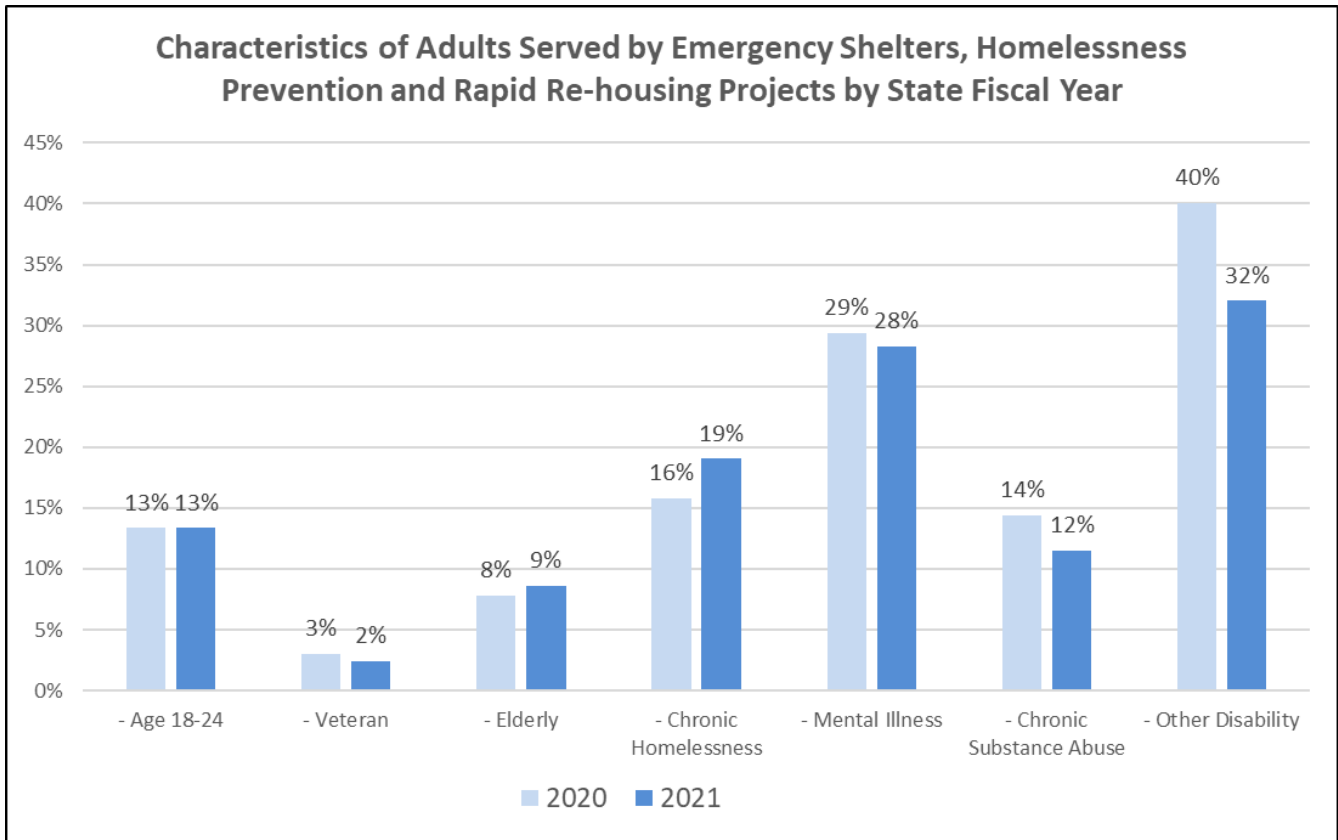


² One bednight = One person sheltered for one night. Total bednights = Number of persons x the number of nights sheltered.

³ In most AHS districts, DCF partners with domestic violence shelters 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. These bednights are included in the total.



The chart below reflects a sampling of demographics for all adults (1,631) served by emergency shelters, homelessness prevention, and rapid re-housing projects. No significant changes in demographics were noted between SFY 2020 and SFY 2021.



Housing Opportunity Grant Program Performance

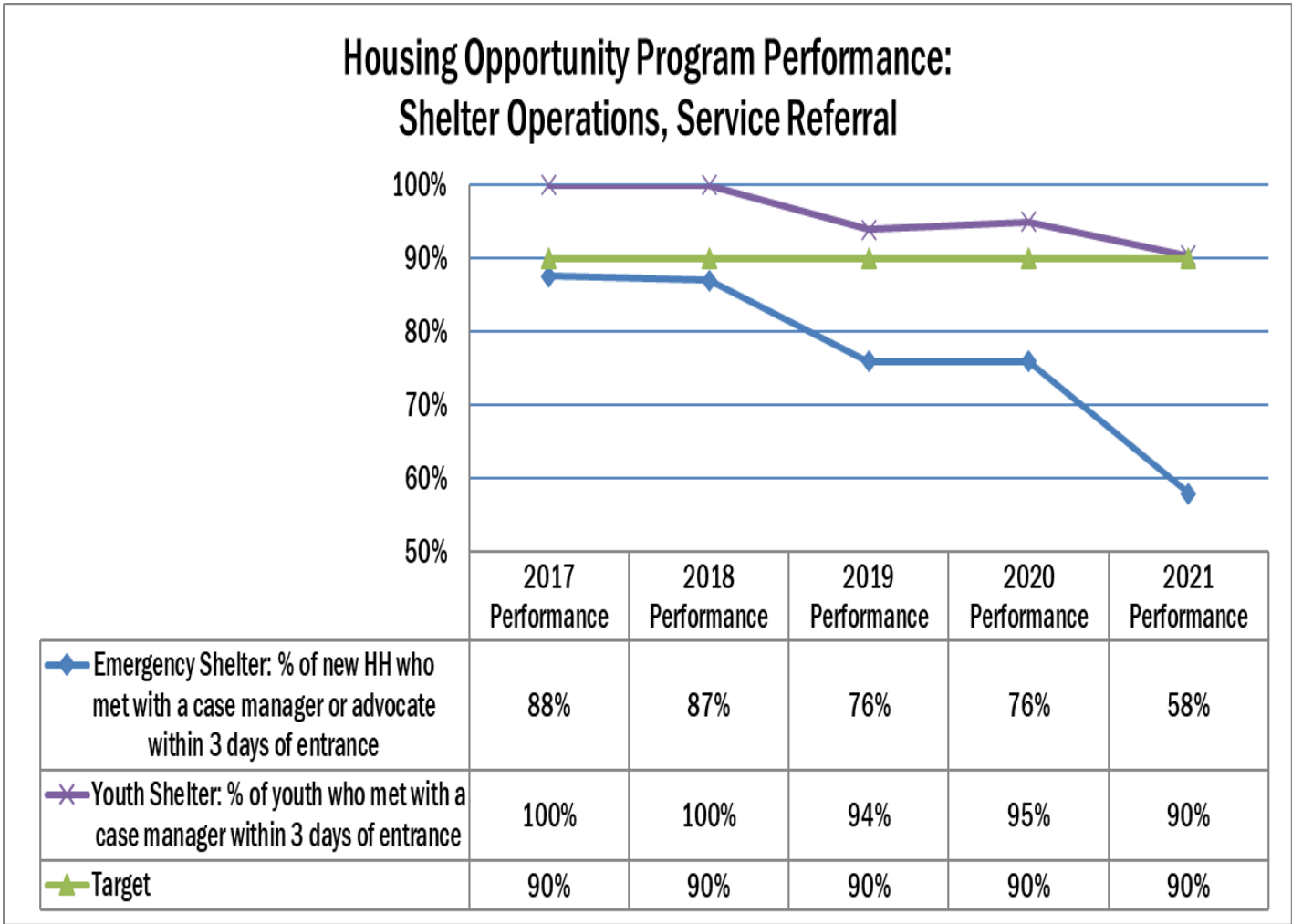
Grantees report on measures tied to the category of funding received: Shelter Operations, Case Management, Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing. Performance targets and 2021 performance are included below. By reporting the “% of Grantees Meeting Target”, the Office of Economic Opportunity better understands how to provide training and technical assistance.

Performance Measures by Activity	Target	State FY 2021 Performance		% of Grantees Meeting Target
EMERGENCY SHELTER OPERATIONS				
Average # of nights that shelter was open, staffed, insured, clear of safety violations and available to shelter the homeless (excludes warming shelters)	365	359		97
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	58%	70%
		Youth	90%	80%
Households who exit emergency shelter, exit to stable permanent or transitional housing	baseline	28%		n/a
YOUTH SHELTER & SERVICES				
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%	75%		60%
ESSENTIAL SERVICES CASE MANAGEMENT⁴				
Homeless households referred for case management will meet with a case manager within 3 days of the referral.	90%	61%		75%
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%	30%		30%
Households receiving case management will be stabilized in transitional or permanent housing	70%	23%		0%
Households stabilized or re-housed will continue to be in stable housing at least 90 days following assistance	70%	55%		40%
HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION⁵				
Households at-risk of homelessness will have their housing stabilized or be safely re-housed	70%	77%		89%
Households stabilized or re-housed will continue to be in stable housing at least 90 days following assistance	70%	72%		67%
RAPID RE-HOUSING⁶				
Homeless households will be safely re-housed	70%	63%		60%
Households re-housed will continue to be in stable housing at least 90 days following assistance	70%	64%		40%

⁴ Only organizations that receive HOP funding for essential services case management report on these performance measures.

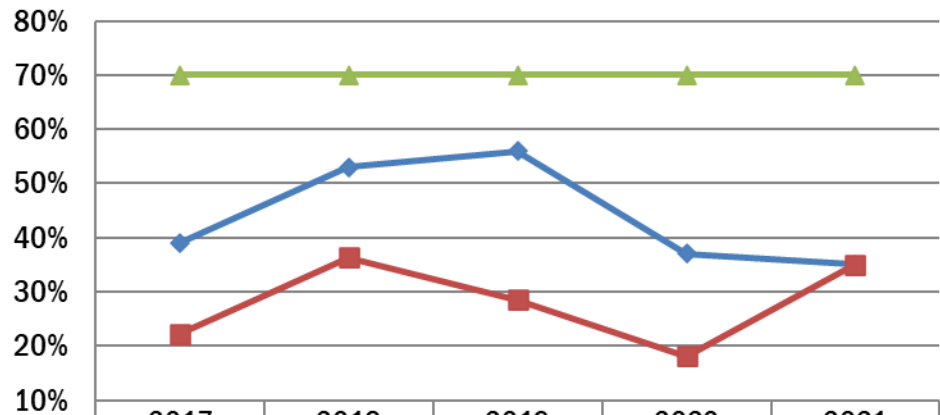
⁵ Only households receiving services and financial/rental assistance (vs. services only) have been included.

The impact of COVID-19 on the operations of year-round and seasonal emergency shelters continued to be significant; however, public health mitigation strategies and the alternative options for isolation and quarantine housing allowed for continued operations during the year. During SFY 21, the average percent of calendar days that the shelter was open, staffed, insured, clear of safety violations and available to residents was 98%, with 74% of shelters staying open all 365 days during the year. This tracks with pre-COVID data and is a significant rebound from the year before when some shelters shut down for a period.



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. On average, households in emergency shelters connected to a case manager within 3 days (58%), with most grantees (70%) meeting the target. The precipitous decline in SFY 21 is limited to specific agencies and improvement plans and technical assistance for these agencies is underway.

Housing Opportunity Program Performance: Essential Services Case Management for Homeless Households, Income

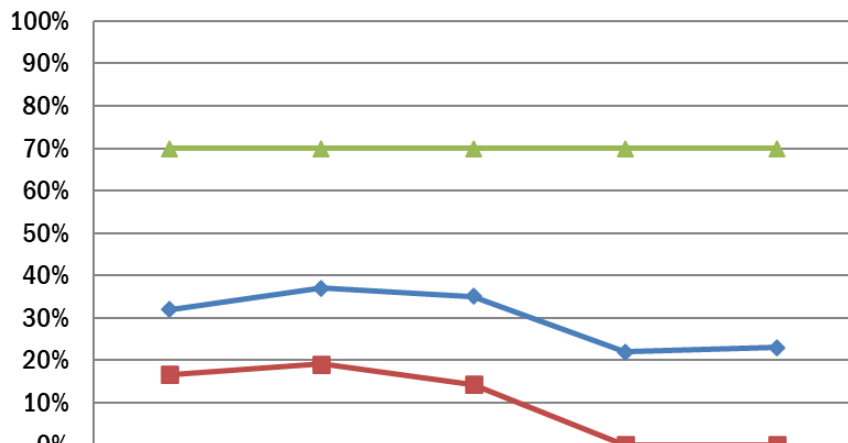


	2017 Performance	2018 Performance	2019 Performance	2020 Performance	2021 Performance
◆ % of HH who - within 90 days of case management - have at least 1 adult who has found employment OR enrolled in education or training OR qualified for income benefits (e.g, TANF, SSI, GA)	39%	53%	56%	37%	35%
▲ Target	70%	70%	70%	70%	70%
■ % of Grantees Meeting Target	22%	36%	29%	18%	35%

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 was similar to performance last year. 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 continued to present challenges as businesses remained with limited operations for much of the year.

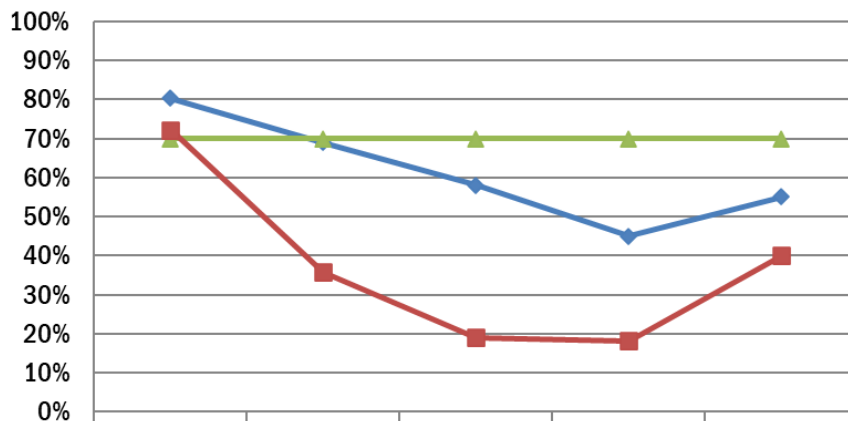
⁷ This measure and data were reviewed in 2020 and the calculation changed. The updated calculation was used in 2020 and 2021.

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



	2017 Performance	2018 Performance	2019 Performance	2020 Performance	2021 Performance
◆ % of households who, after meeting with a CM, were stabilized in transitional or permanent housing	32%	37%	35%	22%	23%
▲ Target	70%	70%	70%	70%	70%
■ % of Grantees Meeting Target	17%	19%	14%	0%	0%

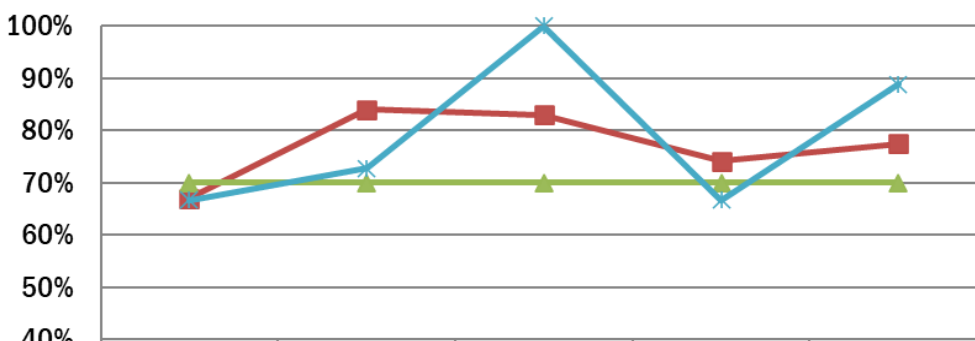
Housing Opportunity Program Performance: Essential Services Case Management for Homeless Households, Housing Stability



	2017 Performance	2018 Performance	2019 Performance	2020 Performance	2021 Performance
◆ % of households who were stabilized in transitional or permanent housing AND remained stably housed for at least 90 days (DV Excluded)	80%	69%	58%	45%	55%
▲ Target	70%	70%	70%	70%	70%
■ % of Grantees Meeting Target	72%	36%	19%	18%	40%

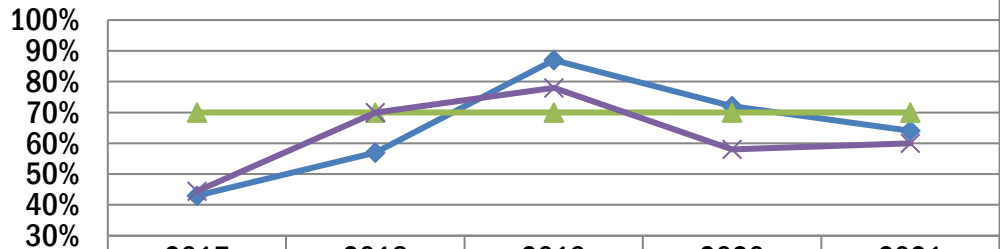
Essential Services case management refers to comprehensive case management services provided to households in emergency shelters or the General Assistance Emergency Housing program. Essential services case management supports households with housing goals, but also focuses more broadly on helping households access resources to support basic needs and increase income. In 2021, the number of those moving into stable housing after receiving essential services case management remained steady, although still lower than previous years. Of those supported into housing, household, 55% of households continued to be stably housed for at least 90 days.

Housing Opportunity Program Performance: Homelessness Prevention



	2017 Performance	2018 Performance	2019 Performance	2020 Performance	2021 Performance
■ % of households at-risk of homelessness who were stabilized or rehoused	67%	84%	83%	74%	77%
▲ Target	70%	70%	70%	70%	70%
* % of Homelessness Prevention Grantees Meeting Target	67%	73%	100%	67%	89%

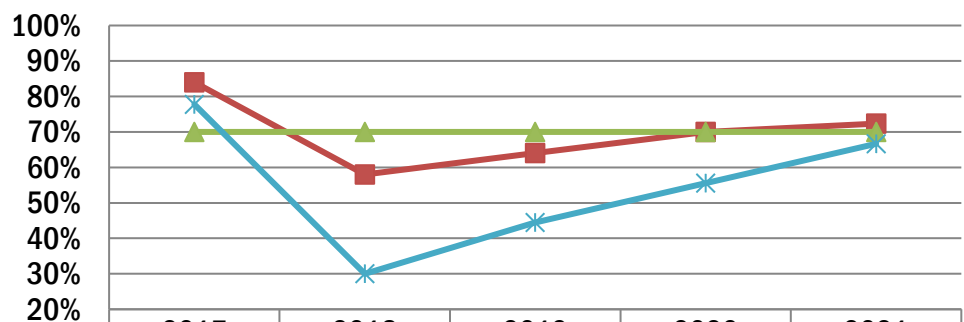
Housing Opportunity Program Performance: Rapid Re-Housing



	2017 Performance	2018 Performance	2019 Performance	2020 Performance	2021 Performance
◆ % of homeless households who were re-housed.	43%	57%	87%	72%	64%
▲ Target	70%	70%	70%	70%	70%
✕ % of Rapid Rehousing Grantees Meeting Target	44%	70%	78%	58%	60%

In SFY 2021, HOP grantees reported a slight increase in those re-housed or achieving stability for those served by Homelessness Prevention but a continued decline in re-housing households through Rapid Re-housing. It's important to note that in SFY 2021, the CARES Housing Voucher Program, a statewide rapid re-housing project, launched rehousing more than 300 households during the year.

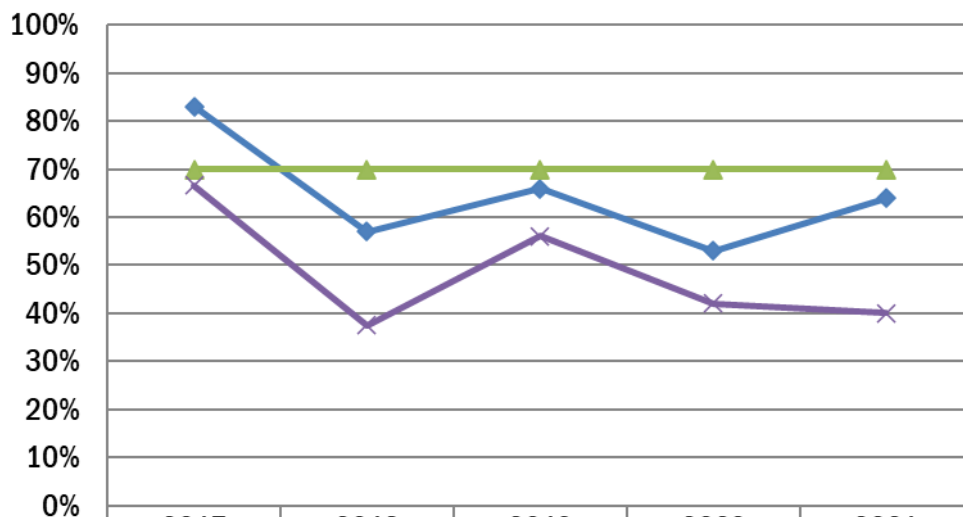
Housing Opportunity Program Performance: Homelessness Prevention - Housing Stability



	2017 Performance	2018 Performance	2019 Performance	2020 Performance	2021 Performance
■ % of HH at-risk of homelessness who remain in stable housing 90 days after assistance (prevention)	84%	58%	64%	70%	72%
▲ Target	70%	70%	70%	70%	70%
* % of Homelessness Prevention Grantees Meeting Target	78%	30%	44%	56%	67%

Housing stability outcomes for Homelessness Prevention programs continued to improve and build on progress seen in 2019. External COVID-19 factors continue to impact the housing landscape as the eviction moratorium provided extra support for households at risk of homelessness while the limited housing market and limited incomes have added stressors for households.

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



	2017 Performance	2018 Performance	2019 Performance	2020 Performance	2021 Performance
◆ % of homeless HH who remain in stable housing 90 days after assistance (rapid re-housing)	83%	57%	66%	53%	64%
▲ Target	70%	70%	70%	70%	70%
✕ % of Rapid Re-Housing Grantees Meeting Target	67%	38%	56%	42%	40%

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. The number of households served increased dramatically, a result of both the increased need created by COVID-19 as well as the increased capacity funded through the supplemental funding. The average length of time between enrollment and rehousing or stability increased.

Housing Opportunity Grant Program Coordinated Entry Housing Navigation Services	SFY2020	SFY2021
Number of Households Served	2,724	6,814
% of Program Exits to Permanent Housing	52%	49%
% Households Served that were Re-housed or Stabilized within 28 Days	3%	2%
Average # of Days from Enrollment to Rehoused or Stabilized	125	143

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted individuals and families, providers, and the community significantly. Vermont’s homeless shelter and service providers faced the challenges head on and continue to support individuals and families during this unprecedented time. Housing navigation services continue to prove vital for households experiencing homelessness to help support access to the expanded range of housing resources available.