

# Economic Services Division (ESD) Department for Children and Families Agency of Human Services



**Providing a helping hand  
to Vermonters in need.**



# Economic Services Division (ESD)

ESD administers economic benefits that help Vermonters in need. Programs such as 3SquaresVT, Emergency/General Assistance, Fuel Assistance, and Reach Up provide a safety net for individuals and families who may be experiencing unemployment, underemployment, single parenthood, aging, disability, the death of a family member, or other life-changing events.

## Populations Served

- ✓ Children & youth;
- ✓ Families with children;
- ✓ Seniors;
- ✓ People with physical disabilities; and
- ✓ Low- and moderate-income families and individuals.

# ESD Organizational Structure

- The ESD Deputy Commissioner oversees 380 staff located:
  - In 12 district offices across the state;
  - At the Application & Document Processing Center (ADPC)
  - ESD Benefits Service Center (BSC) call center
  - At our central office located in Waterbury: Administrative Unit, Quality Control Unit, Fraud Unit, Training Unit, Business Application Support Unit, Operations Team and Benefit Program Teams.
- Eligibility staff administer benefits for all major financial programs:
  - 3SquaresVT (SNAP)
  - Essential Person
  - Fuel Assistance (LIHEAP)
  - General and Emergency Assistance (GA/EA)
  - Reach Up (TANF)

# District Offices

There are 12 ESD district offices across the State, co-located with other AHS district offices:

- ADO - St. Albans
- BDO – Burlington
- HDO - Hartford
- JDO – St. Johnsbury
- LDO – Brattleboro
- MDO - Barre
- NDO – Newport
- RDO – Rutland
- SDO - Springfield
- TDO – Bennington
- VDO – Morrisville
- YDO – Middlebury

# Application & Document Processing Center

- The ADPC scans and indexes an average of 300,000 pieces of paper per month.
- This includes:
  - Applications; and
  - Supporting documents such as paystubs, tax returns, identification, correspondence, etc.
- In addition to processing all incoming mail for ESD statewide, the ADPC manages the process and sends out all reviews and interim reports.
- The average is 8,000 -10,000 documents mailed from the ADPC each month.



## ESD's BSC: 1-800-479-6151



- 25 Agents receive an average of 600 to 1,000 calls per day.
- July 1, 2015 - June 30<sup>th</sup> 2016 there were over 127,000 calls to the call center. The average talk time is 4-5 minutes per call. The average wait time is 6 minutes. Staff also receive about 30 calls a day from community partners and respond to 30 to 50 emails per month.
- Once clients have established accounts, they can use Interactive Voice Response (IVR) to get information about their benefits (24 hours a day, 7 days a week).
- Clients can also choose to speak with a customer service representative during regular business hours:
  - 8:00 am – 5:45 pm      Monday - Thursday
  - 8:00 am – 4:15 pm      Friday
- Staff are fully trained in program eligibility rules so they can resolve consumer issues without having to transfer calls to district offices.

# General /Emergency Assistance

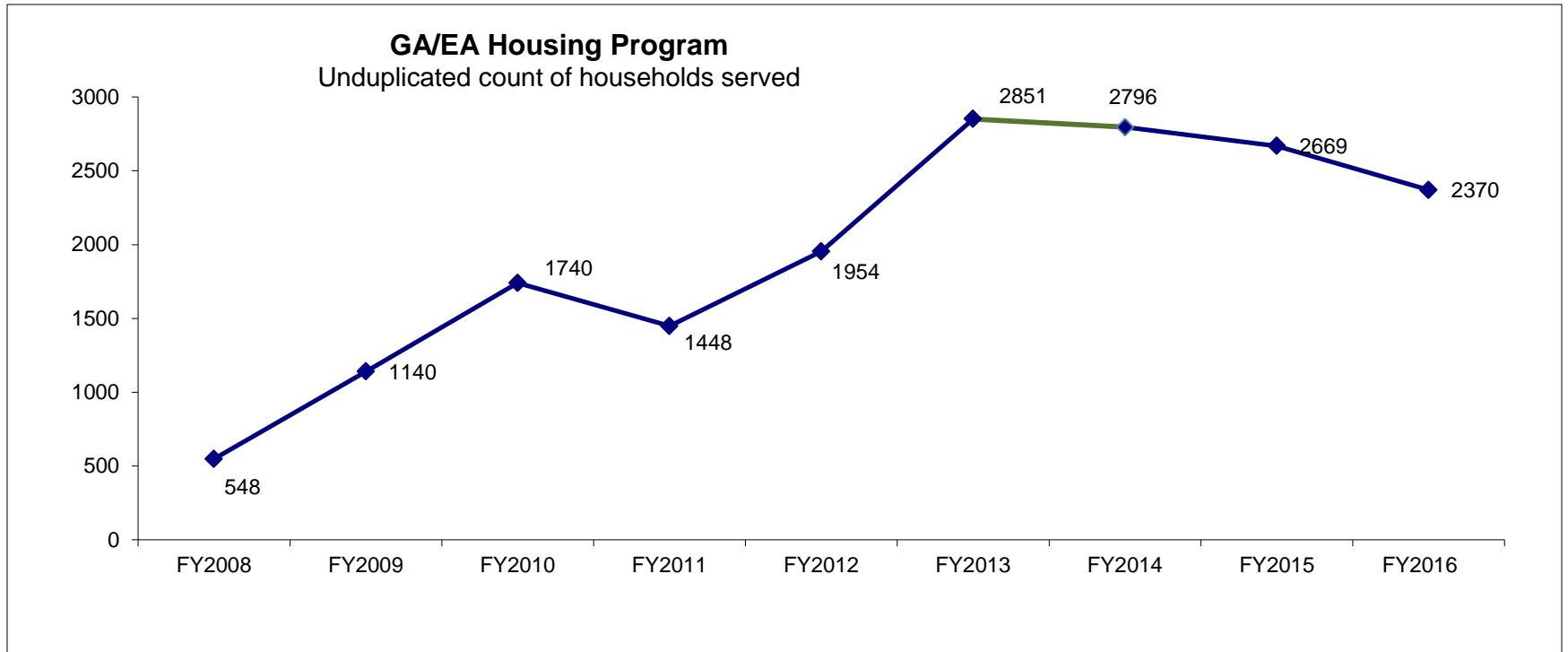
- GA and EA help eligible individuals and families meet their emergency basic needs. This may include help paying for:
  - Groceries;
  - Room & board;
  - Rent/security deposit;
  - Fuel, utilities, utility deposit, connect & reconnect fees, special trip charges;
  - Transportation,
  - Medical, dental, prescription, medical supplies/equipment; and
  - Burial costs.
- GA is funded from the State's general fund. EA is funded from the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant.
- Individuals and families may be eligible if they have an emergency need and do not have the income or resources to meet that need. They must show:
  - Their assets have been exhausted (with certain exceptions)
  - They have actively pursued all sources of potential income
  - Other criteria such as responsibility for dependent children, elderly, unable to work, or having barriers to employment according to GA/EA rules.

# GA Temporary Housing

- Temporary housing, a large portion of the GA budget, is provided only if alternative arrangements (e.g., family, friends, shelter) are not immediately available.
- Eligibility is based on one of the following criteria:
  - Catastrophic (fire, flood, natural disaster, constructive eviction and domestic violence) up to 84 days.
  - Vulnerable Population (65 years of age or older, receipt of SSI or SSDI, family with child six years of age or under, in the third trimester of pregnancy) up to 28 days.
  - Cold Weather Exception – Eligibility for temporary shelter is relaxed when any of the following conditions exist (or are anticipated to exist) between 6pm and 6am – in the Vermont zip code where the homeless applicant is applying:
    - Temperatures or Wind Chill are less than 20 degrees (F)
    - Temperatures are less than 32 degrees (F) with a higher than 50% chance of precipitation reported.



# GA Temporary Housing



# Cold Weather Analysis

<b>COLD WEATHER EXCEPTION ANALYSIS FOR SFY14 &amp; SFY15 THROUGH DECEMBER 31</b>			
<b><u>CWE Measure</u></b>	<b><u>SFY14</u></b>	<b><u>SFY15</u></b>	<b><u>SFY16</u></b>
Nights Meeting Criteria*	154	133	93
Requests for Emergency Housing	6835	12,279	3721
Number of Motel Nights	16,542	26,226	4745
Avg. Number Motel Rooms Per CWE Night	107	197	41
Number of Adults	7338	13152	3961
Number of Children	1558	3370	1334
Cost	\$983,443	\$1,833,587	\$344,441

\*The first CWE night: SFY14 - 10/25/2013; SFY15 - 11/2/2014; and SFY16 - 11/17/15

\* The last CWE night: SFY14 - 4/25/14; SFY15 - 4/8/15; and SFY16 - 4/27/16.

# Vermont Rental Subsidy Program (VRS)

- State-funded short term (12 month) rental assistance program.
- Clients are generally on Reach Up or SSI or have income less than 125% of FPL.
- Subsidies provide support for up to one year while households work to increase their income or secure other long-term affordable housing.
- Participants pay 30% of their income towards rent (\$232 in Chittenden County or \$198 outside of Chittenden County, whichever is greater), the State of Vermont pays the difference directly to landlords. VRS works closely with VSHA which provides VRS recipients with a preference on the Section 8 waiting list.
- Case management is provided by local housing review teams which includes community partners, local ESD staff, Voc. Rehab, DOC, DV agencies, church representatives, etc.
- Housing review teams make all VRS referrals to central office and assign a case manager that follows/supports clients throughout their time on the program.



# Vermont Rental Subsidy Program (VRS)

- VRS began in December of 2011 as a rapid rehousing program.
- State-funded short term (12 month) rental assistance program.
- Clients are generally on Reach Up or SSI or have income less than 125% of FPL.

	2014	2015	2016
Average monthly rent paid by each household:	\$282	\$287	\$280
Average monthly rent paid by ESD per household is:	\$536	\$623	\$713
Households are approved and leased up	69	113	133
Households are tentatively granted and seeking housing	60	27	36
Households are on the waiting list	0	56	79
Vermont Rental Subsidy Funding	\$500,00	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000

# Vermont's Reach Up Program: TANF



- Congress created the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant through the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996.
- TANF replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), which had provided cash welfare to poor families with children since 1935.
- States receive a fixed block grant to fund their own welfare programs (FY 2015-VT received approximately \$47.3 million). This funding is used in a number of ways: EITC, childcare, basic assistance, CCDF-Child Care Development Fund, SSBG-Social Services Block Grant, administration.
- States must also spend some of their own dollars on programs for needy families (Maintenance of Effort – MOE – requirement, Separate State Programs and Solely State Funded programs approximately \$42.7 million). This funding is also utilized for basic assistance, child care, administration etc...

# Related Programs

## **Reach First**

Stabilizes families experiencing a short-term crisis by providing case management, financial assistance and support services within a four-month period.

## **Reach Ahead**

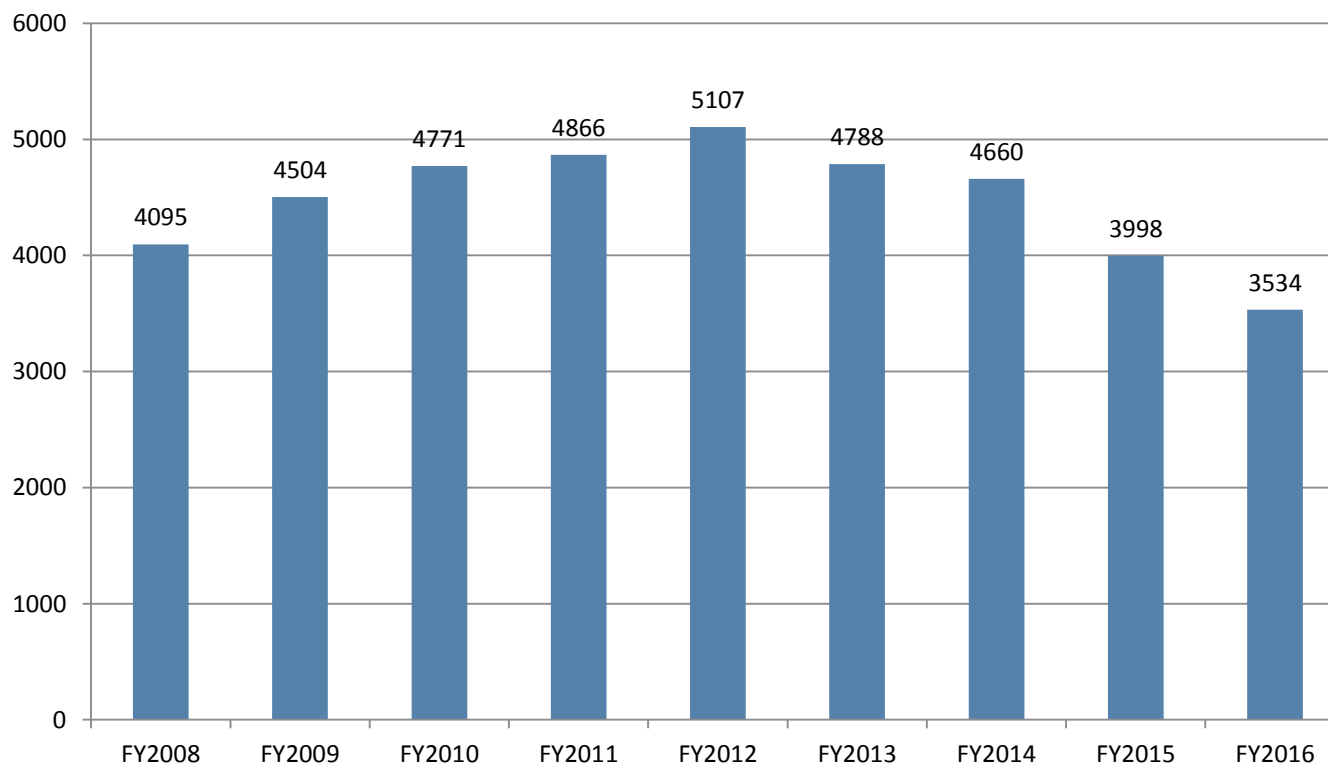
Promotes financial stability after families have transitioned off of Reach Up by providing a food and child care benefit and support services for 24 months after a family has left Reach Up.

## **Postsecondary Education (PSE)**

Assists parents in eligible low-income families to obtain two- or four-year postsecondary undergraduate degrees in fields directly related to employment.

# Reach Up Caseload Trend

**Families on Reach Up  
Average Monthly Caseload**



# Who is Eligible for Reach Up?

- States have broad discretion to determine eligibility for TANF benefits and services.
- Families must be financially needy and have a minor child to qualify for assistance; states determine the exact financial eligibility rules and benefit amounts.
  - The payment standard for a family of 3 living outside Chittenden county is \$640.
  - The payment standard for a family of 3 living inside Chittenden county is \$665.
- Key federal restrictions:
  - States cannot provide cash assistance from federal TANF funds for longer than 60 months to a family that includes an adult recipient
  - Legal immigrants are ineligible until they have been in the US for 5 years



# Reach Up Work Requirements

- States must require recipients to engage in federally approved work activities and must impose sanctions (by reducing or terminating benefits) if an individual refuses to participate.
- States can set their own policies on who must participate in work activities and what an individual must do, but a state must meet the federal work participation rate or face fiscal penalties.
- Half of *all* families receiving TANF assistance must be engaged in a federally approved work activity for at least 30 hours a week (20 hours a week for single parents with young children).
- 90 percent of *two-parent* families must be engaged in a federally approved work activity, generally for 35 hours per week.
- Participants create a Family Development Plan (FDP) with their case manager which outlines the family's goals and steps towards employment.
- Families may receive a deferment from the work requirements for a number of reasons, including medical, caring for a young child, needed in the home etc...

# Reach Up Non-Compliance and Sanctions

If a participating adult does not fully comply with the FDP or work requirement without good cause, the family's Reach Up grant will be reduced (sanctioned) or closed.

- For the first 3 months of noncompliance the grant is reduced by \$75.
- After 3 months, the grant is reduced by \$150.
- For a family that has received over 60 months of assistance and is not in compliance, the grant will be closed. The family may re-apply after a two month penalty period.

# Reach Up Time Limits

- As of May 1, 2014, families that received 60 countable months or more of Reach Up benefits are no longer eligible for benefits unless:
  - The participating adult is deferred from his/her work requirement;
  - The participating adult is engaged in work activities listed in [33 V.S.A. 1101\(28\)](#)(A-K, M-N) such as community service, on the job training ; or
  - The participating adult is employed and meeting his/her work requirement.
  
- ESD submitted a report in February 2015 that analyzed the impact of this requirement.

# Reach Up Partnerships

- Vermont Adult Learning (VAL) and Vermont Association of Business Industry and Rehabilitation (VABIR)
- Parent Child Centers
- VRRP-Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program and AALV- Association for Africans Living in Vermont
- Housing
- Transportation Brokers
- DMH and ADAP collaborative for substance abuse and mental health case management and clinical services for Reach Up participants.
- Substance abuse residential treatment for women and their children-Lund



# Reach Up Highlights

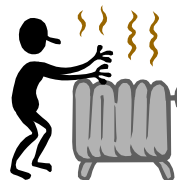
- **Teaming with Family Services Division (FSD)**-Reach Up and FSD have been making a concerted effort to work together in serving families involved with both programs.
- **Integrating Financial Empowerment into the Reach Up Program**-In partnership with the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), the Reach Up program is working to integrate financial capability into the Reach Up program.
- **The 2-Generation Approach in the Reach Up Program**-Reach Up is committed to using a two generational (2-Gen) approach to working with participants and their families. A 2-Gen approach focuses on creating opportunities for, and addressing needs of both children and their parents together.
- **A Commitment to Ongoing Professional Development**-Reach Up is working to expand research-based training opportunities in key areas, such as trauma-informed care, executive functioning, and motivational interviewing.
- **Reach Up and Housing Services**-The Reach Up team works closely with the Office of Economic Opportunity, Family Supportive Housing, Vermont State Housing Authority, other Agency of Human Services (AHS) departments, and the AHS Director of Housing to ensure that families receiving Reach Up are connected with appropriate housing services.
- **Substance Abuse/ Mental Health Initiative**-The Reach Up program, in partnership with the Department of Mental Health (DMH) and the Department of Health's Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program (ADAP), is providing mental health and substance abuse services to address employment barriers and family well-being for Reach Up participants.

# Seasonal Fuel Assistance



- Helps lower-income Vermonters to heat their homes by paying part of their home heating bills.
- Benefits are granted if the client is income eligible (185% of the Federal Poverty Level). Example: maximum income for a 3-person household is \$3,108/month
- Applications are processed year-round (approx. 33,000/year)
- Grants are made from late September (firewood/pellets) through mid-March (all fuels)
- 21,500+/- households are projected to receive a benefit in FFY2017
- Average FFY2017 “full-season, full-fuel-liability” benefit projected at \$865
- Federal Requirement: Benefits based on client “*need*” (financial need and energy burden)
- “Heat-&-Eat” – annual \$21 fuel benefit to 24,000+/- households leverages additional 3SquaresVT benefits
- [www.dcf.vermont.gov/esd/fuel\\_assistance](http://www.dcf.vermont.gov/esd/fuel_assistance)

# Crisis Fuel Assistance



- Applications are processed by Vermont's five Community Action Agencies
- Income limits: 200% of FPL. Example: the maximum income for a 3-person household is \$3,360/month. In addition to being income eligible, the household must also be experiencing a crisis
- One grant per season for households with incomes up to 185% FPL; two grants for households between 186% and 200% of FPL
- Clients receiving Seasonal Fuel can also receive Crisis Fuel
- Crisis season: last Monday in November to the last business day in April or until funds run out
- After-hours help is available statewide (8:30am to 4:00pm) on Saturdays, Sundays and state holidays for households with "vulnerable" members (age 60 or older, living with a disability, or under the age of 6) by calling 1-866-331-7741
- Approximately 6,000 households are projected to be assisted in FFY2017
- [www.dcf.vermont.gov/esd/fuel\\_assistance/crisis\\_assistance](http://www.dcf.vermont.gov/esd/fuel_assistance/crisis_assistance)

# LIHEAP Funding & Benefit Summary

## LIHEAP Funding & Benefit Stats Compilation

29-Sep-16

SFY	LIHEAP Total	LIHEAP Carry-Over (1)	State Funds	TOTAL FUNDS	Fuel Liability Households	Full Season Fuel Liability Avg. Benefit O/P/K	Nov-Apr Avg cost petro/gal (2)	Purchase Power Gallons / %age (3)	SFY
2017	\$16,181,020	3,646,376	3,837,000	23,664,396	21,500	\$865	\$2.11	410 / 54%	2017
2016	\$14,664,644	\$1,939,626	\$2,857,970	\$19,462,240	22,618	\$699	\$2.11	331 / 43%	2016
2015	\$18,965,161	\$2,074,954	\$5,000,000	\$26,040,115	25,147	\$783	\$2.87	274 / 36%	2015
2014	\$19,140,144	\$591,060	\$8,100,000	\$27,831,204	26,625	\$792	\$3.62	219 / 29%	2014
2013	\$18,359,509	\$1,583,684	\$9,700,000	\$29,643,193 (4)	27,776	\$898	\$3.85	233 / 31%	2013
2012	\$19,529,156	\$4,005,000	\$6,100,000	\$29,634,156	27,100	\$900	\$3.61	249 / 33%	2012
2011	\$27,557,850	\$6,687,000	\$0	\$34,244,850 (5)	26,546	\$866	\$3.31	262 / 34%	2011
2010	\$27,341,881	\$5,447,000	\$0	\$32,788,881	20,399	\$1,064	\$2.68	397 / 52%	2010
2009	\$38,642,377	\$363,000	\$0	\$39,005,377 (6)	19,227	\$1,718	\$2.62	656 / 86%	2009
2008	\$16,883,723	\$1,780,000	\$5,898,032	\$24,561,755 (7)	15,369	\$1,362	\$3.24	420 / 55%	2008

Note: 2017 Numbers are Projections

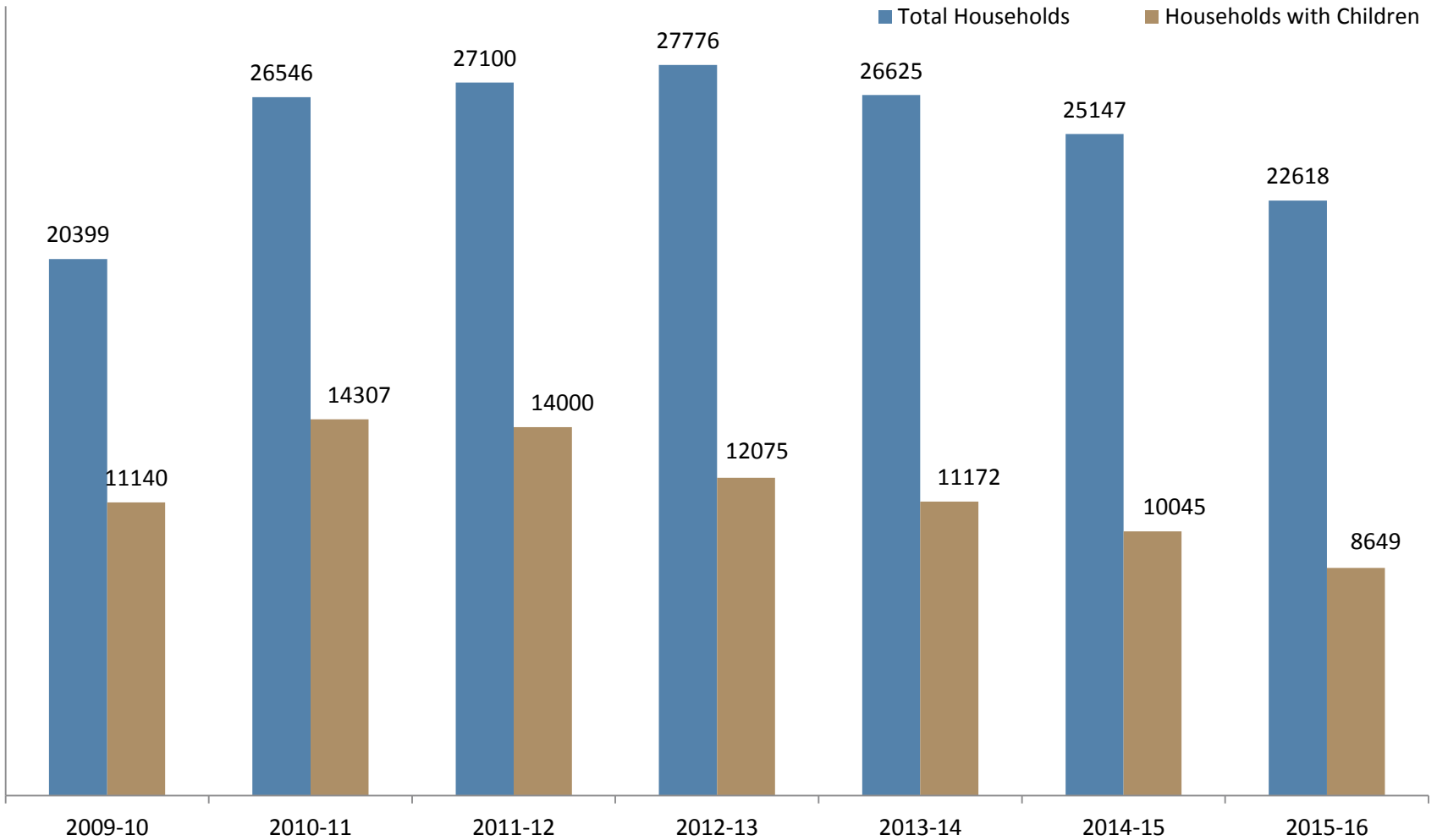
- (1) The carry-over amounts are for a June 30 State Fiscal Year close-out
- (2) "Blended price" for oil/propane/kerosene after required discount from current MOR/DOR vendor agreements
- (3) Assumes average winter consumption of 764 gallons for a delivered petro fuel (oil/propane/kerosene)
- (4) Includes \$130,000+ in non-block grant LIHEAP funds
- (5) Income maximum increased from 156% federal poverty level gross per month to 185% fpl, and resource test eliminated
- (6) In July 2008 - heating oil approached \$5.00/gallon
- (7) State Funds Contributed Prior to SFY 2008: SFY2007 \$590,769; SFY2006 \$10,200,000; and SFY 2005 \$1,000,000  
No state funds were contributed to LIHEAP prior to FFY2005

\* LIHEAP Totals for 2016 and 2017 are total federal block grant awarded during the respective fiscal years less the \$2.8M transfer to Weatherization

\*\* 2016 LIHEAP block grant award is less \$2.8M transfer to Wx and less 10% of block grant, which was carried over into 2017. Projected 2017 block grant amount does not anticipate any federal carryover into 2018



# Fuel Assistance Caseload



# Utility Assistance Programs

- Benefits privately funded by GMP & VGS rate-payers.
- DCF/ESD/Fuel & Utility Office determines eligibility under service contracts with GMP and VGS.
- Green Mountain Power (GMP) 25% discount on entire bill; 150% federal poverty maximum; new enrollees receive a one-time forgiveness on arrearages. Current and ongoing enrollees may be eligible for an additional 50% forgiveness on arrears.
- Vermont Gas Systems (VGS) 20% discount on entire bill; 185% federal poverty maximum.
- **To be eligible for Energy Assistance you must:**
  - Be a residential customer of Green Mountain Power
  - Your total gross monthly household income is not more than:
    - 1 person \$1,485
    - 2 persons \$2,003
    - 3 persons \$2,520
- Residential service only regardless of heat source.
- Website: [www.dcf.vermont.gov/esd/eap](http://www.dcf.vermont.gov/esd/eap)

# 3SquaresVT – (SNAP)

## Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programs

- 3SquaresVT is a federal USDA program that helps eligible Vermonters to stretch their food budgets and help put three healthy meals on their tables every day
- At the national level, the program is called the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP
- SNAP is the largest program in the domestic hunger safety net
- ESD works with community partners such as Community Action Agencies, Area Agencies on Aging, the Vermont Food bank, Hunger Free Vermont, and others to reach out to Vermonters who are eligible for 3SquaresVT and ensure they can access benefits



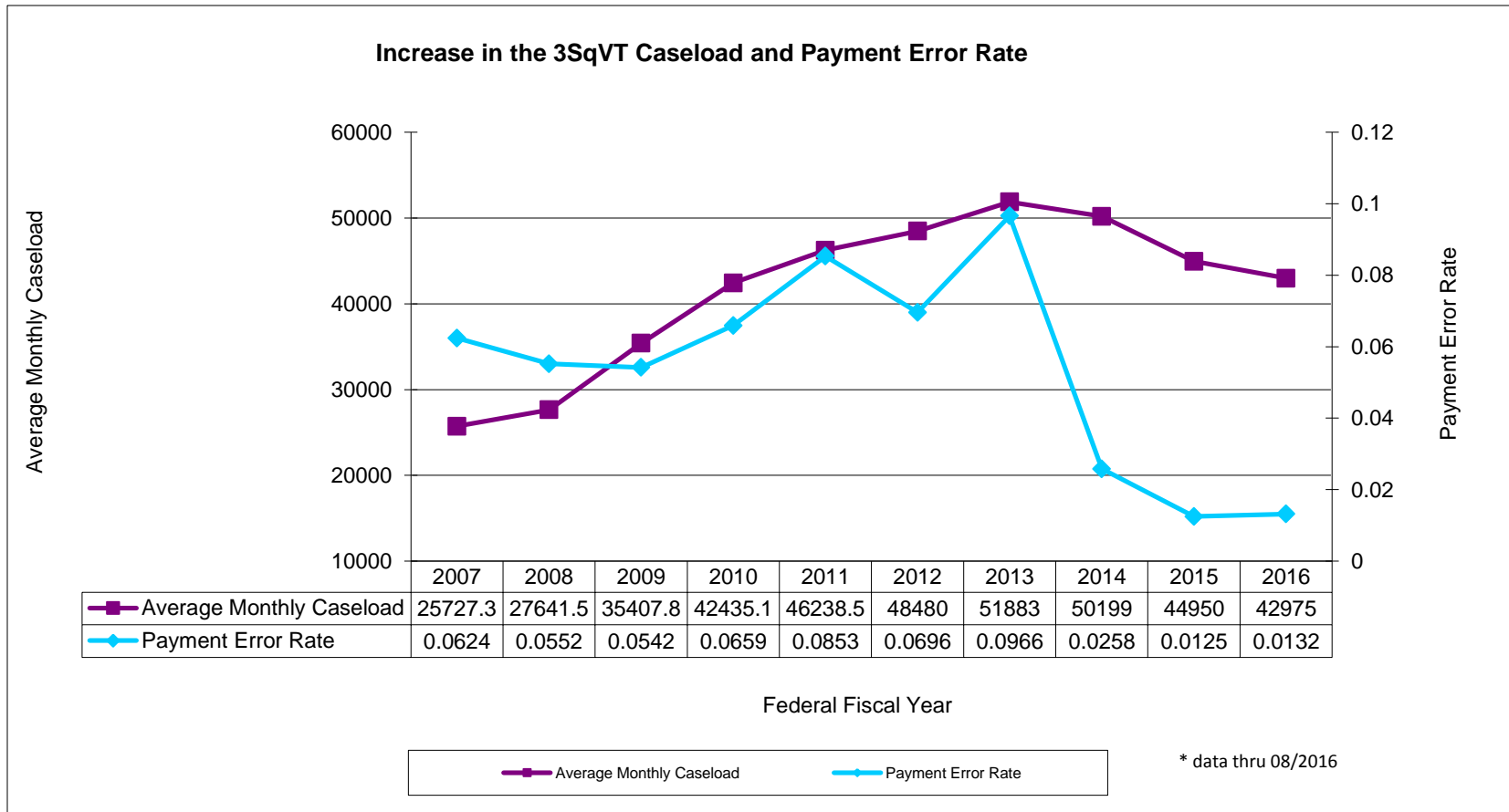
# One-Month Snapshot of 3SquaresVT Participants

One-Month Snapshot of 3SquaresVT Participants	
Data for the Month of August, 2016	
Average Household Benefit	\$228
Total Recipients	78,174
Recipients aged 0-17	26,393 (34%)
Recipients with a disability	20,569 (26%)
Recipients aged 60 or older	13,745 (18%)
Total Participating Households	42,259
Households with children aged 0-17	13,711 (32%)
Households with at least one person with a disability	19,235 (45%)
Households with at least one person aged 60+	12,487 (29%)

# 3SquaresVT Caseload & Payment Error Rate

- The USDA requires states to achieve a minimum accuracy rate of 94% when issuing benefits – or face penalties. This means the percentage of total recipients who were either under or over paid must be below 6% to be in compliance.
- Vermont failed to meet this standard for three years in a row: from FFY 2011 to FFY 2013 when it stood at a high of 9.66%.
- This rate dropped to 2.76% in FFY 2014 (October – June 2014), ranking Vermont first in the nation for most-improved payment error rate, and we received a performance bonus of \$293,274.00.
- Currently the error rate is at 1.32%.
- Several initiatives contributed to this dramatic turnaround:
  - Adding new eligibility workers;
  - Addressing workflow and procedural issues through a business improvement process;
  - Implementing new quality control procedures;
  - Delivering intensive staff trainings to eligibility workers, supervisors, and managers;
  - Restoring ESD's training unit; and
  - Consulting with national experts around best practices.
  - Moved to a district based caseload

# 3SquaresVT – Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programs (SNAP)



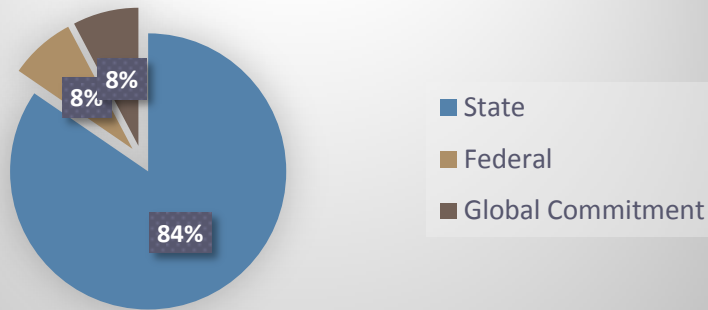


# Vermont Farm to Family Program

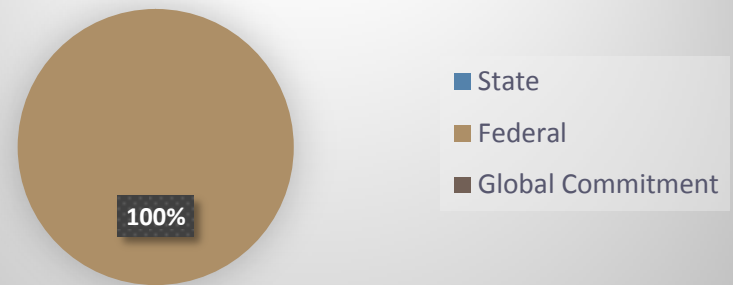
- Helps income-eligible Vermonters to buy locally-grown fresh fruits and vegetables at participating farmers' markets
- About one in four Vermonters qualifies for Farm To Family coupons
- Coupon distribution begins in June and ends September 30th or sooner if all coupons are distributed. Coupons expire October 31
- Eligible applicants get one \$30 book of coupons per year. The program was not created to supplement incomes but rather to change food shopping and eating habits and build the consumer base for local farmers markets
- Vermont distributes four blocks of coupons each year:
  - Participants in the Ladies First Program
  - Participants in the WIC Program
  - Income-eligible households that include someone age 60 or older
  - Other low-income households

# Federal vs. State Funding for Benefits

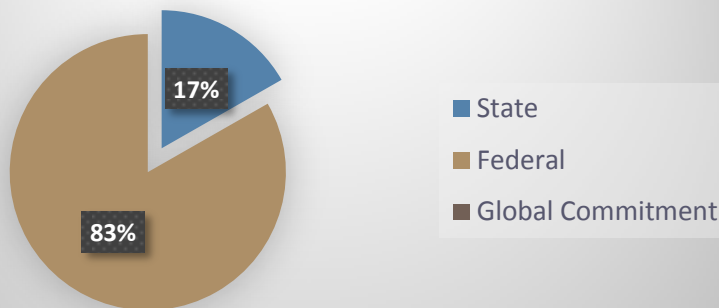
Reach Up



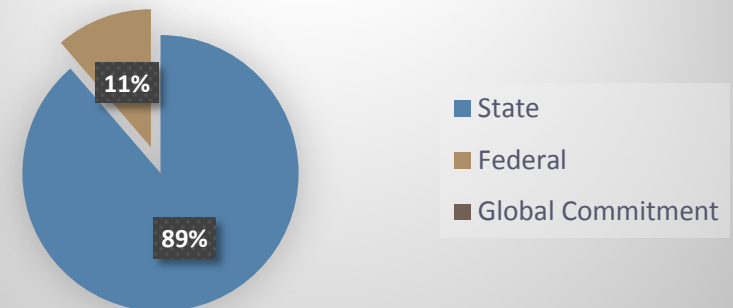
3SquaresVT (EBT and Cashout)



LIHEAP



General Assistance





# Other ESD Programs

## LIFELINE

- ESD administers the eligibility for the Lifeline program. Lifeline is a federal and state program that provides a monthly discount on phone or internet service to eligible households in the amount of \$9.25 (federal) and \$4.25 (state). Only one Lifeline benefit—either wireless or landline phone, home internet or cell phone data plan—is allowed per household.
- Not all phone companies participate in the Lifeline Program. Here is the current list of participating companies:
- [FairPoint Communications](#)
- [Franklin Telephone](#)
- [Life Wireless](#) (*Telrite*)
- [OTT Communications](#) (*Shoreham*)
- [QLink Wireless](#)
- [TDS Telecom](#) (*Ludlow, Northfield, Perkinsville*)
- [Topsham Telephone](#)
- [Vermont Telephone](#) (*VTel*)
- [Waitsfield/Champlain Valley Telecom](#)

# Other ESD Programs Continued

## Vermont Spay and Neuter Incentive Program (VSNIP)

- ESD oversees the administration of the program which provides low income Vermonters with an affordable avenue to spay or neuter their companion cat or dog.
- To be eligible the applicant must be: a Vermont resident, in receipt of a public benefit program or under 185% of the Federal Poverty Level, and to obtained the animal at no or very low cost, under \$75 per cat or dog.
- ESD currently contracts most aspects of the administration of the program to an outside vendor, currently Vermont Volunteer Services for Animals.
- The program is funded exclusively with dog license fees that generates approximately \$300,000 a year for the program.

# ESD Contact Information

- Sean Brown, Deputy Commissioner (DC) 802-241-0594
- Michael Madill, Assistant to DC 802-241-0592
- Rich Donahey, Operations Director 802-241-0601
- Geoffrey Pippenger, GA Director 802-241-0637
- Erin Oalican, Reach Up Director 802-241-0632
- Pat Duda, 3SquaresVT Director 802-241-0603
- Bobby Arnell, LIHEAP Director 802-241-0588
- Benefits Service Center/Fraud Referral 800-479-6151