
Report to The Vermont Legislature

GENERAL ASSISTANCE EMERGENCY HOUSING REPORT In Accordance with 33 V.S.A. 2115

Submitted to: House Committee on Appropriations
House Committee on General and Housing
House Committee on Government Operations and
Military Affairs
House Committee on Human Services
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Senate Committee on Health and Welfare
Joint Fiscal Committee

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Executive Summary

Within the Vermont Department for Children and Families' Economic Services Division, the General and Emergency Assistance Program (GA) serves some of the most vulnerable Vermonters, assisting with rent, mortgage, utilities, medical and dental needs, emergency housing, financial assistance for burials, financial assistance for pet spay and neuter, and a small personal needs cash benefit.

This report provides a comprehensive overview of the major developments, policy changes, operational challenges, and accomplishments within the GA program including spotlights on the Vermont Rental Subsidy Program and the General Assistance Emergency Housing Program in Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25).

The Vermont Rental Subsidy Program (VRS) offers short-term rental assistance designed to bridge households experiencing homelessness or housing instability to longer-term, federally funded housing solutions. While no direct changes were implemented for the VRS program in FY25, federal funding for long-term vouchers (Section 8) has greatly influenced how the program is operating and the length of assistance it now offers. VRS vouchers are typically provided for up to 12 months while the household works to obtain a long-term voucher. Due to the decrease in long-term vouchers, VRS participants are staying in the program longer which decreases the number of households that can be served by the program.

The **General Assistance Emergency Housing Program** is intended to provide short-term hotel housing when shelters are full as a last resort for eligible households experiencing homelessness. Eligible households may receive up to 80 days of assistance in a 12-month period, in addition to assistance received during winter months (December through March). While individuals are sheltered in Emergency Housing hotels, the Department for Children and Families works to connect households with coordinated entry and other community-based services to assist in locating permanent housing.

The General Assistance Emergency Housing Program experienced multiple programmatic changes in FY25, which included the implementation of Act 113, Executive Order 03-25, and a Temporary Restraining Order for the program was issued in April 2025. Because of these changes, the population that the program is serving has started to decrease from its peak during the COVID-19 pandemic (approximately 1800 households) to 1100 households. While this is a significant decrease, it does still represent a stark increase from pre-pandemic levels, when the program served approximately 250 households.

Vermont Rental Subsidy (VRS)

Program Overview

The VRS program established in 2011 is a short-term rental subsidy program intended to bridge eligible Vermonters to a long-term, federally funded housing voucher. VRS provides rental assistance and case management services to individuals and families experiencing homelessness while they work to increase their income and/or secure a longer-term housing subsidy such as Section 8. Reach Up Case Managers and other community Housing Case Managers generally refer participants to the VRS program. Case management is a key aspect of support for households during their time with the program.

To qualify for rental assistance through VRS, applicants must meet all of the following eligibility criteria:

1. Be currently homeless, as defined by the Agency of Human Services Housing Policy;
2. Have applied for all other available subsidized housing programs;
3. Cannot receive rental assistance through any other subsidized housing program;
4. For Reach Up or General Assistance Program recipients, applicants must follow all applicable program requirements;
5. Be eligible for Section 8 rental assistance pursuant to HUD regulations;
6. Monthly expenses must not exceed monthly income, according to income and expenses for the 30 days prior to the date of application; and
7. Net monthly income cannot be less than 30% of total monthly income.

FY2025

As of the close of fiscal year 2025, approximately 60 households had an active VRS voucher, while approximately 100 households were on the waitlist. In the spring of 2025, the Vermont State Housing Authority announced that due to a decrease in federal housing voucher funding, the Housing Authority would no longer issue new rental assistance vouchers. In response to this, DCF drafted a plan to extend the term of eligibility for households receiving Vermont Rental Subsidy vouchers beyond the 12 months households are typically eligible. This change allowed households to remain sheltered and provided continuity with case management services. DCF aims to transition these households to long-term, federally funded housing vouchers as soon as they become available. In the interim, the Department will continue to provide short-term VRS extensions to households meeting case management and other program requirements.

Program Strengths

The program's strengths include offering rental assistance comparable to federal housing vouchers, delivering comprehensive Reach Up case management, and maintaining strong partnerships with landlords. These strengths have enhanced the program's impact. However, a key challenge has emerged: households are remaining in the program longer than anticipated. Originally designed to offer up to 12 months of assistance before participants transitioned to long-term housing vouchers, the program is now serving many clients beyond the intended 12-month timeframe because long-term vouchers such as Section 8 are not currently being issued.

Emergency Housing Program

Program Overview

Act 113, effective July 1, 2024, established a stable set of rules that more closely resembled traditional (pre-COVID) General Assistance Emergency Housing policies. These rules outlined eligibility requirements, set an 80-day length-of-stay limit, and capped the number of rooms to be utilized at 1,100 outside of an established cold weather period. The program continued to operate as a “shelter first” program, requiring households to utilize available shelter beds before accessing a hotel room. Appendix A – Unique Households by Month provides detailed information on the number of unique households, adults, and children who applied for assistance. On average, the data show that 1,575 unique households applied for housing assistance each month in FY25.

From December 1, 2024, through March 31, 2025, Act 113 lifted both the 80-night cap and the room cap for the winter months. Simultaneously, it also limited who was eligible for GA Emergency Housing in the winter months to only those that met one of the criteria outlined in Act 113. This marked a deviation from pre-COVID winter eligibility, where anyone who did not have shelter was able to access GA in the colder months. Appendix B- Household Eligibility Category chart and table further demonstrate the eligibility criteria that were utilized in FY25.

Households with income above the Reach Up basic needs standard for their household size were required to contribute 30% of their income towards the cost of their own housing. The Department did not collect these payments directly from households. Instead, a formula determined the number of nights for which the household was financially responsible, based on an \$80 per room per night rate. During those nights, the Department did not provide hotel housing. Households could choose to pay for their stay at the same establishment or arrange their own lodging elsewhere.

As Appendix C – Households by number of nights chart demonstrates, program utilization is not always continuous. Many clients use the program for a few days, leave, and then return later. As the chart illustrates, most participants ultimately use all 80 of their eligible days. However, a significant number of clients use only about two weeks or less of assistance. At the same time, there are clients who remain in the program throughout the entire winter, utilize their additional 80 nights, and participate in the program for the majority of the year.

The Emergency Housing Program is intended as a temporary response to a housing crisis. Eligible households were required to take active steps to resolve their housing emergency. Each household was referred to the Coordinated Entry Lead Agency in their district, which provided access to services including case management, housing barrier assessments, and assistance with housing voucher waitlists. Households were also required to complete a housing search activity, which included completing a Coordinated Entry assessment, engaging in case management, addressing barriers to permanent housing, applying for housing vouchers, and adding their name to a local shelter waitlist. As part of the application process, staff identified the most appropriate housing search task and advised households on the verification needed to demonstrate completion.

Executive Order 03-25

On March 28, 2025, Governor Scott issued Executive Order 03-25 which expanded eligibility for

General Assistance Emergency Housing by waiving the 80-night cap for some households in the program. The executive order expanded eligibility for families with custody of a child under 19 years of age and households with a medically vulnerable individual (defined as individuals who met the Medicare definition of homebound, individuals who require a lifesaving device that requires access to electricity, individuals in active cancer treatment, individuals receiving Medicaid-eligible or Medicare-eligible “home-based” nursing services, or individuals in their third trimester of pregnancy). The Executive Order waived the 80-night maximum for these populations from April 1, 2025, through June 30, 2025. This meant that any household that had already used their 80 nights could remain housed through the end of the fiscal year; however, these nights counted in their overall night count in a rolling 12-month period. A total of 797 households received additional nights of housing under the Executive Order, including 285 families/pregnant individuals, and 236 Medically Vulnerable individuals. 276 individuals applied as Medically Vulnerable but were unable to provide medical documentation to support additional nights of housing, therefore they were only conditionally housed for up to 7 days to allow them to gather the necessary documentation.

Temporary Restraining Order (TRO)

On April 30, 2025, Vermont Superior Court Judge Samuel Hoar, Jr. issued a Temporary Restraining Order to the Agency of Human Services based on a filing by Vermont Legal Aid. The order required the Department for Children and Families (DCF) to provide written notice to households in the Emergency Housing program before terminating benefits. The notice was required to include: the legal basis for the termination of benefits, that the notice be delivered using a method the household could be reasonably expected to receive, that the notice be delivered with ample time for the household to dispute the termination of benefits, and that the notice advised the household of their right to an appeal before the Human Services Board.

To comply with the order, DCF temporarily suspended any exits from the hotel program and issued a “Notice of Eligibility” to all participating households. Once adequate notice was provided, DCF resumed exiting households from the program when it was appropriate. Currently, DCF continues to provide a Notice of Eligibility anytime a household that has applied for Emergency Housing is granted benefits. If an applicant household is denied benefits, a denial notice is provided.

On May 16, 2025, the case was heard in Vermont Superior Court. Judge Hoar acknowledged the complicated nature of the program and noted that a permanent injunction would further complicate the program. The parties agreed to a preliminary injunction to allow time to negotiate areas of concern. At the time this report was written, the preliminary injunction was still in effect and mediation had been scheduled for late August.

Program Challenges

Despite efforts to stabilize and modernize the General Assistance Emergency Housing Program, significant challenges remain, particularly in meeting the complex needs of the individuals and families the program serves. Many Vermonters experiencing homelessness are also living with

untreated or undertreated substance use disorders, unaddressed mental health conditions, and chronic health issues. The current system often lacks the level of integrated, on-site services needed to support individuals in crisis and help them successfully transition out of homelessness. In many cases, the absence of embedded case management, behavioral health supports, and clinical outreach services limits the program's ability to address some of the root causes of housing instability.

The cost of hotel and motel room authorizations for the program in fiscal year 2025 was \$33,885,327, reflecting the substantial resources required to maintain emergency shelter capacity. Even with this investment, the program has been unable to serve every person who meets eligibility criteria due to resource constraints, and the sheer scale of need. As a result, the state has had to prioritize services for the most vulnerable populations, such as families with children, individuals with significant medical needs, and those experiencing domestic or sexual violence, in an effort to focus limited shelter resources where they can have the most immediate and potentially life-saving impact. Ultimately, due to requirements in Act 113, the Department had to discontinue the prioritization of the most vulnerable households for assistance and reverted to operating the program on a first-come, first-served basis.

It is also important to emphasize that homelessness is, at its core, a housing issue. A persistent shortage of safe, affordable, and permanent housing across Vermont continues to drive the crisis. Too many individuals and families are unable to secure a place to live, not because they don't want housing, but because there is simply not enough housing available at a price they can afford. Emergency shelter and motel-based programs can serve as a temporary safety net, but they are not a substitute for permanent housing solutions.

Program Strengths

During Fiscal Year 2024, the department implemented a software solution allowing front-line staff to process applications and generate authorization and denial notices through a standard system. During Fiscal Year 2025, updates to the system provided workers with real-time access to the number of rooms being utilized by the program to ensure compliance with the 1,100-room cap established by Act 113.

During Fiscal Year 2024, the department entered into an agreement with the RDI Corporation to augment the General Assistance call center. This contract was extended in Fiscal Year 2025 and provided the ability to decrease and increase staffing levels based on programmatic changes, such as the 1,100 cap and the removal of the room cap during winter months.

In the Fall of 2024, DCF opened two family shelters in Waterbury and in Williston (discussed below). These shelters were crucial in allowing DCF the flexibility to divert families away from the hotel program and toward a more holistic, case-managed shelter environment. Forty-three families placed at these shelters were ultimately successful in finding permanent alternatives, and the existence of the shelters allowed DCF additional flexibility to meet the needs of Vermonters during the winter months.

Act 113 created periods of change on September 15th and December 1st of 2024 that impacted a large number of households. Unfortunately, both of these dates fell on a Sunday. To avoid a high

number of unanswered phone calls with the after-hours vendor, as had been experienced during previous periods of change, DCF was able to anticipate the level of need and staff the call center with state and RDI call center operators to better meet the needs of clients.

Throughout Fiscal Year 2025, DCF prioritized transparent and consistent communication with stakeholders, service providers, and community members about ongoing changes to the General Assistance Emergency Housing Program. In response to significant programmatic shifts, stemming from Act 113, Executive Order 03-25, and court orders, DCF hosted monthly community meetings and shared notes with interested parties. These sessions provided a platform to explain policy changes, share timelines, and answer questions from local officials, advocacy organizations, and impacted individuals.

The Department also distributed a series of formal communications, including guidance memos and policy letters, to ensure that partners were informed promptly. All outreach materials and meeting summaries were made publicly available on the DCF website to promote transparency and statewide access to information. These engagement efforts played a critical role in helping communities prepare for changes and in supporting local systems in navigating the transition away from pandemic-era emergency housing policies.

The Emergency Housing Program's strengths include the effective utilization of an online application system, the continued contractual agreement with the RDI Corporation to provide phone coverage for the Emergency Housing telephone line, and the opening of the family shelters in Waterbury and Williston. Challenges continue to include a lack of embedded services within GA Emergency Housing to assist clients in finding housing and addressing their health needs. As a result, some of the most vulnerable Vermonters continue to be underserved by this program.

State Operated Family Shelters

In November 2024, the Agency of Human Services opened two state-operated family shelters in Williston and Waterbury in response to increasing homelessness among families and the limitations of the General Assistance (GA) hotel program. These facilities were designed to provide semi-congregate housing for families while offering on-site support services. The shelters were staffed with qualified and experienced personnel, ensuring a safe and structured environment.

While open as state-operated shelters from November 1, 2024, through June 13, 2025, the two shelters collectively served 51 families, which included 74 adults and 78 children. The Waterbury location sheltered 35 unique households and successfully exited 34 households into permanent housing options in their own apartments, or to live with family. The Williston location sheltered 16 unique households and successfully exited 9 households. In May, operations of the Williston shelter transferred from the State of Vermont to the Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity (CVOEO) and guests still in the shelter were able to stay and continue to receive services on site. The State anticipates working with a community provider to reopen the Waterbury shelter in State Fiscal Year 2026.

Families in both locations received a range of services, including employment support, housing navigation, case management services, and connections to health, mental health, and substance use treatment. Onsite service providers included Vermont Chronic Care Initiative, Reach Up,

HireAbility, Children’s Integrated Services, and WIC, all of which maintained regular presence at the shelters. The Lund Family Center and Washington County Family Center hosted child play groups and provided additional family-focused supports. Other community partners also came onsite as part of a team-based care approach, ensuring that families could access multiple resources in one location. These service providers and shelter staff, helped 11 adults gain employment during their stay, connected 24 adults to workforce services, and linked 13 individuals to needed mental health support. A small number of households received housing vouchers while in shelter, and 17 households completed Coordinated Entry assessments to improve housing placement prospects.

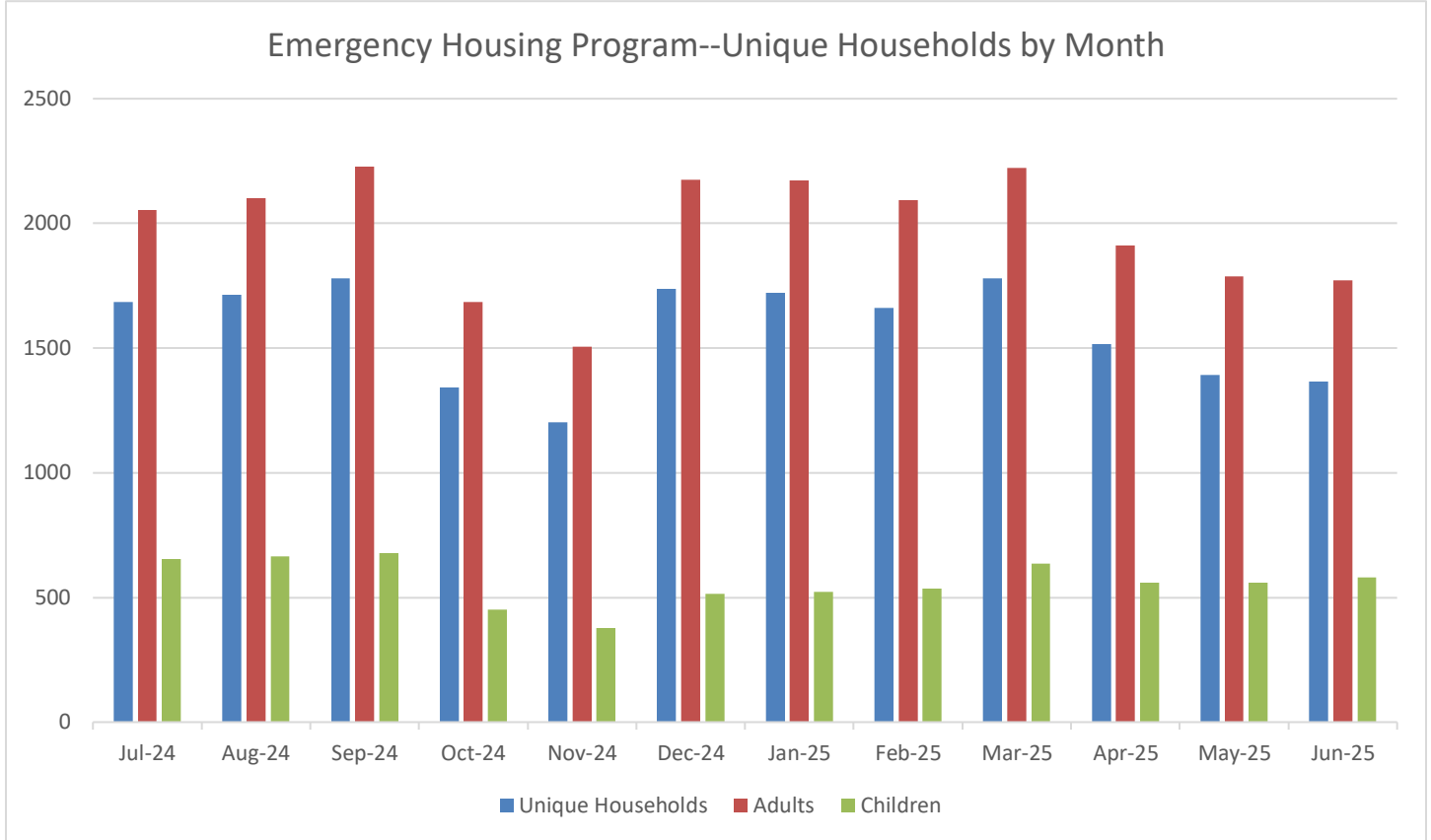
Of the 44 households that exited the Waterbury and Williston shelters during the reporting period, 16 transitioned into permanent housing through programs such as the Vermont Housing Improvement Program (VHIP) and scattered-site rentals. Others moved in with family, relocated out of state, or entered specialized housing programs like Lund. A small number were transitioned to alternative accommodations due to medical needs or to be closer to their communities.

Lessons learned from the operation of these shelters highlight the value of consistent on-site staffing, structured environments, and integrated case management. Families reported feeling safer in shelter than in hotels, and team-based care proved essential in supporting both adults and children. However, barriers to permanent housing, such as poor rental histories, lack of income, and limited affordable units, remained significant.

Conclusion

Act 113 provided a stable set of housing rules. Winter housing followed a similar timeline as previous years, and while it presented capacity challenges, the winter also presented opportunities as family shelters opened, and staff adjusted to a stable set of rules. In the spring of 2025, Executive Order 03-25 and the temporary restraining order brought some challenges and opportunities, including the Notice of Eligibility, allowing DCF to communicate more information to households accessing Emergency Housing. DCF was able to rely on and expand upon strengths built in previous years, including our partners at the RDI Corporation, our online application system, and our agency partners at the Office of Economic Opportunity.

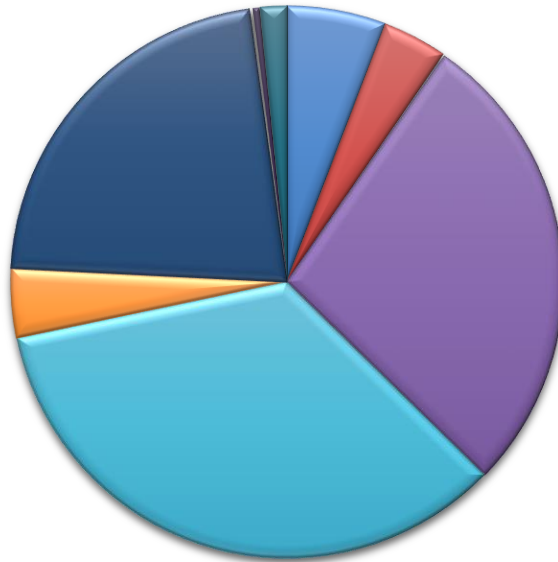
Appendix A: Emergency Housing Program – Unique Households by Month



Date	Unique Households	Adults	Children
Jul-24	1685	2054	655
Aug-24	1714	2100	666
Sep-24	1780	2227	677
Oct-24	1342	1685	451
Nov-24	1202	1505	378
Dec-24	1737	2175	514
Jan-25	1721	2171	522
Feb-25	1662	2092	536
Mar-25	1779	2223	635
Apr-25	1517	1911	558
May-25	1391	1788	559
Jun-25	1367	1773	580

Appendix B: Households by Eligibility Category

Housing by Category



Age 65+	Court Ordered/Constructive Eviction
Death of a Spouse, Domestic Partner or Minor Child	Disabled (201G-VR)
Disabled (SSI/SSDI)	Domestic Violence
Families with Children	Flood
Natural Disaster	Natural Disaster (excluding flood)
Pregnant	

Eligibility Category	% of Households by Category
Age 65+	6%
Court Ordered/Constructive Eviction	4%
Death of a Spouse, Domestic Partner or Minor Child	0%
Disabled (201G-VR)	28%
Disabled (SSI/SSDI)	34%
Domestic Violence	4%
Families with Children	22%
Flood	0%
Natural Disaster	0%
Natural Disaster (excluding flood)	0%
Pregnant	2%

Appendix C: Households by Number of Nights Housed

