

Housing Opportunity Grant Program (HOP)

Annual Report - State Fiscal Year 2022

July 2021 – June 2022

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.

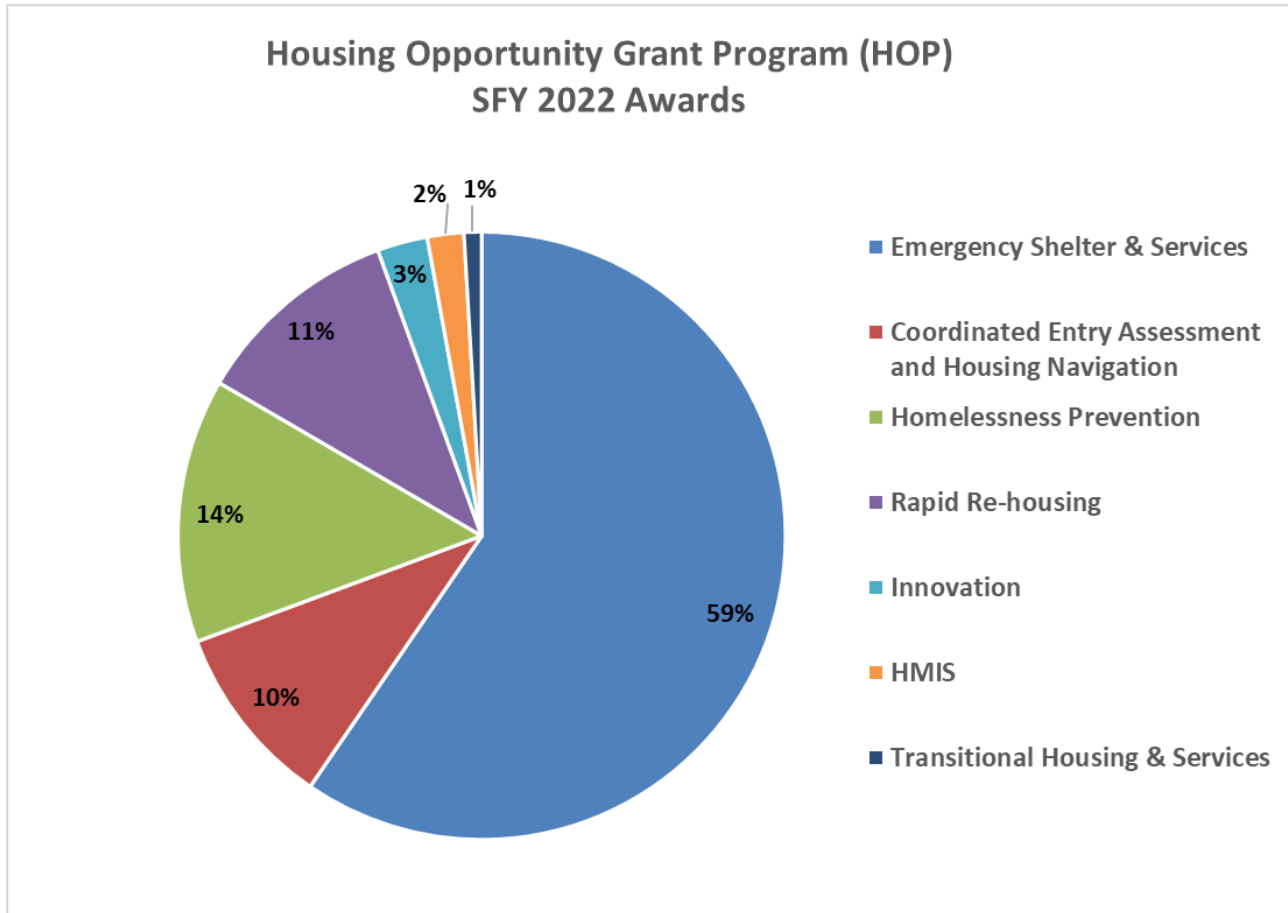
During State Fiscal Year 2022, the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) also continued to administer the ESG CARES Housing Project, which provides rental assistance vouchers; the Rapid Resolution Housing Initiative, which provides flexible financial assistance to assist households in exiting motels; and the Housing Stability Services program, which provides support to households applying for or receiving assistance through the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP).

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 statewide homeless Point-in-Time Count and the Economic Services Division on the General Assistance Emergency Housing program.

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 SFY2022, more than \$11 million in state and federal funding was awarded under the Housing Opportunity Grant Program.



The Housing Opportunity Grant Program supports basic operations and essential services at 20 overnight emergency shelters, including eight shelters for persons fleeing domestic/sexual violence and six motel overflow pools operated by these agencies. Shelters range in size from a few rooms for families to 50 beds for single adults. Four programs also provided emergency shelter in 18 scattered site apartments, ranging in size from one to three bedrooms. During SFY22, one Extreme Cold Weather shelter operated for two nights in Rutland. In general, emergency shelter bed capacity continued at a reduced level in SFY2022, as compared to pre-COVID levels, with shelters responding to public health recommendations to reduce the spread of infection.

Approximately 66% of all HOP funds supported direct service staff, such as shelter case managers or housing specialists. Ten percent 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; financial assistance such as security deposits, utility payments and deposits, moving costs, rental arrearages; and up to 24 months of rental assistance. In SFY2022 these activities provided housing stability for 836 households. Approximately 52% of these households were literally homeless, an increase from 43% in SFY2021. More than \$1.27 million was awarded in client financial or rental assistance.

Over \$1.37 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 \$523,000) supported the implementation of HMIS and innovative projects such as landlord liaisons.

Vermonters experiencing homelessness or housing instability face significant challenges. These include the lack of available rentals, the high cost of rent, and very low incomes. These factors impact outcomes across the Housing Opportunity Grant Program and continued to be exacerbated by COVID-19 during State Fiscal Year 2022.

Program changes initially implemented in State Fiscal Year 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic continued at some level in State Fiscal Year 2022. Following public health recommendations, many shelters continued to operate at a reduced capacity and limited new intakes during active outbreaks on site. Motel-based services and outreach remained significant activities during the year. Most seasonal shelters, typically providing congregate shelter during cold weather months and overnight only, did not operate again this year. Additional activities as part of the COVID response and recovery efforts included:

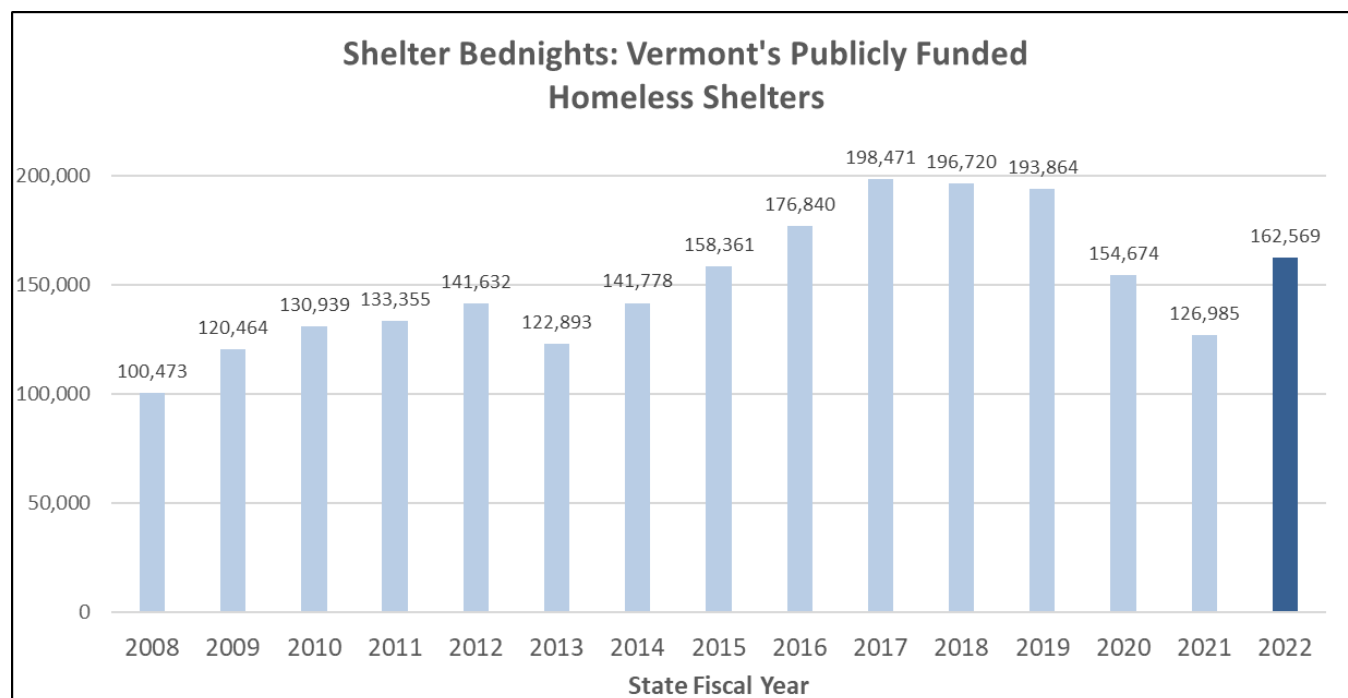
- A continued partnership with the Vermont Department of Health to provide guidance, training and technical assistance, including site-specific support on infection prevention and control;
- Provision of supplies, including hand sanitizer and personal protective equipment;
- Maintaining non-congregate sheltering options through the General Assistance (GA) Emergency Housing Program;
- Creating alternative housing capacity to quarantine and isolate households with suspected or confirmed COVID-19; and
- Building capacity within local communities to improve homeless health care through a grant administered by the Vermont Department of Health.

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

Between July 1, 2021 and June 30, 2022, Vermont’s publicly funded emergency shelters, domestic violence shelters, and youth shelters, reported the following:

- **2,648** persons (68% individuals and 32% in families with children) sheltered for a total of **162,569** bednights.²
- **2,128** were adults and **520** were children under the age of 18.
- The average length of stay was **66** days.
- Approximately 63% of sheltered children (326) and 59% of families (499) spent their stay through domestic/sexual violence shelter.³

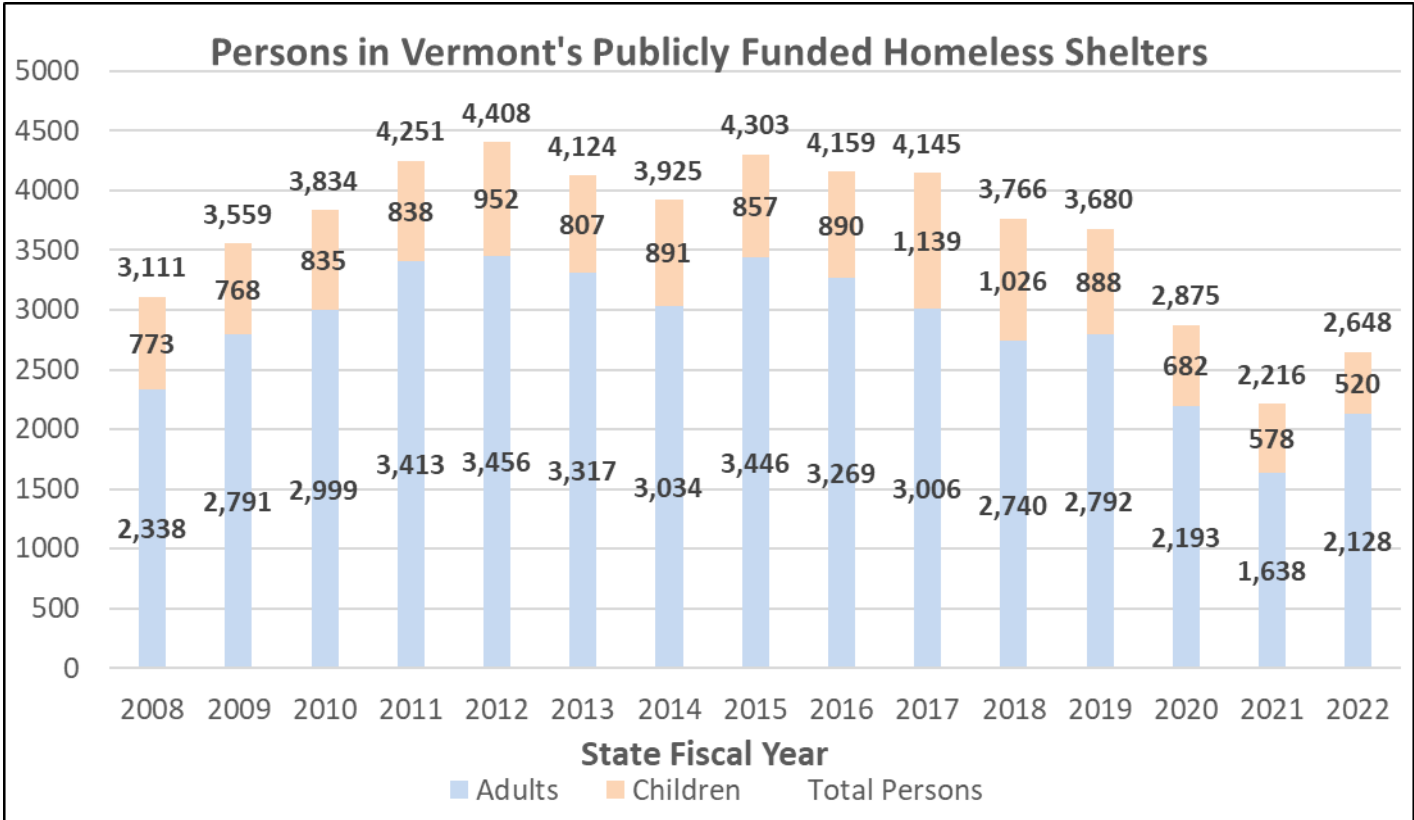
The total number of emergency shelter bednights provided increased from the previous year, but is still below what it had been in earlier years. Changes were driven by shelter decisions to operate during the year with reduced capacity to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 as well as a continued loss of seasonal shelter capacity. Seasonal shelters have been especially impacted by COVID due to their congregate nature and often volunteer-based staffing models. Since SFY2019, nine seasonal shelter projects have ended; some, but not all, have been replaced with other year-round options run by the same agencies. Only two seasonal shelters operated in SFY2022. Although not the purview of this report, the General Assistance Emergency Housing Program continued to serve an increased number of households during the same period as part of the State’s pandemic response.



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

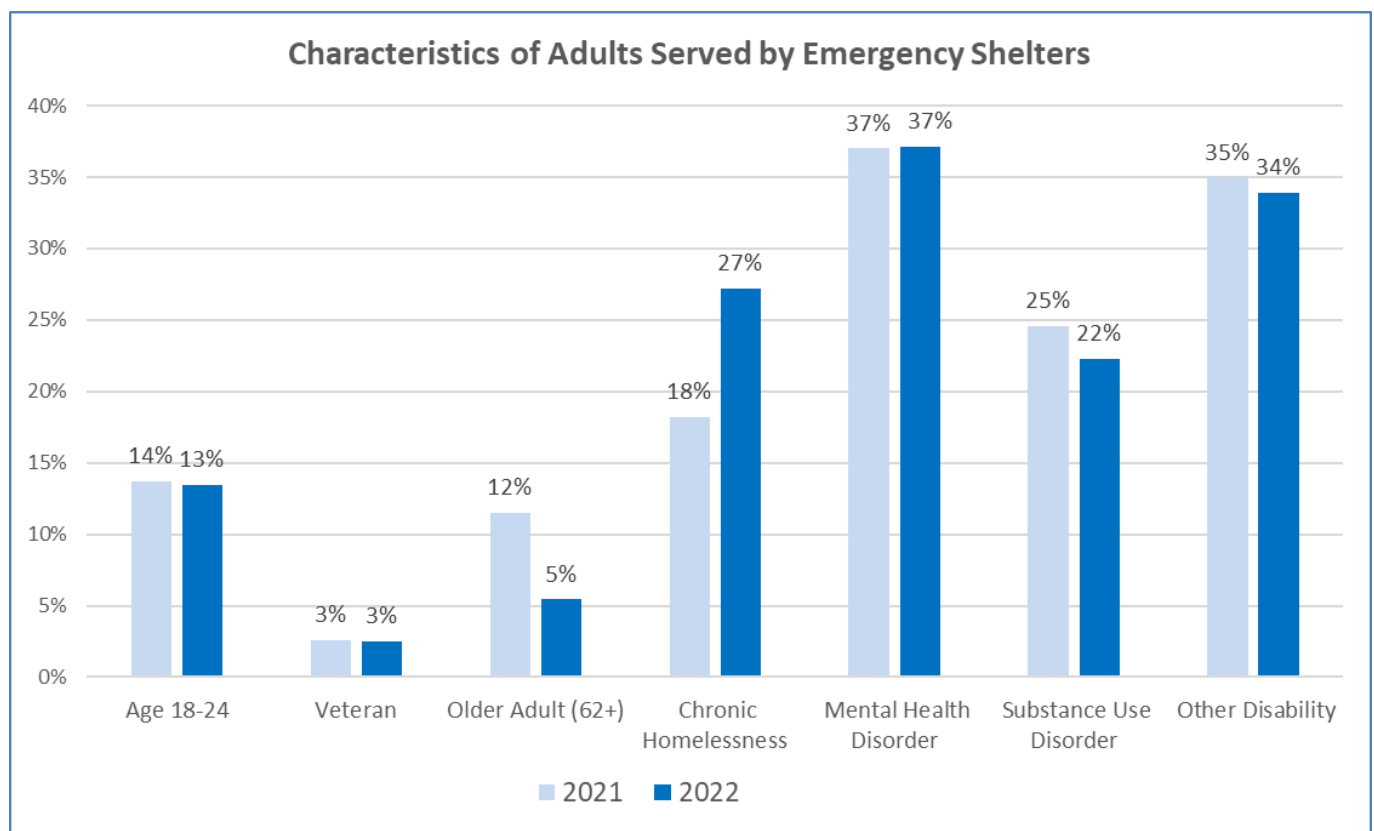
³ In most AHS districts, DCF partners with domestic violence shelters to directly meet emergency housing needs for all victims fleeing domestic/sexual violence (including through motel vouchers) rather than referrals to the General Assistance Emergency Housing Program. These bednights are included in the total.

During SFY2022, shelters navigated multiple outbreaks of COVID and at times were instructed to restrict new intakes to prevent the spread of infection. This, paired with longer lengths of stay, may be a contributing factor to the number of persons sheltered increasing at a slower pace than bednights when compared with last year.



The chart below reflects a sampling of demographics for all adults (2,128) served by emergency shelters. There were some significant changes in demographics noted between SFY2021 and SFY2022:

- While the *percentage* of older adults in shelter decreased from the previous year, the *number* of those 62 years or older actually increased. However, the total number of adults sheltered in SFY2022 was significantly higher than in SFY2021, resulting in older adults representing a smaller percentage of all adults overall.
- Chronic homelessness, which is based on the length of time a household is homeless⁴ and having a long-term disability that effects independent living, is on the rise. The state’s General Assistance Emergency Housing Program operated without length of stay limits (compared to pre-COVID length of stay restrictions) which resulted in more households experiencing uninterrupted periods of homelessness and thus meeting the definition of chronic homelessness. Emergency shelters also reported longer stays in shelter, which would further impact this measure.



⁴ [Definition of Chronic Homelessness](#)

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 2022 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 2022 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	337	91%
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	49%
		Youth	87%
Households who exit emergency shelter, exit to stable permanent or transitional housing	baseline	19%	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%	81%	100%
ESSENTIAL SERVICES CASE MANAGEMENT⁵			
Homeless households referred for case management will meet with a case manager within 3 days of the referral.	90%	65%	43%
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%	32%	22%
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 ⁶	70%	40%	44%
HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION⁷			
Households at-risk of homelessness will have their housing stabilized or be safely re-housed	70%	76%	60%
Households stabilized or re-housed will continue to be in stable housing at least 90 days following assistance ⁸	70%	67%	67%
RAPID RE-HOUSING⁹			
Homeless households will be safely re-housed	70%	65%	50%
Households re-housed will continue to be in stable housing at least 90 days following assistance ¹⁰	70%	46%	44%

⁵ Only organizations that receive HOP funding for essential services case management report on these performance measures.

⁶ Victim service providers have been excluded from this measurement as they are not required to conduct follow up with households

⁷ Only households receiving services and financial/rental assistance (vs. services only) have been included.

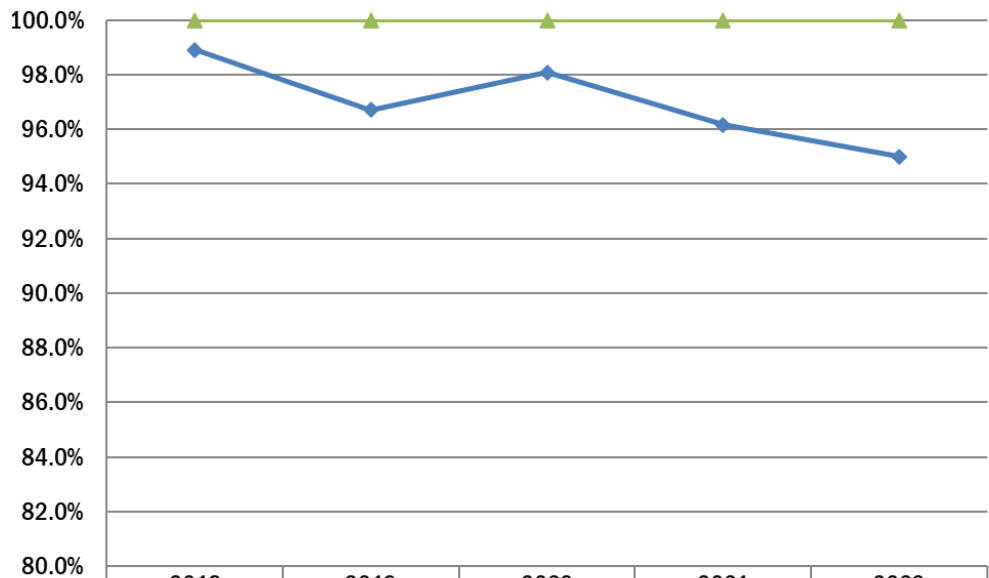
⁸ See footnote 5

⁹ See footnote 6

¹⁰ See footnote 5

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 SFY2022, the average percent of calendar days that the shelter was open, staffed, insured, clear of safety violations and available to residents was 95%, with 91% of shelters staying open all 365 days during the year. Throughout the year there were some shelters who were closed due to either planned or unplanned renovation projects, impacting the overall percentage of calendar days that shelter was available to residents.

Housing Opportunity Program Performance: Emergency Shelter Operations



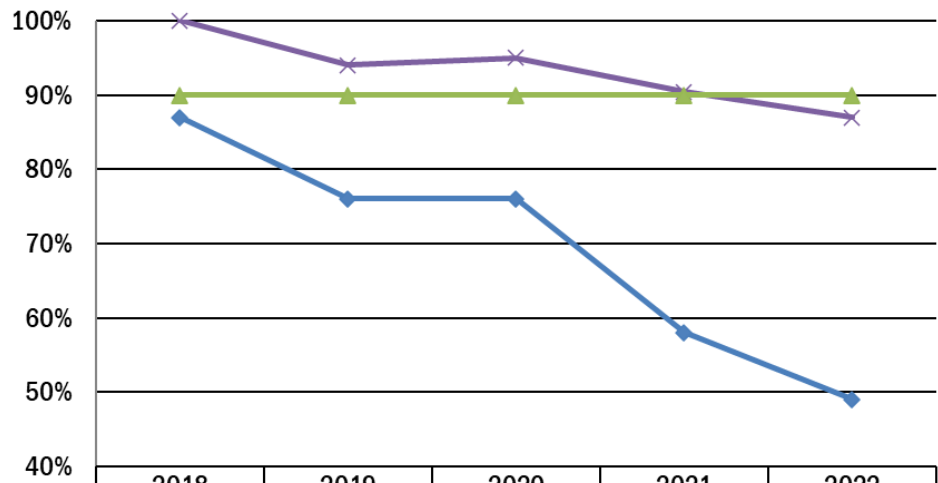
◆ % of calendar days that the shelter was open, staffed, insured, clear of safety violations and available to shelter residents

▲ Target

	2018 Performance	2019 Performance	2020 Performance	2021 Performance	2022 Performance
% of calendar days that the shelter was open, staffed, insured, clear of safety violations and available to shelter residents	98.9%	96.7%	98.1%	96.2%	95.0%
Target	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

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. Some emergency shelters provide services onsite, while other programs refer guests to another service provider for case management support. On average, non-youth shelter grantees (59%) and youth shelter grantees (75%) are meeting the target for this measure. The decline that began in SFY2021, and continued in SFY2022, is limited to specific agencies and improvement plans and technical assistance for these agencies is underway.

Housing Opportunity Program Performance: Shelter Operations, Service Referral

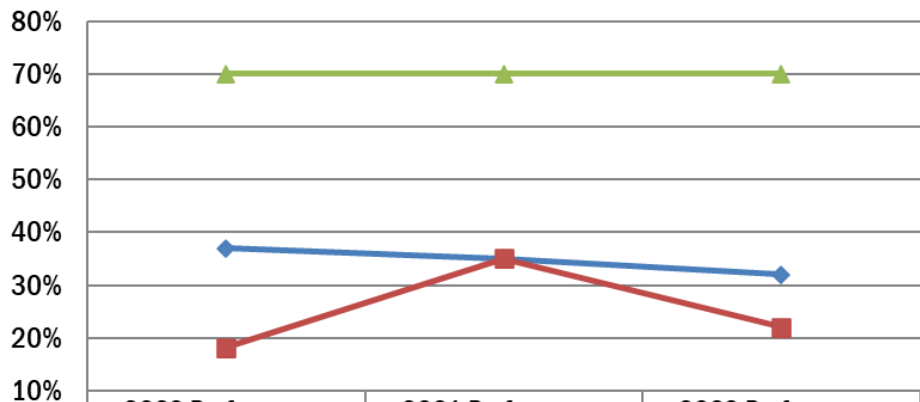


	2018 Performance	2019 Performance	2020 Performance	2021 Performance	2022 Performance
Emergency Shelter: % of new HH who met with a case manager or advocate within 3 days of entrance	87%	76%	76%	58%	49%
Youth Shelter: % of youth who met with a case manager within 3 days of entrance	100%	94%	95%	90%	87%
Target	90%	90%	90%	90%	90%

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. 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 slipped from previous years. High levels of staff turnover and vacancies across many systems of care have created delays in connecting households to resources. There was also a significant push to get people connected to benefits such as unemployment, food assistance, and health insurance in the early days of COVID; this may have meant that participants did not identify needing support connecting to other resources when they entered shelter.

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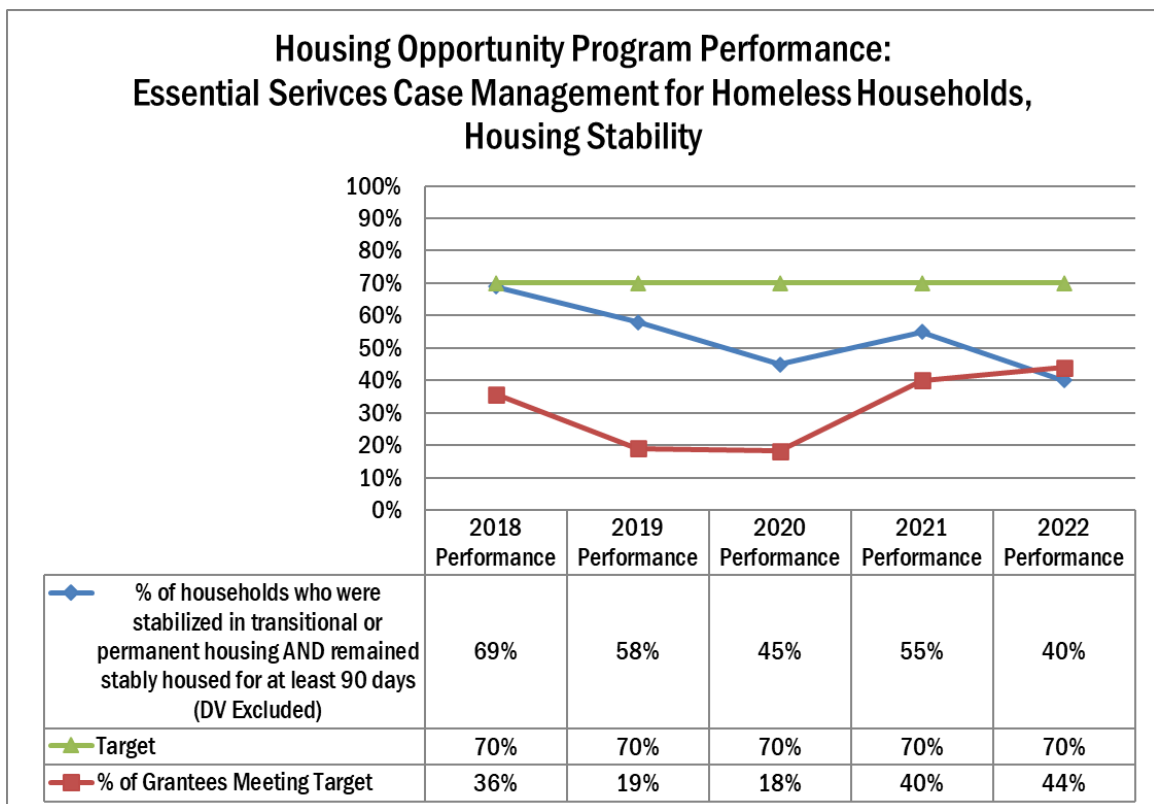
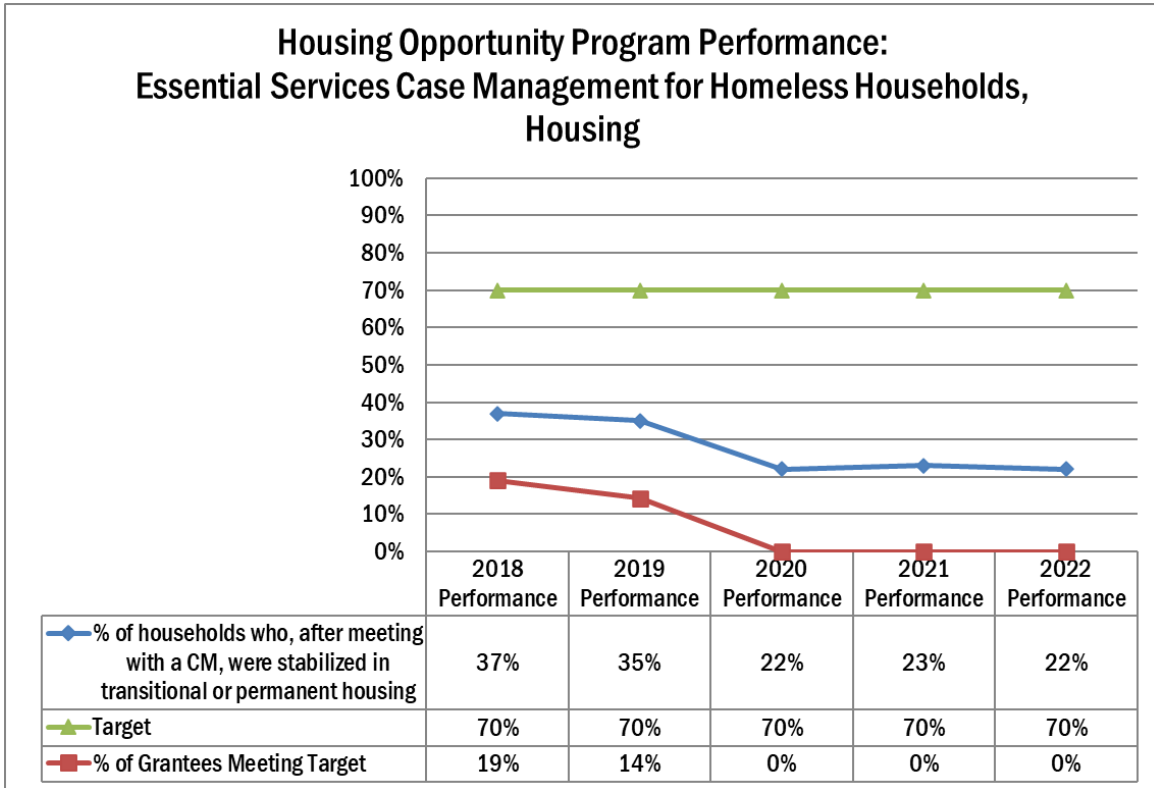
Housing Opportunity Program Performance: Essential Services Case Management for Homeless Households, Income



	2020 Performance	2021 Performance	2022 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)	37%	35%	32%
▲ Target	70%	70%	70%
■ % of Grantees Meeting Target	18%	35%	22%

¹¹ This measure and data were reviewed in 2020 and the calculation changed. Only the years using the updated calculation (2020-2022) have been included.

In SFY2022, the number of households moving into stable housing after receiving essential services case management remained relatively steady, although still lower than previous years. Of those supported into housing, 40% of households continued to be stably housed for at least 90 days. When considered with the fact that the average length of stay in shelter increased, it appears that stable housing outcomes continue to be impacted by a lack of housing stock or other sustainable housing options.



In SFY2022, HOP grantees reported a slight decline in those re-housed or achieving stability through Homelessness Prevention. With so many other resources available around the state, such as VERAP, Homelessness Prevention programs served a smaller number of households (360) in SFY2022 when compared with previous years: 531 in 2021, 1,308 in 2020. Those households served in SFY2022 likely had more complex needs or higher barriers to housing, both of which can impact performance on this measure. The state also continued to struggle with historically low vacancy rates, making it difficult to find affordable housing for program participants.

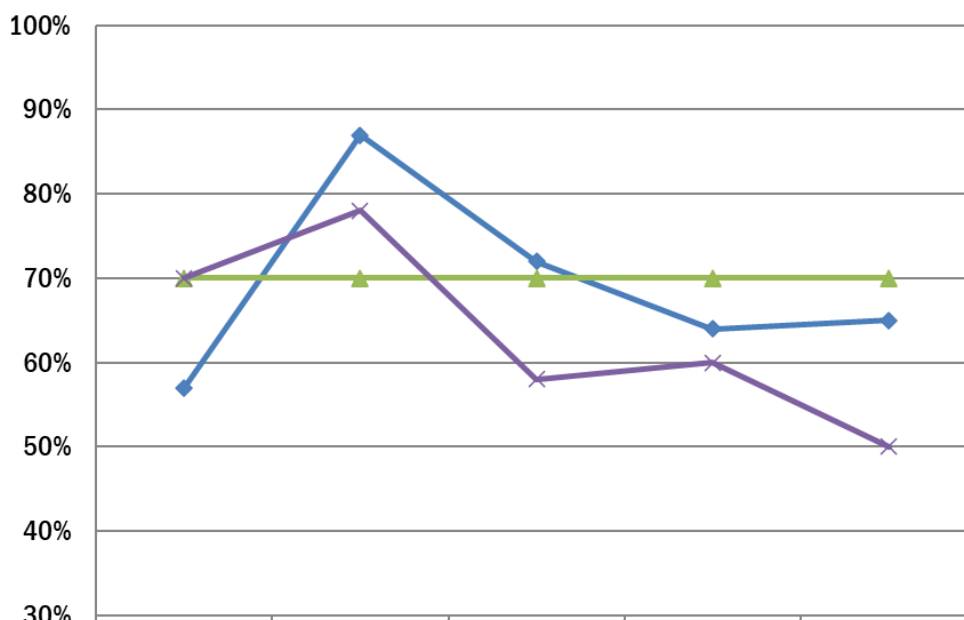
Housing Opportunity Program Performance: Homelessness Prevention, Housing



	2018 Performance	2019 Performance	2020 Performance	2021 Performance	2022 Performance
% of households at-risk of homelessness who were stabilized or rehoused	84%	83%	74%	77%	76%
Target	70%	70%	70%	70%	70%
% of Homelessness Prevention Grantees Meeting Target	73%	100%	67%	89%	60%

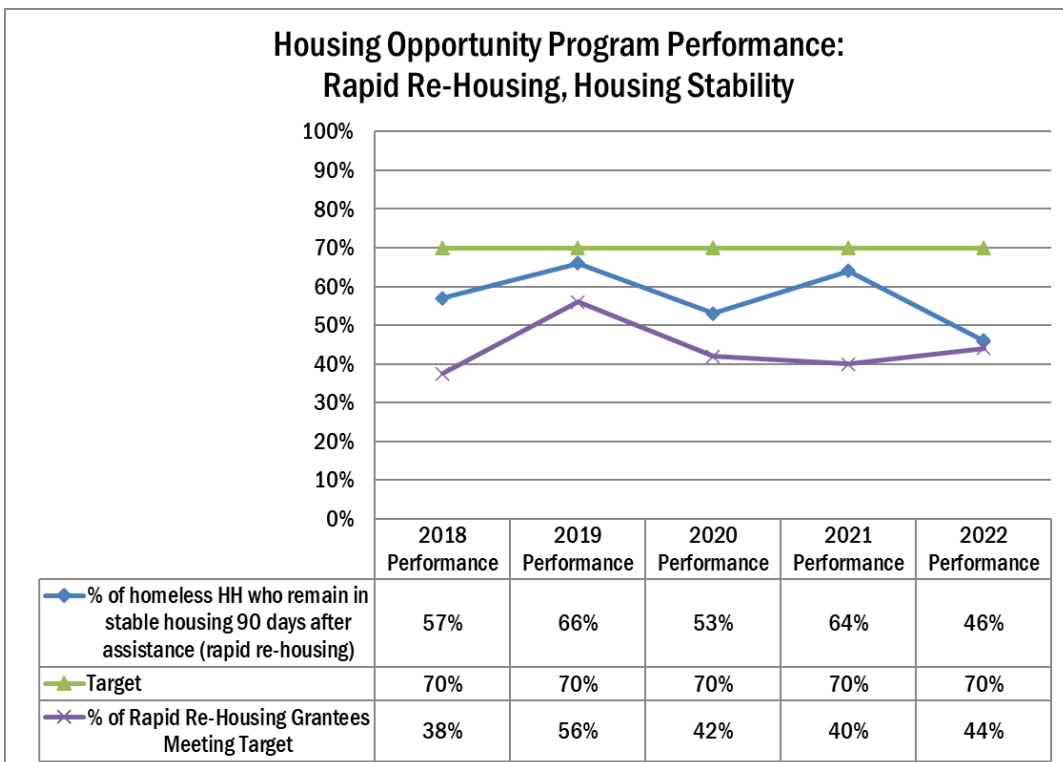
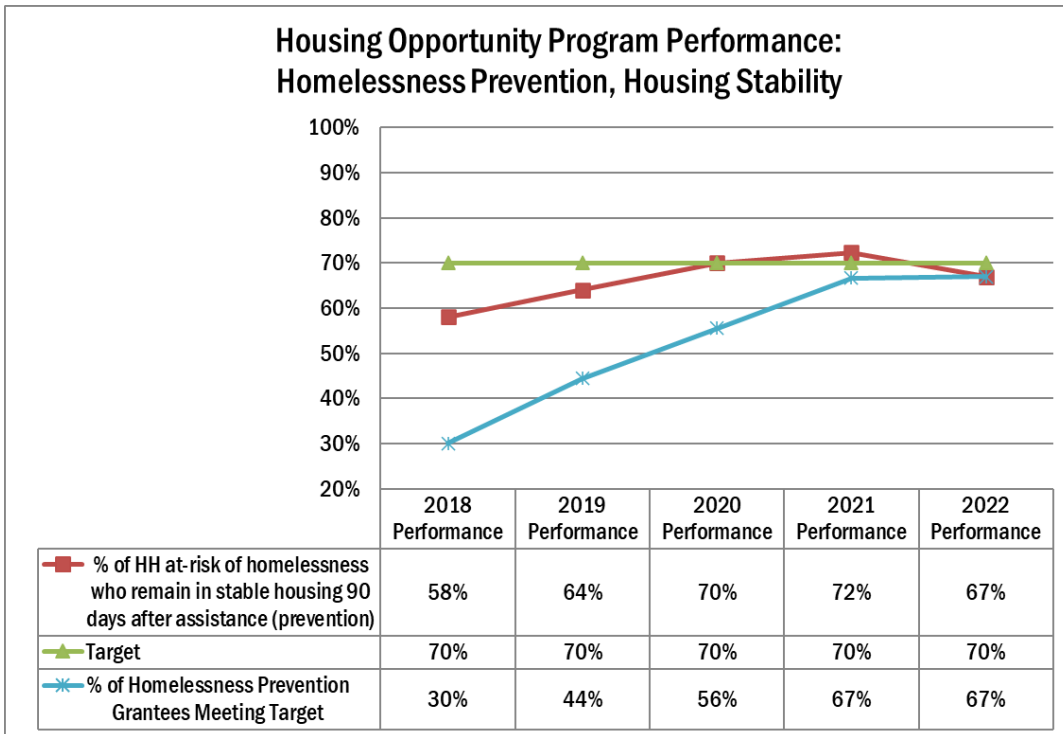
The percentage of those re-housed through Rapid Re-Housing in SFY2022 remained steady with last year’s performance, although there was a very slight increase. As with Homelessness Prevention, the overall number of households served through Rapid Re-Housing programs has decreased significantly since 2020, as a result of increased rental assistance being made available. In 2020, 899 households were served in Rapid Re-housing, compared to only 531 in 2021 and 528 in 2022. A flood of rental assistance or vouchers into a tight housing market can make it that much harder for households to find units to rent. Those households served in SFY2022 may have had more complex needs or higher barriers to housing, both of which can impact performance on this measure. Moving forward, OEO will expand training and technical assistance for rapid re-housing providers and explore new models to support stronger results.

Housing Opportunity Program Performance: Rapid Re-Housing, Housing



	2018 Performance	2019 Performance	2020 Performance	2021 Performance	2022 Performance
◆ % of homeless households who were re-housed.	57%	87%	72%	64%	65%
▲ Target	70%	70%	70%	70%	70%
✕ % of Rapid Rehousing Grantees Meeting Target	70%	78%	58%	60%	50%

Housing stability outcomes for Homelessness Prevention programs showed a decline for the first time since 2018; Rapid Re-housing stability outcomes also saw a decline from last year. For both of these program types, a review of agency-level data shows that there are a few specific providers falling significantly below the target, which has an impact on overall performance. OEO will work with these providers to determine what barriers may exist related to housing stability outcomes and how they can be addressed. External factors that impact the housing landscape and financial stability of participants, may also be contributing to participants not being able to sustain housing once they find it.



Full implementation of coordinated entry has helped to identify appropriate levels of assistance based on the household need. In SFY2020, new performance measures for Coordinated Entry Housing Navigation services were introduced. The number of households served in SFY2022 decreased from the previous year, but still remains above the number served in SFY2020. The average length of time between enrollment and rehousing or stability continued to increase, showing that most households spent over 5 months in Coordinated Entry during SFY2022 before stabilizing their housing. The overall percentage of households exiting Coordinated Entry to permanent housing has remained relatively stable from year to year.

Housing Opportunity Grant Program Coordinated Entry Housing Navigation Services	SFY2020	SFY2021	SFY2022
Number of Households Served	2,724	6,814	3,839
% Program Exits to Permanent Housing	52%	49%	52%
Average # of Days from Enrollment to Re-housed or Stabilized	125	143	165

State Fiscal Year 2022 continued to be significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. There were many uncertainties, including surges in cases, changing access to testing resources, and the roll out of vaccine boosters. Additionally, there was ongoing uncertainty about when non-congregate shelter through the General Assistance program would end. Vermont’s shelter and service providers remained committed to serving program participants, while also navigating high rates of staff turnover and lengthy vacancies. Providing safe shelter, flexible financial and rental assistance, and housing navigation services are vital in the state’s effort to end homelessness.

Throughout the year, OEO worked to support grantees navigate these difficulties by providing:

- Logistical and financial support for COVID mitigation efforts, including ongoing close coordination with the Vermont Department of Health
- Increased funding to support the raising of wages and bringing on new staff capacity where needed
- Ongoing statewide homeless response calls to keep partners updated on changes to policy and approaches.