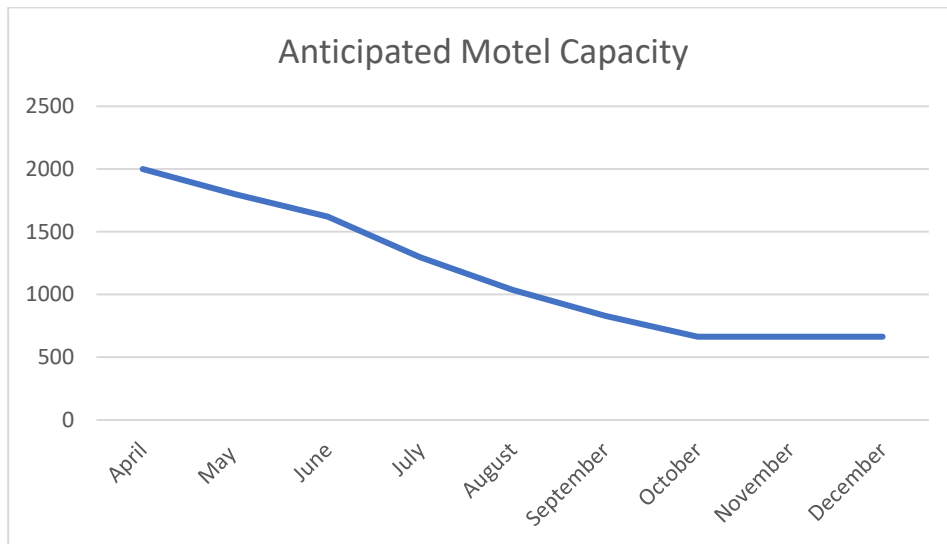


SFY22 – Emergency Housing Program

State Fiscal Year 2022 represents an interim year to transition from the current COVID-19 non-congregate shelter policy to a more sustainable emergency housing system in SFY 2023. As the Department for Children and Families (DCF) makes this transition, the decline in motel capacity must be factored into any temporary housing program that operates in SFY22. DCF believes that Vermont can still protect the most vulnerable households with changes in eligibility to the General Assistance Emergency Housing Program.

DCF has made significant efforts to maintain, recruit, and increase motel capacity during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Economic Services Division has directly coordinated the recruitment efforts for motels throughout the pandemic. As the economy reopens, motels currently participating in the program have indicated they plan to shift back to their pre-COVID clients and engage in the tourism market. ESD has struggled with motel capacity prior to the pandemic, particularly during the months of Adverse Weather Conditions and communities ran out of capacity when we housed 250-300 households. In addition to motel capacity, ESD has also identified decreasing capacity with towns who are unwilling to continue to run this program and significant security limitations due to staffing.

Currently there are 76 lodging establishments accepting a GA “motel voucher” and providing almost 2,000 rooms. DCF has already received notification that by July 1 at least 250 rooms will no longer be available to the program, a reduction of 12.5%. There are currently districts that are out of capacity on a daily basis. Based on historical capacity and early indications from lodging establishments, DCF anticipates the motel capacity will further decline between April – October as the economy reopens and many of these establishments continue to return to serving tourists and travelers. The chart below outlines the projected loss of hotel capacity.



Although current projections have the capacity decreasing to approximately 650 rooms, that number is double the maximum need DCF saw pre-pandemic, and due to ongoing efforts by DCF to keep hotels in the program. DCF has made efforts throughout the pandemic to reach out to lodging establishments in and around communities, including those which have traditionally not participated in the motel voucher program. ESD management has worked closely with local providers and agencies to ensure services and supports are tied into motels wherever and whenever possible. ESD continues to troubleshoot concerns and obstacles that may arise with motels. ESD has worked to accommodate the needs of different populations and sites to ensure people are housed as safely and appropriately as possible. ESD and the Agency’s law enforcement consultant continue to work with motels around fire code violations, compliance, safety concerns, and how to address those.

The State is invested in protecting and prioritizing the most vulnerable households within the confines of the motel capacity, service capacity, and fiscal limitations. To ensure the most vulnerable households are protected, the following changes in eligibility to the General Assistance Emergency Housing Program will occur:

Current Households

No Eligibility Changes for Current Households

Households already in the COVID Emergency Housing Program during April and May will continue to be eligible (“original cohort”) until June 30th. On July 1, these households will be eligible to apply under the new criteria listed below.

New Households and New Eligibility Criteria Effective JUNE 1

Changes to New Household Eligibility

The following eligibility criteria will exist for the period of June 1 through State Fiscal Year22 (June 30, 2022) unless there is a need to respond to the public health emergency or other emergency and expand eligibility.

- A natural disaster such as a flood, fire, or hurricane.
- Domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, human trafficking, or other dangerous or life-threatening conditions related to violence against a household member that cause them to reasonably believe that they are at risk of further harm if they remain in the unit, or if the relevant incident occurred within the applicant’s home.
- Families with a child or children under the age of 18, or who are 18 or 19 and attending secondary education full-time or an equivalent level of vocational or technical training.
- Households including a person age 60+.
- Households including a person with a disability, including but not limited to those receiving SSI, SSDI, or VA disability benefits.
- Households including a pregnant person.
- Households that are pursuing legal resolution of violations of the Rental Housing Health Code through the Vermont Department of Health or appropriate local officials.
- Households that have been physically barred entry into their dwelling through the intentional act of the landlord.

Eligibility for new households would be based on new eligibility criteria and households could receive up to 84 days of emergency housing. Households with children may request additional housing in 30 day increments so long as they are actively working with service providers to locate and secure permanent housing.

Individuals with a disability that significantly impairs activities of daily living (ADL) can request a waiver to receive emergency housing past 84 days. In addition, any GA emergency housing eligible recipients who are currently enrolled, or are likely eligible for any of the following personal needs services programs will be eligible for an exception:

- Choices for Care
- Development Services
- CRT
- Brain Injury program
- Attendant services

In cases where the individual is eligible for one of the above programs or has a disability that significantly impairs ADL, a housing case manager or legal representative will request an exception from the GA team at ESD who will then coordinate with the DAIL nurse coordinator for that region of the state.

For households that may be impacted by the end of the eviction moratorium, DCF will contract with community partners to ensure that those households have access to diversion services through federal funding. The diversion services will be intended to keep those households in permanent housing, in lieu of a motel room.

Income Limits and Self-Pay

All households, including the “original cohort” must meet income limits at or below 185% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) and will be required to contribute 30% of net income towards their housing. The net income will be calculated in alignment with how net income is currently calculated in the Reach Up program. If the self-pay contribution equals an amount less than or equal to the cost of two nights, there will be no self-pay requirement for that household.

Period of Ineligibility

The period of ineligibility (POI) and criteria are outlined in GA-120 and will be updated to reflect the structure that follows.

The period of ineligibility will not apply to households with a child or children under the age of 18, or who are age 18 or 19 attending secondary education full time or an equivalent level of vocational or technical training and who are included as part of the household in the current temporary housing grant.

Households will not be eligible to be placed in a hotel/motel by the Department for a period of time if you are asked to leave a hotel/motel for:

Major violations *(POI 15 days first offense, 30 days each subsequent offense):*

- Violent Criminal Behavior
- Attempted violent criminal behavior
- Major theft from Hotel/motel or guests
- Creating safety hazards (examples: disabling smoke detectors, using appliances or heaters which create a fire hazard, blocking exits)
- Threatening other guests or motel staff, or having guests that threaten others
- Sale or distribution of illegal substances
- Destruction of property (intentional damage or misuse)

Lesser violations *(No POI; however, the guest can be exited from hotel and placed on do not rent list for that hotel):*

- Being loud/noise nuisance
- Use of illegal substances
- Smoking in a non-designated area including cigarettes or marijuana
- Minor theft from Hotel/motel or guests
- Damages to room (unintentional, or from lack of cleanliness)

Causing One’s Own Loss of Housing

Temporary housing is intended to provide short term shelter for applicants who are involuntarily without housing through circumstances they could not reasonably have avoided, and for whom permanent housing or alternative arrangements are not immediately available. DCF will not house a client in a hotel/motel if they caused their own loss of housing within the past 3 months* - unless the client left for health or safety reasons.

Causing one's own loss of housing includes but is not limited to leaving housing where one could have stayed. If a person's disability played a role in causing their loss of housing, they may request a reasonable accommodation to not apply GA-60. Otherwise, having a disability would not change the fact that GA-60 applies. DCF will identify a clear process for these situations including a review and decision by the ESD Deputy Commissioner.

**While there is general agreement on reducing this time from 6 months to 90 days, Legal Aid and CVOEO do not agree with 90 days.*

JULY 1

End of COVID "Original Cohort" Eligibility

On July 1, households who continued to be housed for the 60-day period will no longer be eligible for housing unless they meet eligibility requirements under the new criteria.

End of Meal Delivery

Households in emergency housing currently have the option of receiving meals delivered to the lodging establishments. Community meal sites are expected to re-open this summer. Meals will no longer be provided in July. The working group recognizes that access to food will continue to be important for those who do not have other options, including lack of refrigeration and ability to heat food received through the meal sites and other programs. Work will continue to quantify subset of individuals that fall into this category. Local community partners and organizations will work to identify resources to support the people who receive Emergency Housing and to connect them with necessary resources. DCF will work with hotels and property owners to further reduce barriers.

NOVEMBER – APRIL 2022

The Department would institute an Adverse Weather Conditions policy similar to past years to provide a relaxation of rules during the months of November – April. AHS will engage community partners around the reimplementation of the extreme cold weather shelters temporarily opened in communities during severe winter weather events in prior years.

PAYMENT PROGRAM

To assist individuals and families in making the transition out of emergency housing, DCF proposes a payment program to help cover the cost of essential needs for households exiting from motels. Many households may have been staying in housing with family or friends but needed to leave due to health and safety restrictions during the pandemic. As health guidance has changed and Vermont emerges from the state of emergency, we anticipate many of these households may be able to transition back to other safe housing settings with additional financial support. Additionally, many homeless individuals traveled to Vermont during the pandemic. These resources may also help those households to establish themselves more permanently in Vermont or to return to their location of origin.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS EXPLORED AND/OR ADDRESSED

How many would be eligible for emergency housing under the new criteria?

- The Department is reviewing various data sources to refine an estimate.

- Initial review suggests the following:
 - Approximately 67% of participants in the program currently would be eligible under the new criteria on July 1. As many families are expected to exit to permanent housing prior to this date, the Department estimates that approximately 1,350 households could be eligible at this time.
 - Approximately 33% would be ineligible on July 1 under the new criteria, or approximately 650 households.

Where will households in motels and hotels go when they leave?

- Emergency Shelters – capacity that re-opens in the summer or fall of 2021, as well as new capacity proposed with ARPA funds.
- A leased apartment – households will be able to use ERAP funds for rental assistance.
- Other safe housing options – including family or friends, with flexible funding support through rapid resolution funds.
- DCF proposes a payment program to help with essential needs for households exiting from motels.

What next?

- DCF will convene an advisory group to deliver a proposed transition plan by November 1, 2021 for a SFY 2023 community-based emergency housing program. This group will consider:
 - Investments needed to build local capacity to support emergency housing needs, which may include funding, training, technical assistance, and planning support.
 - Additional standards for a community-based program.

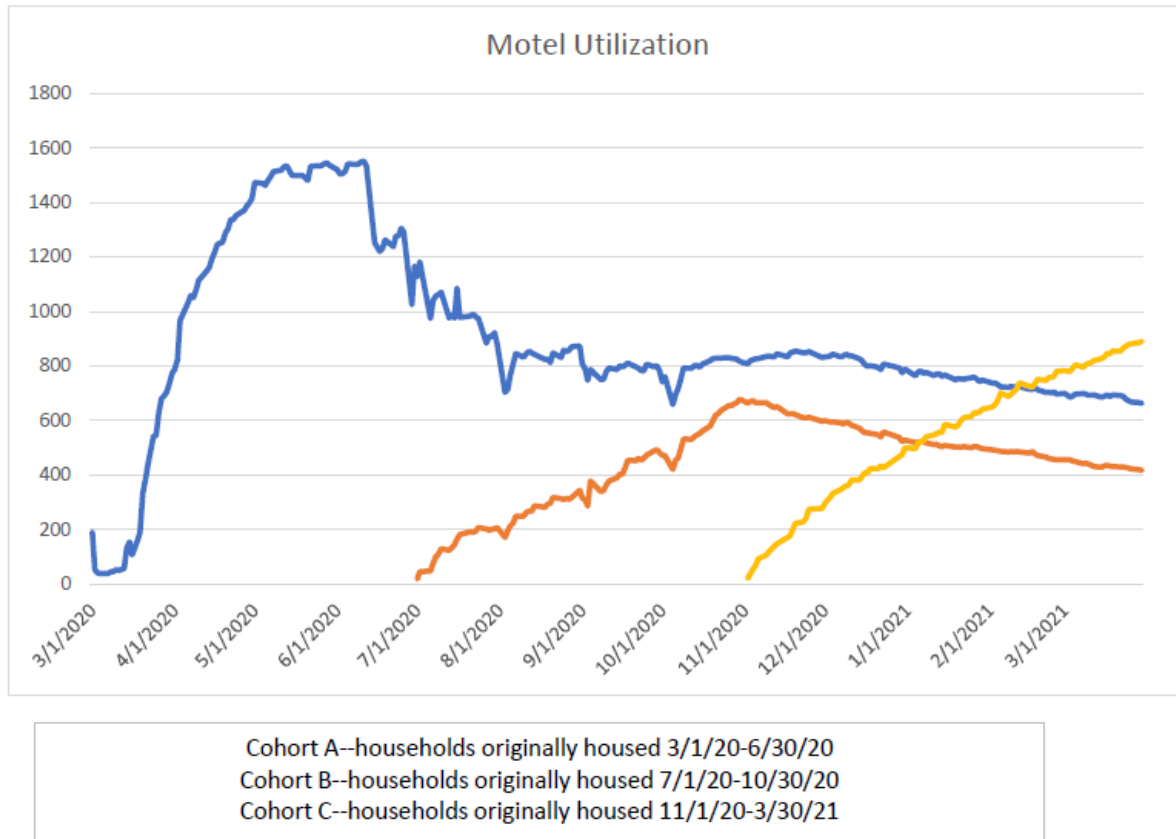
Anticipated Cost for SFY22

Housing and Housing Services		
<u>Groupings</u>	<u>Cost</u>	<u>Fund Source</u>
<i>Housing</i>		
Motel Housing Non-AWC	\$ 17,277,237.80	FEMA & ERAP & ERAP 2
Motel Housing AWC	\$ 12,513,571.61	
<i>Services</i>		
Motel-based Services	\$ 4,000,000.00	ERAP - Housing Support Services (Additional)
Security	\$ 650,000.00	CRF
Expand Community-Based Shelter - Temporary and/or Permanent	\$ -	Base budget funds moving to OEO in FY22 Governor's Proposed Budget
Rapid Resolution - \$3M Money for Essential Support Payment; \$1M for Rapid Resolution for FY22	\$ 4,000,000.00	CRF
<i>Admin</i>		
211 Contract (Additional Funds)	\$ 252,000.00	CRF
Staffing Needs (ESD/OEO/BO) - Extension of limited service positions; 17 new limited service positions; allocated costs and positive time reporting	\$ 2,250,581.00	ERAP Admin
Total Need	\$ 40,943,390.41	

EMERGENCY HOUSING FACT SHEET

As of early April, there were approximately 1,980 households receiving non-congregate shelter due to COVID-19 through the General Assistance Emergency Housing Program.

- Approximately 250 households are families with children, and 1,730 households are adults only.



Vaccination Clinics

- Vaccination Clinics are underway during April-May to offer vaccinations to the homeless population.

Lodging Capacity

- There 76 lodging establishments currently accepting a GA “motel voucher” and providing almost 2,000 rooms.
- By July 1, at least 250 rooms will no longer be available. (12.5% reduction)
- DCF anticipates the motel capacity declining between April – October as the economy reopens. By October, as much as 66% of current capacity may no longer be available, reducing available rooms to between 600-700 rooms statewide.

Re-housing Strategies

- All remaining families with children have a CARES housing voucher or Vermont Rental Subsidy which includes 12-month rental assistance with housing support services, with an expectation that two-thirds will be able to lease up by July 1st.
- All households in GA Emergency Housing are eligible to apply for the Vermont Emergency Rental Assistance Program to provide rental assistance in new housing. <https://erap.vsha.org/>

- Services to help find and keep housing are also available.
- The Governor's ARPA Housing Proposal includes investments intended to create 600 new units of permanent housing for the homeless during SFY 2022.

Changes in shelter capacity

- In July 2021, shelter capacity is expected to increase to be able to serve an additional 150 households, mostly single adults.
- There are still some unknowns regarding seasonal shelter capacity that may return this fall, which could be an additional 50-75 beds.
- Although limited, additional temporary shelter capacity may also be possible through community-based grants.
- The Governor's ARPA Housing Proposal includes investments intended to create 150 new shelter beds.