

## *Housing Opportunity Grant Program (HOP)*

### *Annual Report - State Fiscal Year 2023*

### *July 2022 – June 2023*

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, financial assistance, and medium-term rental assistance at approximately 37 non-profit emergency shelter, transitional housing, housing navigation, rapid re-housing and homelessness prevention organizations serving all regions of the state.

During State Fiscal Year 2023, the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) also continued to administer the ESG CARES Housing Project (which wound down in the early months of the fiscal year) and the Housing Stability Services program, which provides support to households as part of the statewide Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP).

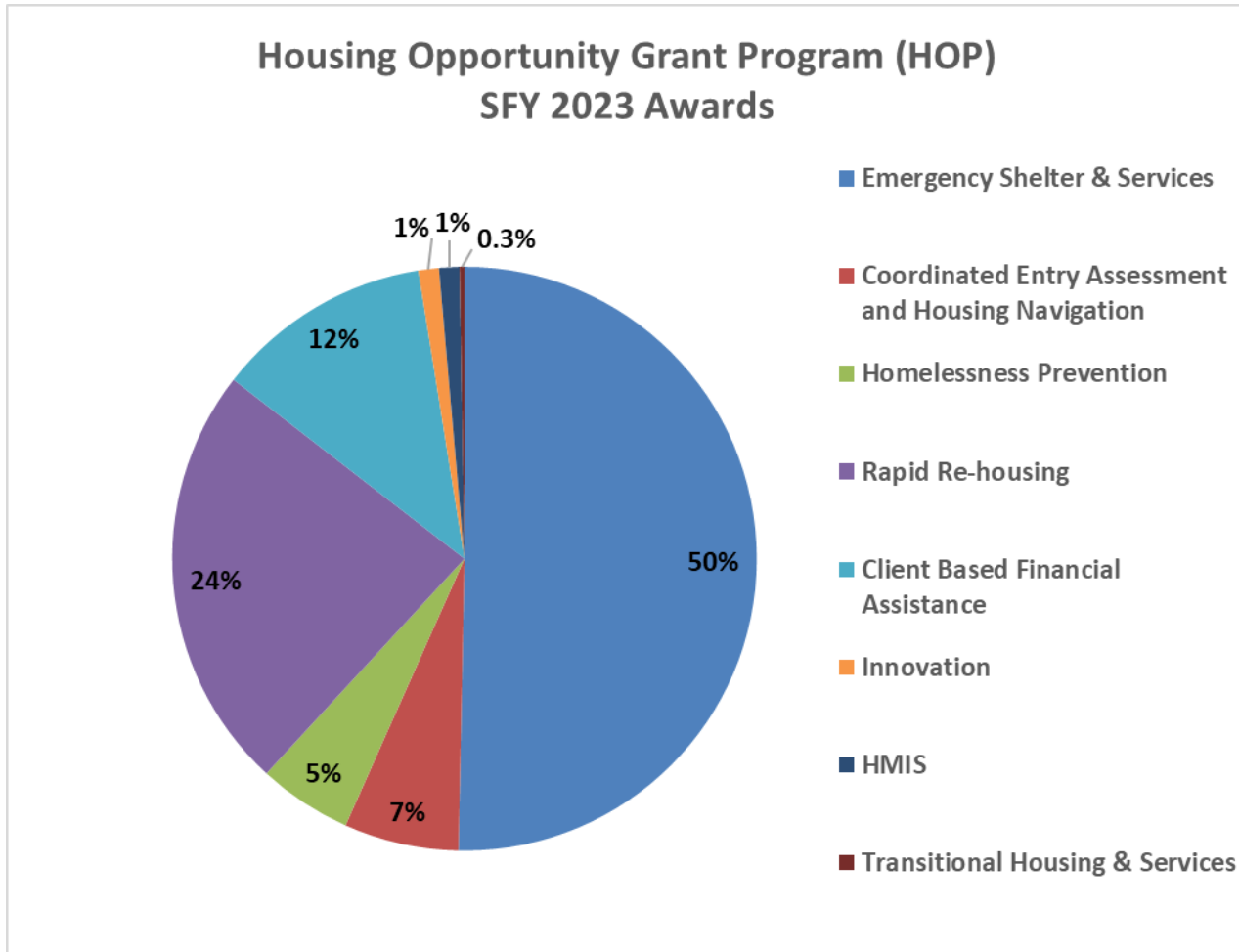
The State Office of Economic Opportunity works in close partnership with both HUD-recognized Homeless Continua of Care – Chittenden County and the Balance of State (i.e., the Chittenden Homeless Alliance and the Vermont Coalition to End Homelessness) - to consult on performance measurement, data management, 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.

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<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 SFY2023, more than \$22 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 21 organizations operating overnight emergency shelters, including eight shelters for persons fleeing domestic/sexual violence and seven motel overflow pools operated by these agencies. Shelters range in size from a few rooms for families to 70 beds for single adults. Five organizations also provided emergency shelter in 21 scattered site apartments, ranging in size from one to three bedrooms. During SFY23, two Extreme Cold Weather shelters operated, one in Rutland and one in Burlington.

Approximately \$3.6 million of HOP funds supported direct services staff at emergency shelters, such as case managers or housing specialists. Approximately \$6.1 million supported emergency shelter operations, such as utilities, rent, building insurance, non-case management staff, shelter supplies, overflow motel placements, or routine maintenance. Over \$230,000 supported client-based financial assistance to divert or quickly exit households from emergency shelter or meet their transportation needs. A handful of shelter renovation projects were supported with approximately \$466,000.

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. Approximately \$1.7 million of HOP funds supported direct service staff in these projects, such as housing navigators, while just over \$6.7 million supported client-based rental and financial assistance.

Over \$1.8 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). Approximately \$577,000 supported the implementation of HMIS, Transitional Housing programs, and innovative projects such as landlord liaisons. Remaining funds were awarded to HOP grantees to support general administration.

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 2023.

Program changes initially implemented in State Fiscal Year 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic continued at some level in State Fiscal Year 2023. Following public health recommendations, shelters limited new intakes during active outbreaks on site. Motel-based services and outreach remained significant activities during the year. Many 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; and
- Building capacity within local communities to improve homeless health care through a grant administered by the Vermont Department of Health.

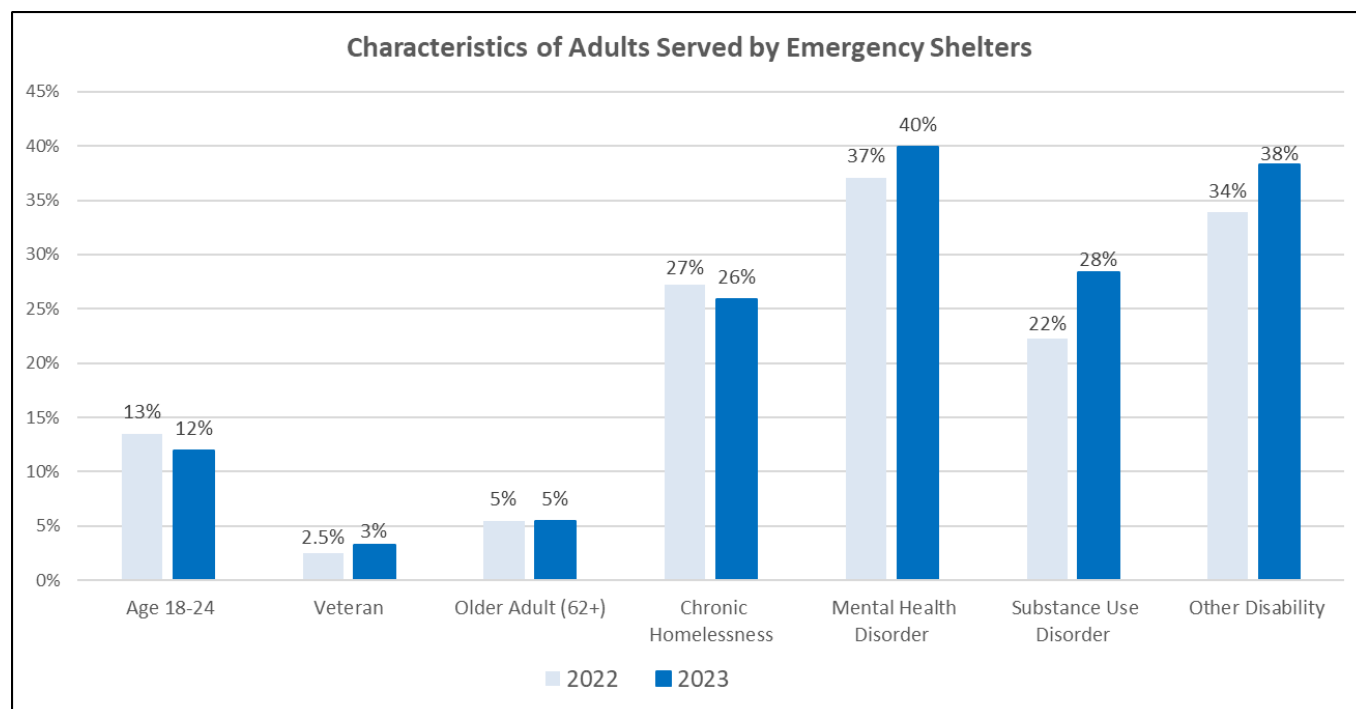
## Emergency Shelter Persons Served, Demographics, Bednights & Length of Stay

Between July 1, 2022 and June 30, 2023, Vermont’s publicly funded emergency shelters, domestic violence shelters, and youth shelters, reported the following:

- **3,180** persons (66% individuals and 34% in families with children) sheltered for a total of **204,299** bednights.<sup>2</sup>
- **2,547** were adults and **633** were children under the age of 18.
- The average length of stay was **64** days (a slight decrease from the 66 days in SFY2022).
- Approximately 66% of sheltered children (415) and 63% of persons in families (681) spent their stay through a domestic/sexual violence shelter.<sup>3</sup>

Only three seasonal shelters operated in SFY2023, providing a total of 2,583 bednights.<sup>4</sup> While this is an increase from the past several years, it is still well below pre-COVID levels: in SFY2019 27,351 bednights were provided at seasonal shelters. 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. 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.

The chart below reflects a sampling of demographics for all adults (2,547) served by emergency shelters.

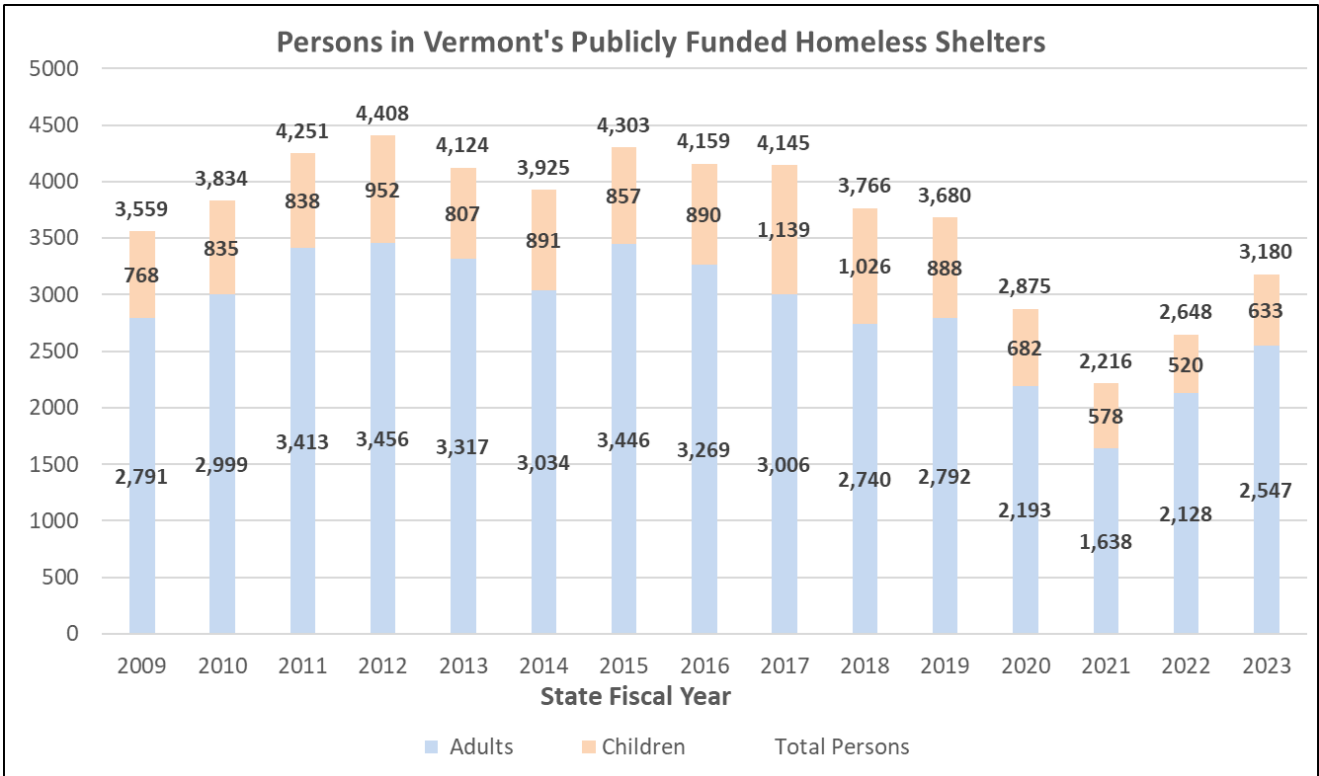
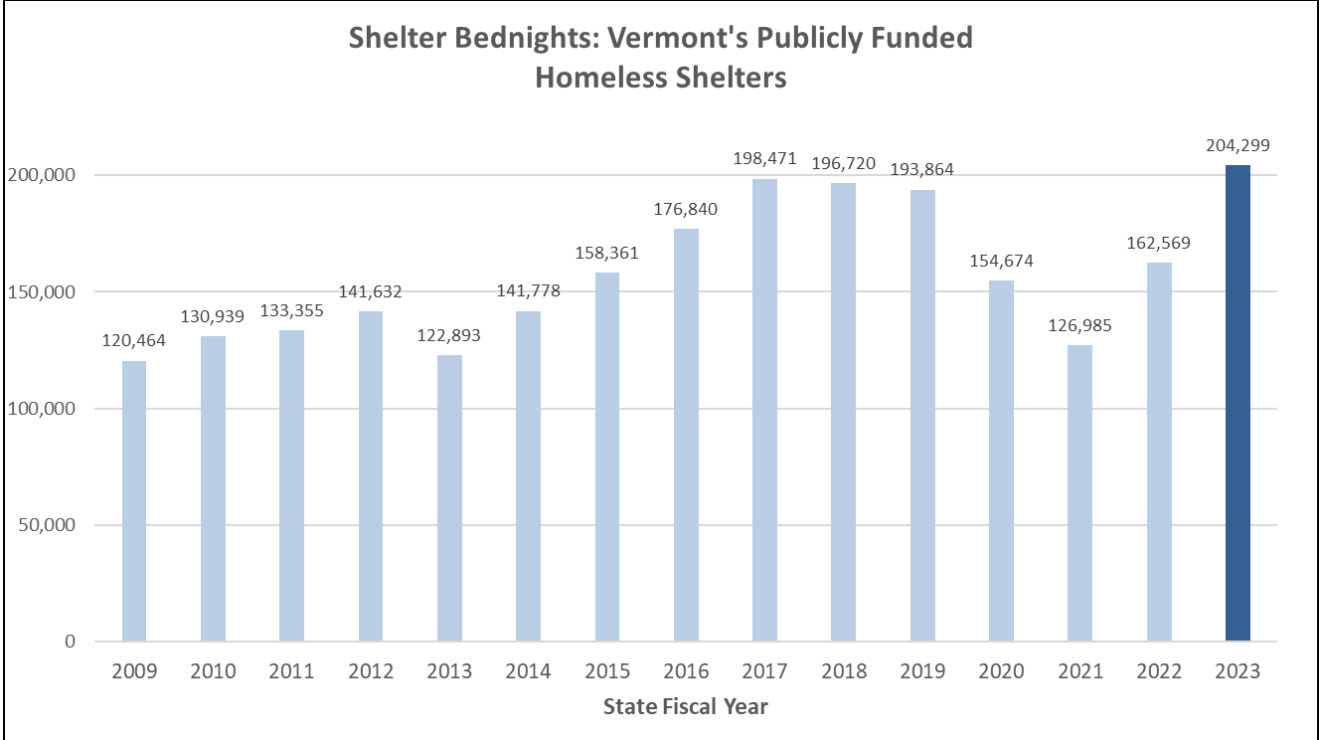


<sup>2</sup> One bednight = One person sheltered for one night. Total bednights = Number of persons x the number of nights sheltered.

<sup>3</sup> In 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.

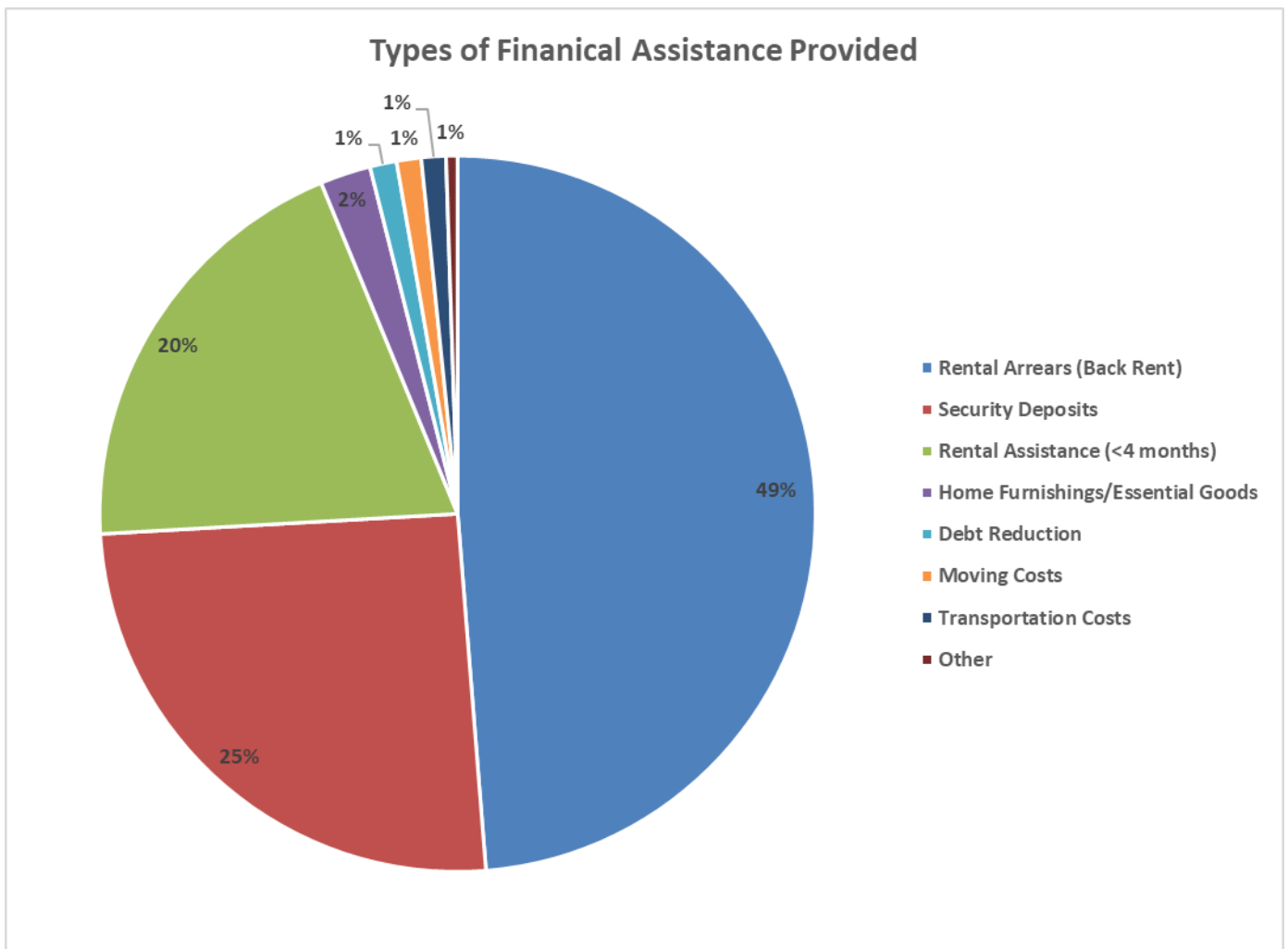
<sup>4</sup> Does not include Extreme Cold Weather Shelters.

While SFY2023 saw a record number of bednights provided, the number of persons sheltered continues to be below pre-COVID levels. During SFY2023, 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.



## Flexible Financial Assistance Households Assisted, Types of Assistance

Between July 1, 2022 and June 30, 2023, over \$2.4 million in flexible financial assistance was provided to 1,497 households. 62% of households assisted were at risk of homelessness, while 38% were experiencing homelessness. For the past few years, households in Vermont could access the VT Emergency Rental Assistance Program (VERAP) or Reach Up Emergency Rental Assistance (RUERA) for 100% of their rental and utility costs. VERAP was significantly scaled back over the course of State Fiscal Year 2023 and both programs ended during the summer of 2023. Over the past year, many other pandemic-era programs aimed at supporting low-income households also ended, such as the expanded child tax credit and additional SNAP benefits (3SquaresVT). The overall impact on households has been a decreased ability to maintain their rental obligations while covering other household costs (e.g., food, clothing).



97% of households secured or maintained safe housing after receiving financial assistance. Of those households with safe housing, the majority were living in rental housing, either with a subsidy/voucher (55%) or without (42%). Other safe exit destinations included owned homes (1%), Permanent Supportive Housing (<1%), and staying or living with family or friends (<1%).

## Housing Opportunity Grant Program Performance

Grantees report on measures tied to the category of funding received: Shelter Operations, Case Management, Homelessness Prevention, Rapid Re-Housing, and Financial Assistance. Performance targets and 2023 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 2023 Performance		% of Grantees Meeting Target
<b>EMERGENCY SHELTER OPERATIONS</b>				
Average # of nights that shelter was open, staffed, insured, clear of safety violations and available to shelter the homeless (excludes warming shelters)	365	358		94%
Shelter households (individuals or families) will have an initial meeting with a case manager (or equivalent) within 3 days of entering the program	90%	Adult	62%	50%
		Youth	98%	100%
Households who exit emergency shelter, exit to stable permanent or transitional housing	baseline	18%		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%	68%		75%
<b>ESSENTIAL SERVICES CASE MANAGEMENT<sup>5</sup></b>				
Homeless households referred for case management will meet with a case manager within 3 days of the referral.	90%	76%		60%
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%	38%		35%
Households receiving case management will be stabilized in transitional or permanent housing	70%	25%		0%
Households stabilized or re-housed will continue to be in stable housing at least 90 days following assistance <sup>6</sup>	70%	40%		25%
<b>HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION</b>				
Households at-risk of homelessness will have their housing stabilized or be safely re-housed	70%	87%		80%
Households stabilized or re-housed will continue to be in stable housing at least 90 days following assistance <sup>7</sup>	70%	56%		44%
<b>RAPID RE-HOUSING</b>				
Homeless households will be safely re-housed	70%	46%		17%
Households re-housed will continue to be in stable housing at least 90 days following assistance <sup>8</sup>	70%	68%		50%
<b>FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE</b>				
Households will secure or maintain safe housing	baseline	97%		n/a

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

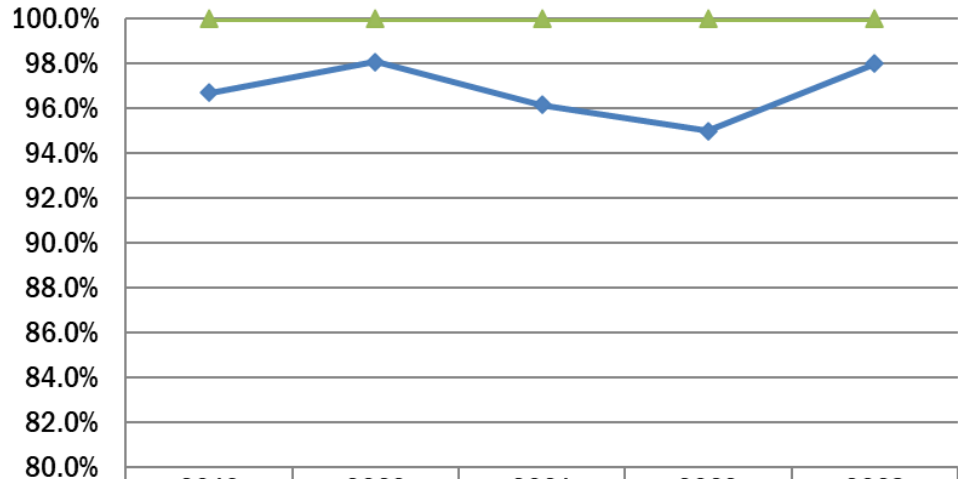
<sup>6</sup> Victim service providers have been excluded from this measurement as they are not required to conduct follow up with households.

<sup>7</sup> See footnote 6

<sup>8</sup> See footnote 6

During SFY2023, the average percent of calendar days that shelters were open, staffed, insured, clear of safety violations and available to residents was 98%, with 94% 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

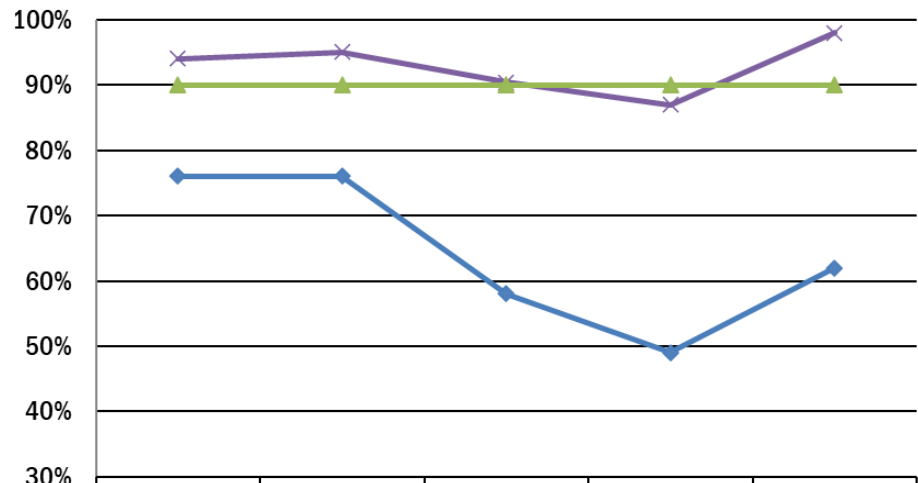


	2019 Performance	2020 Performance	2021 Performance	2022 Performance	2023 Performance
◆ % of calendar days that the shelter was open, staffed, insured, clear of safety violations and available to shelter residents	96.7%	98.1%	96.2%	95.0%	98.0%
▲ Target	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%



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 (50%) and youth shelter grantees (100%) are meeting the target for this measure. Improvement plans and technical assistance for specific agencies struggling with this measure began in SFY2022 and continued throughout SFY2023.

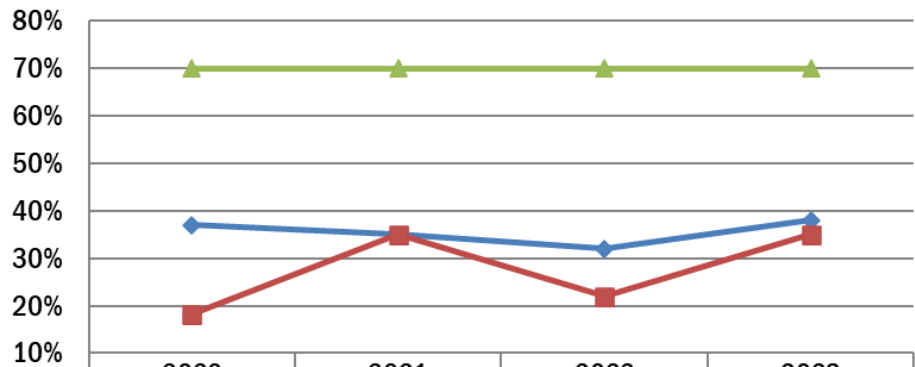
### Housing Opportunity Program Performance: Shelter Operations, Service Referral



	2019 Performance	2020 Performance	2021 Performance	2022 Performance	2023 Performance
Emergency Shelter: % of new HH who met with a case manager or advocate within 3 days of entrance	76%	76%	58%	49%	62%
Youth Shelter: % of youth who met with a case manager within 3 days of entrance	94%	95%	90%	87%	98%
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. SFY2023 saw the highest percentage of households achieving outcomes related to employment, education/training, or connection to income benefits since SFY2020.

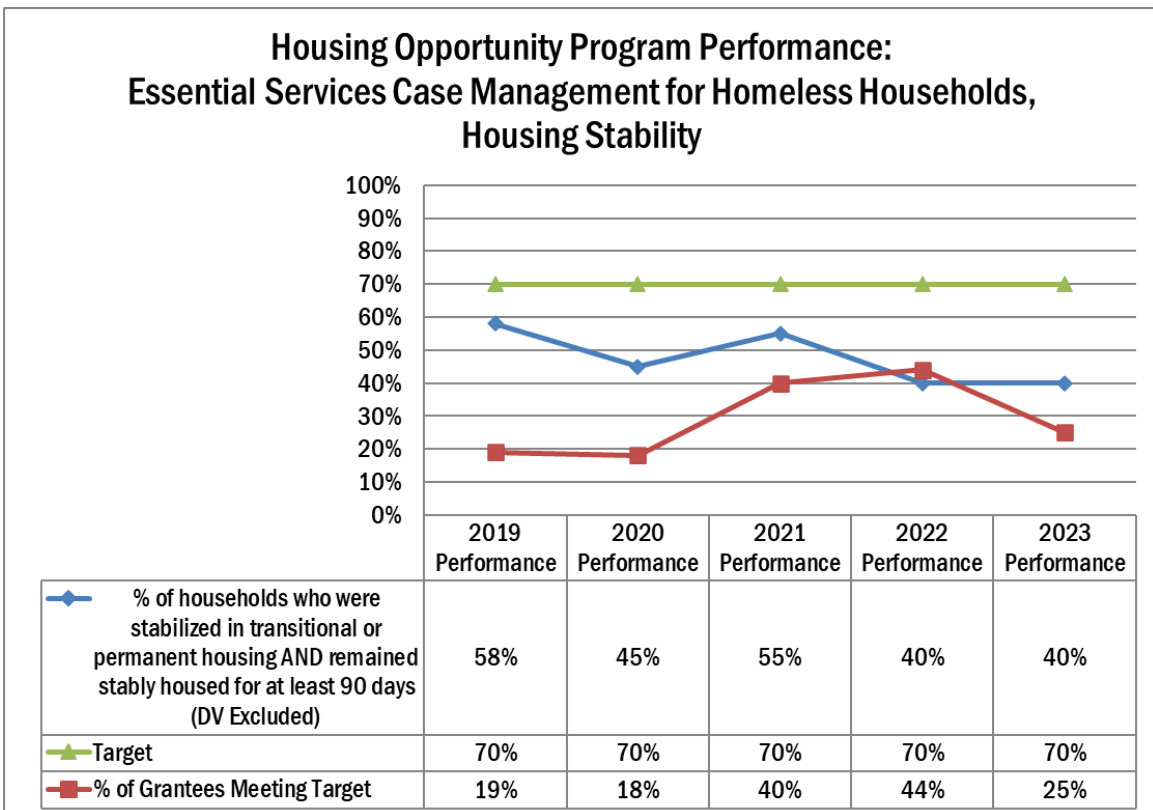
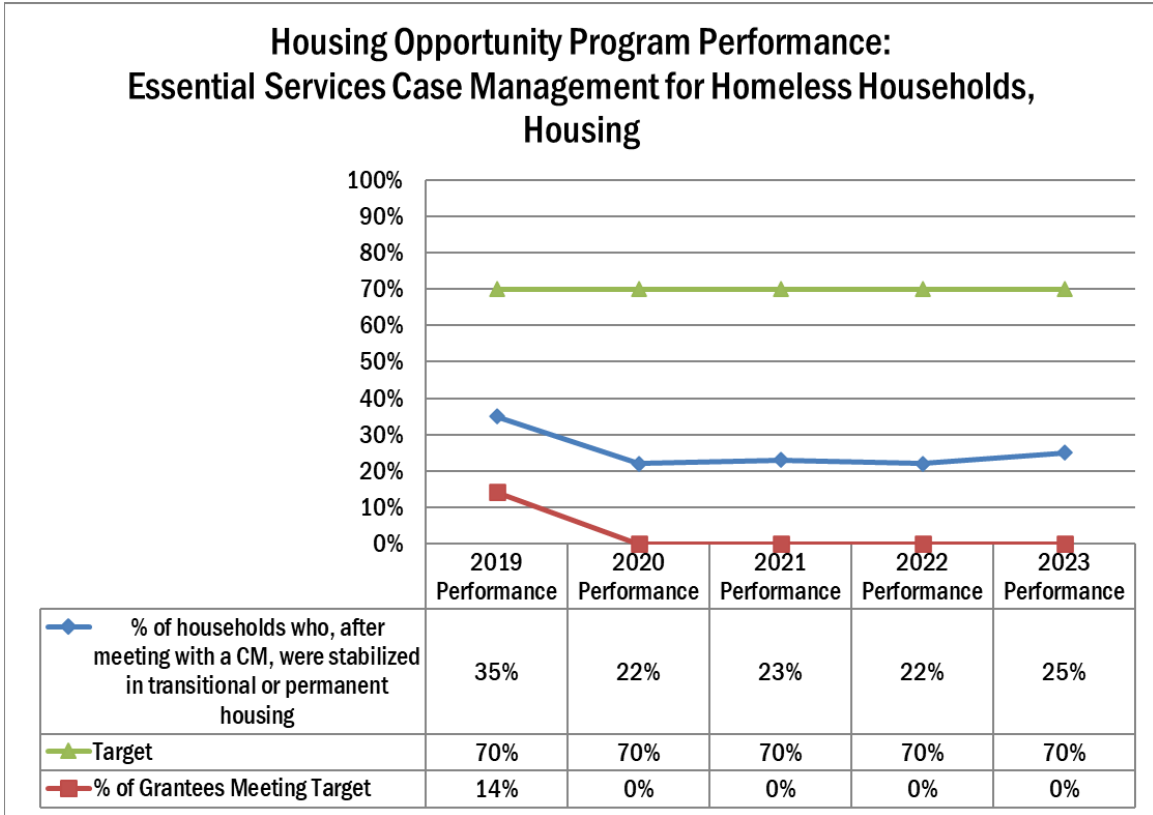
### Housing Opportunity Program Performance: Essential Services Case Management for Homeless Households, Income



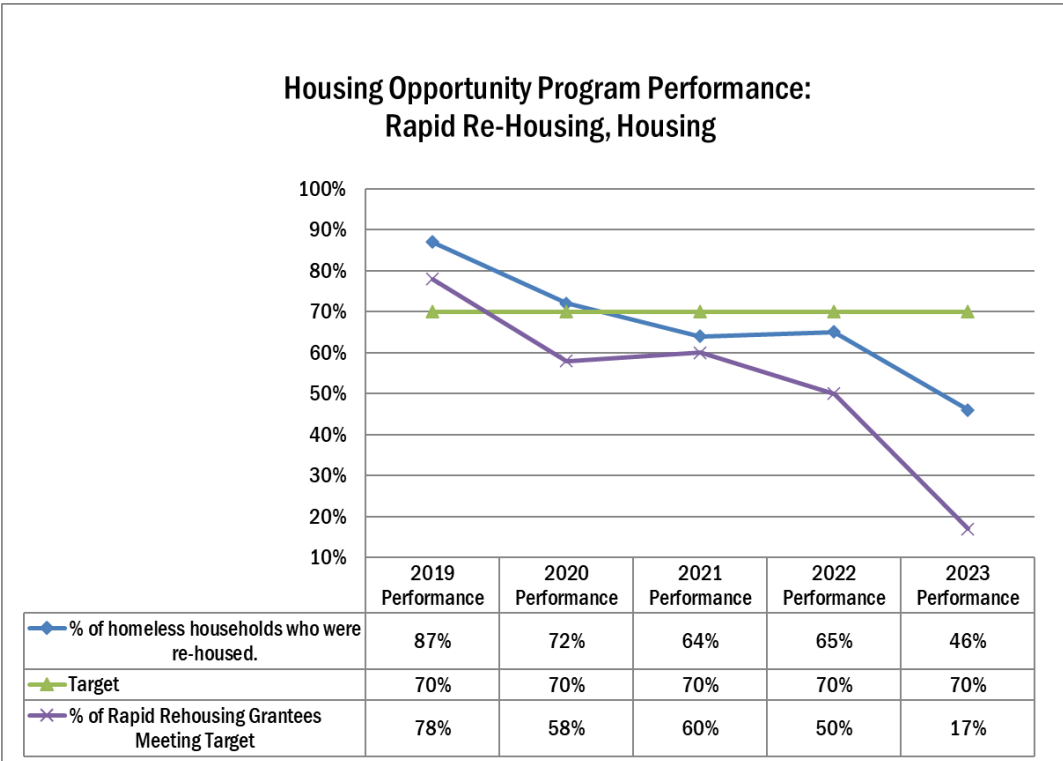
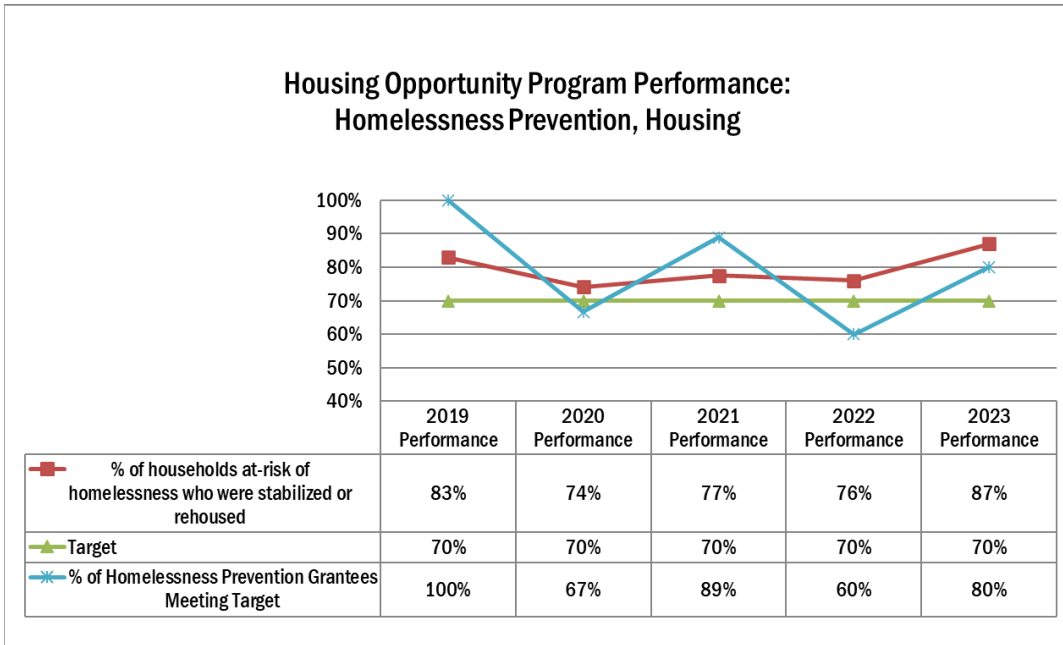
	2020 Performance	2021 Performance	2022 Performance	2023 Performance
◆ % of HH who - within 90 days of case management - have at least 1 adult who has found employment OR enrolled in education or training OR qualified for income benefits (e.g, TANF, SSI, GA)	37%	35%	32%	38%
▲ Target	70%	70%	70%	70%
■ % of Grantees Meeting Target	18%	35%	22%	35%

<sup>9</sup> This measure and data were reviewed in 2020 and the calculation changed. Only the years using the updated calculation (2020-2023) have been included.

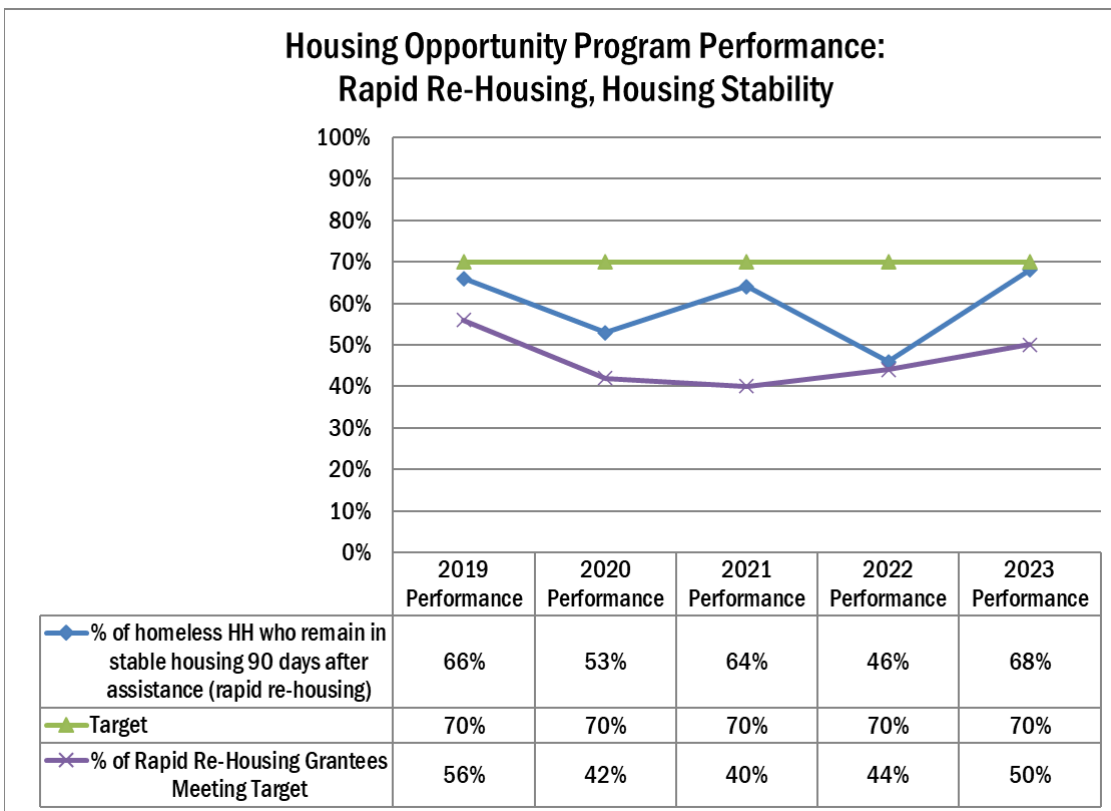
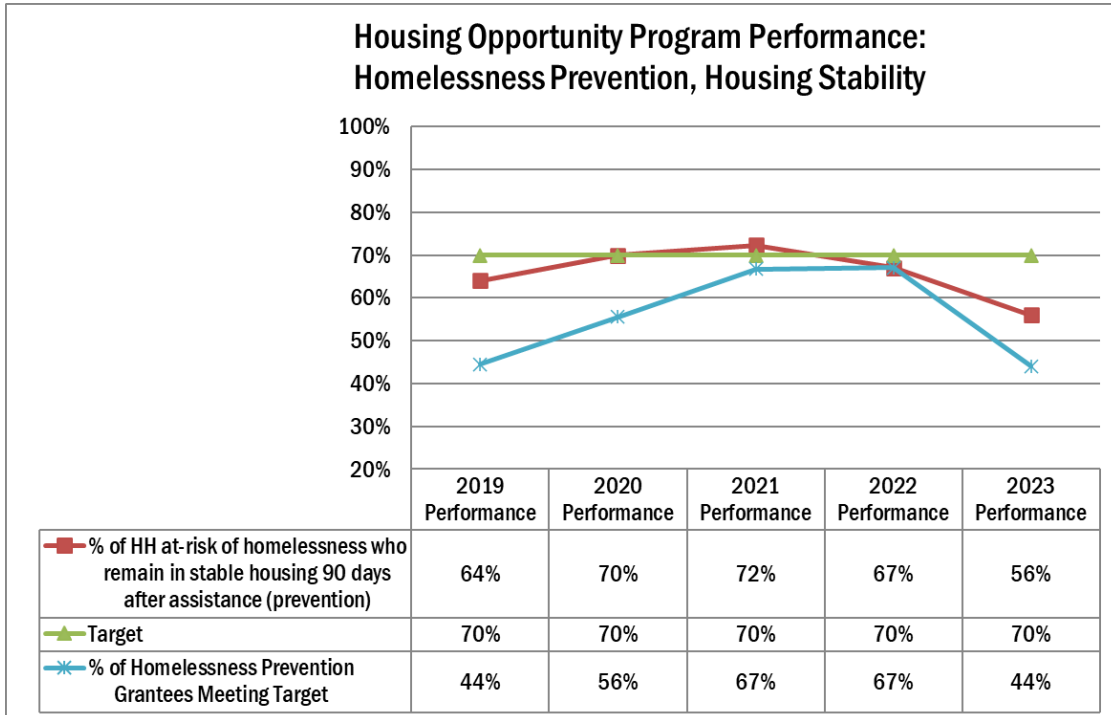
In SFY2023, the number of households moving into stable housing after receiving essential services case management increased slightly. Of those supported into housing, 40% of households continued to be stably housed for at least 90 days. When considered with the fact that the average length of stay in shelter remains longer than in pre-COVID years, it appears that stable housing outcomes continue to be impacted by a lack of housing stock or other sustainable housing options.



In SFY2023 Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing programs provided housing stability for 985 households, an increase from 836 households in SFY2022. While this year saw a new high in households reported as achieving stability or being rehoused through Homelessness Prevention programs, HOP grantees reported a significant decrease in those re-housed through Rapid Re-Housing in SFY2023. The overall number of households served through Rapid Re-Housing programs has decreased significantly since 2020, partially as a result of a restructuring of the program in HOP beginning in SFY2023. In 2020, 899 households were served in Rapid Re-Housing, compared to only 135 in 2023. Those households served in Rapid Re-Housing during SFY2023 may have had more complex needs or higher barriers to housing, both of which can impact performance on this measure. OEO will continue to monitor Rapid Re-Housing outcomes while evaluating the restructuring of the program in HOP and consider where additional technical assistance is needed.



Housing stability outcomes for Homelessness Prevention programs continued to show a decline, while Rapid Re-Housing outcomes showed an increase to record levels. For Homelessness Prevention programs, a review of agency-level data shows that there are a few specific providers who continue to fall 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 household need. In SFY2020, new performance measures for Coordinated Entry Housing Navigation services were introduced and in SFY2023 data collection and performance reporting was further refined for the Housing Opportunity Grant Program. With these changes, SFY2023 created a new baseline by which to monitor performance for Coordinated Entry Housing Navigation services.

<b>Housing Opportunity Grant Program Coordinated Entry Housing Navigation Services</b>	<b>SFY2023<sup>10</sup></b>
<b>Number of Households Served</b>	1,255
<b>% Program Exits to Permanent Housing<sup>11</sup></b>	37%
<b>Average # of Days from Enrollment to Re-housed or Stabilized</b>	123

Data presented here reflects only housing navigation services provided by HOP-funded grantees; it does not represent all of the households in the Coordinated Entry system nor the full scope of the services being provided to those households. For additional data on Coordinated Entry, OEO recommends reviewing the following:

- Vermont Coalition to End Homelessness’ Coordinated Entry Annual Evaluation report: <https://helpingtohousevt.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/2022-CE-Annual-Evaluation-Report-FINAL.pdf>
- Institute for Community Alliances’ Vermont Coordinated Entry Dashboard: <https://icalliances.org/vermont-coordinated-entry-dashboard>

State Fiscal Year 2023 saw many challenges for both service providers and the Vermonters they serve, including the ending of pandemic-era funding, changes in the State’s General Assistance Emergency Housing program, continued tightening of the housing market, and the impacts of inflation. 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 infectious disease prevention and mitigation efforts, including ongoing close coordination with the Vermont Department of Health,
- Increased flexible client-based financial assistance to meet the needs of participants, and
- Tailored learning opportunities to support the professional development of staff.

<sup>10</sup> Data from previous years has not been included in this report due to changes in how these programs collected and reported on data in SFY2023.

<sup>11</sup> Permanent housing is used here to describe a variety of housing that is expected to long-term and stable, such as home ownership, rental housing, Permanent Supportive Housing, and staying with friends and family on a permanent basis.