

Housing Opportunity Grant Program (HOP)

Annual Report - State Fiscal Year 2019

July 2018 – June 2019

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 39 non-profit emergency shelter, transitional housing, re-housing and prevention organizations serving all regions of the state. This past year, nearly \$2 million in funds from the General Assistance (GA) Emergency Housing program was strategically invested under the Housing Opportunity Grant Program into community-based programs designed to decrease reliance on motels to shelter homeless persons and families. These GA funds supported 17 initiatives, and the outcomes from these projects are included as part of this statewide report.

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 General Assistance program and the statewide homeless Point-in-Time count.

¹ US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Emergency Solutions Grant and Continuum of Care Grant and Global Commitment Investment

Overnights Sheltered

Between July 1, 2018 and June 30, 2019, Vermont's publicly funded emergency shelters, domestic violence shelters, and youth shelters, reported the following:

- **3,709** persons (58% single adults and 42% in families with children) sheltered for a total of **193,864** bednights.²
- **2,821** were adults and **888** were children under the age of 18.
- The average length of stay was **52** days.

Housing Opportunity Grant Program funds support basic operations and essential services at 39 overnight emergency shelters, including 11 warming shelters open only during cold weather months. A total of 11 shelters for persons fleeing domestic/sexual violence were funded, including three motel pools operated by these agencies. Finally, 6 programs provided emergency shelter in scattered site apartments, ranging in size from 1 to 3 bedrooms. Shelters range in size from only a few rooms for families to more than 37 beds for single adults.

Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing

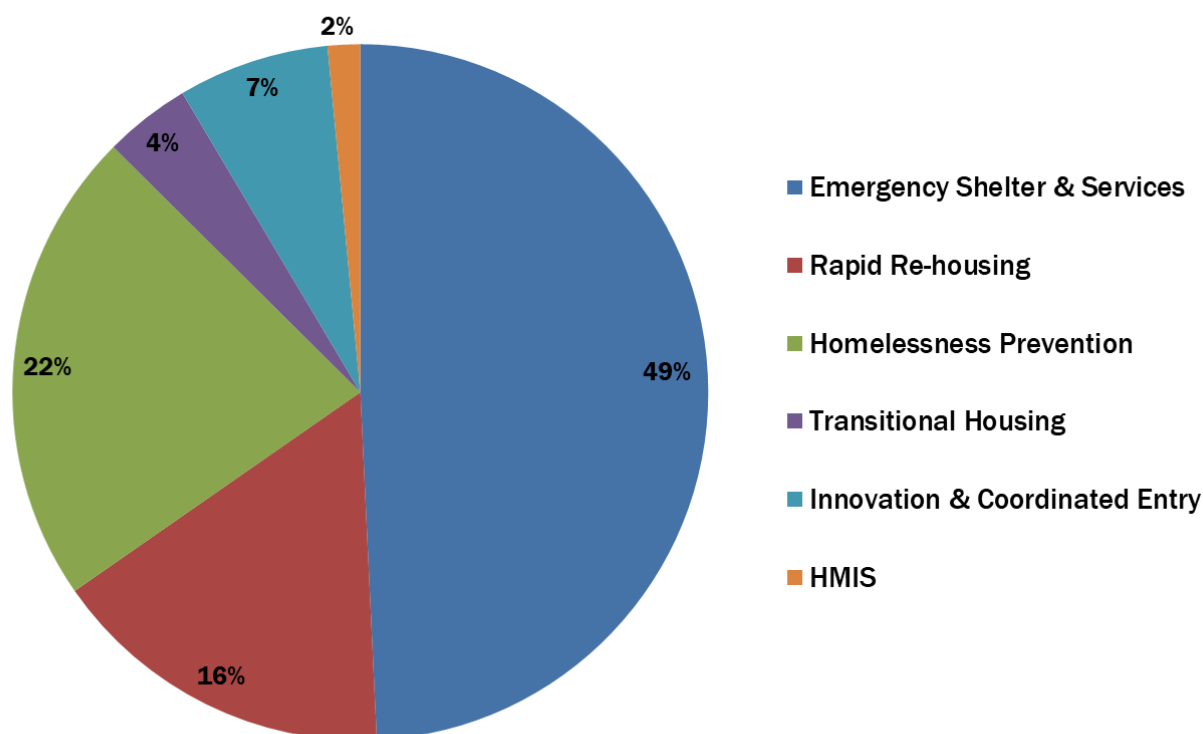
Other HOP-funded programs provide homelessness prevention and rapid re-housing assistance such as housing support services and financial aid to prevent eviction or help a family enter new housing. Homelessness prevention targets assistance to those who are "imminently homeless" or "at-risk of homelessness" (e.g., "couch surfing", exiting an institution, or facing eviction) whereas rapid re-housing serves those experiencing literal homelessness (e.g., sleeping in a place not meant for habitation or staying in an emergency shelter). These activities provided housing stability for **1,755** households. Approximately 31% of these households were literally homeless, contrasted with 45% in SFY 2017, demonstrating a shift towards greater homelessness prevention focus.

Both homelessness prevention and rapid-rehousing 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 and financial assistance such as security deposits, utility payments and deposits, moving costs, rental arrearages and from one to twenty four months of rental assistance.

Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing services in this report reflect only those paid for in whole or part with Housing Opportunity Grant Program dollars. Numbers do not reflect other activities by these grantee providers paid for with funding such as Crisis Fuel, Vermont Rental Subsidy, FEMA, or Community Services Block Grants. Though in reality, community-based providers often combine these various resources in order to meet the presenting needs.

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

Housing Opportunity Grant Program SFY 2019 Awards



In SFY2019, more than \$7.1 million in state and federal funding was awarded under the Housing Opportunity Grant Program. Nearly \$2 million in funds from the General Assistance Emergency Housing program was invested in 17 projects through the Housing Opportunity Grant Program to create or expand community capacity to meet emergency shelter needs in the following AHS districts: Addison, Barre, Bennington, Burlington, Brattleboro, Hartford, Rutland, St. Johnsbury and Lamoille. This was an increase of nearly \$445,000 over SFY 17 GA community investments.

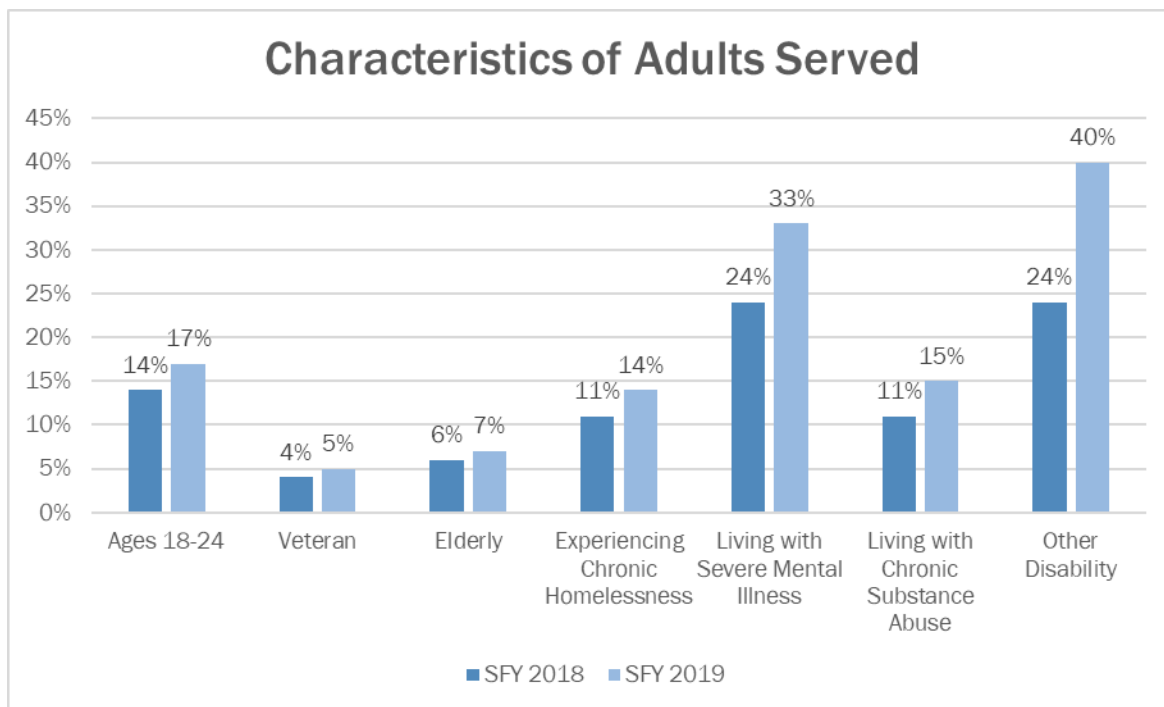
Approximately 46% of all HOP funds supported direct service staff, such as shelter case managers or housing specialists. Just under 18% of funds supported basic shelter operations, such as utilities, rent, building insurance, shelter supplies or routine maintenance. More than \$1.37 million was provided in client financial or rental assistance such as security deposit, rental or utility arrearages, and/or short- and medium-term rental assistance. The remaining funds (approximately \$670,000) supported the implementation of HMIS, coordinated entry, and innovative projects such as landlord liaisons.

Between SFY 2017 and SFY 2019 the percentage of HOP funds spent on Emergency Shelter increased from 39% to 49% largely due to GA community investments in seasonal shelter. As mentioned, Rapid Re-Housing spending declined as Homelessness Prevention funding increased.

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

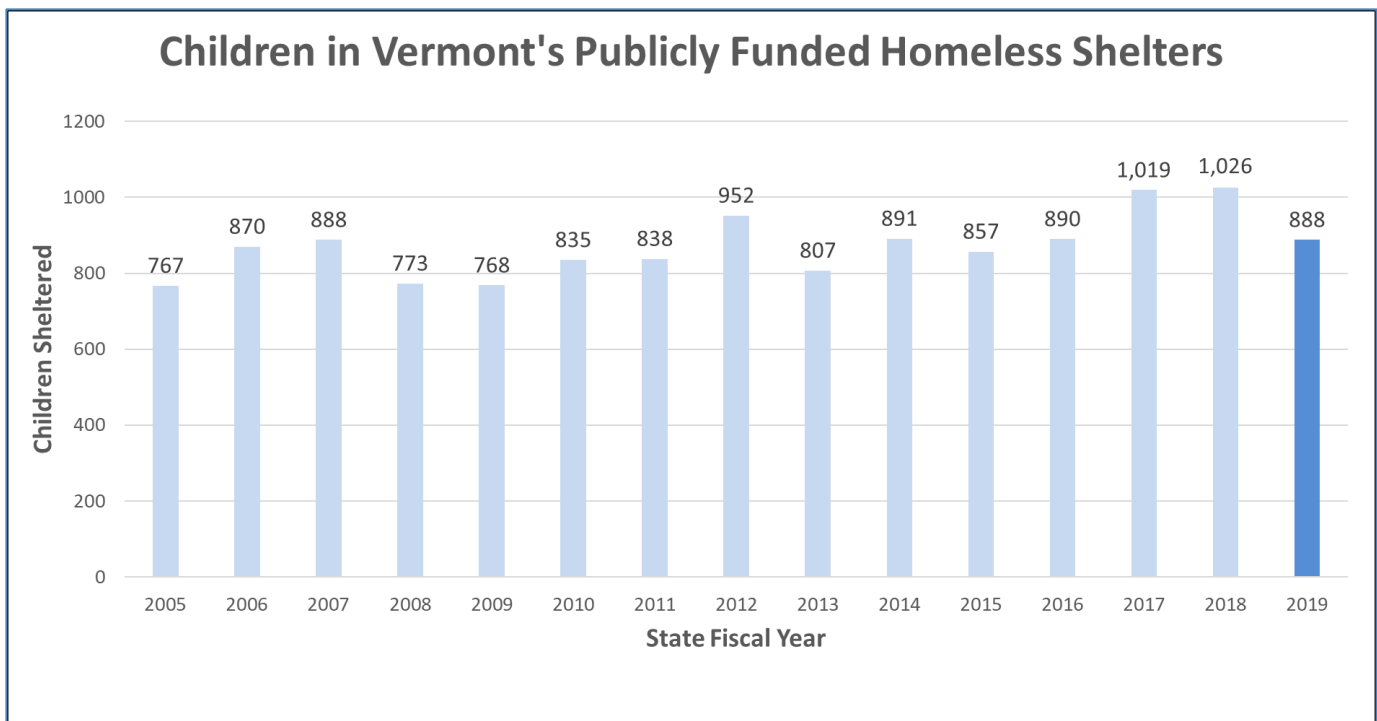
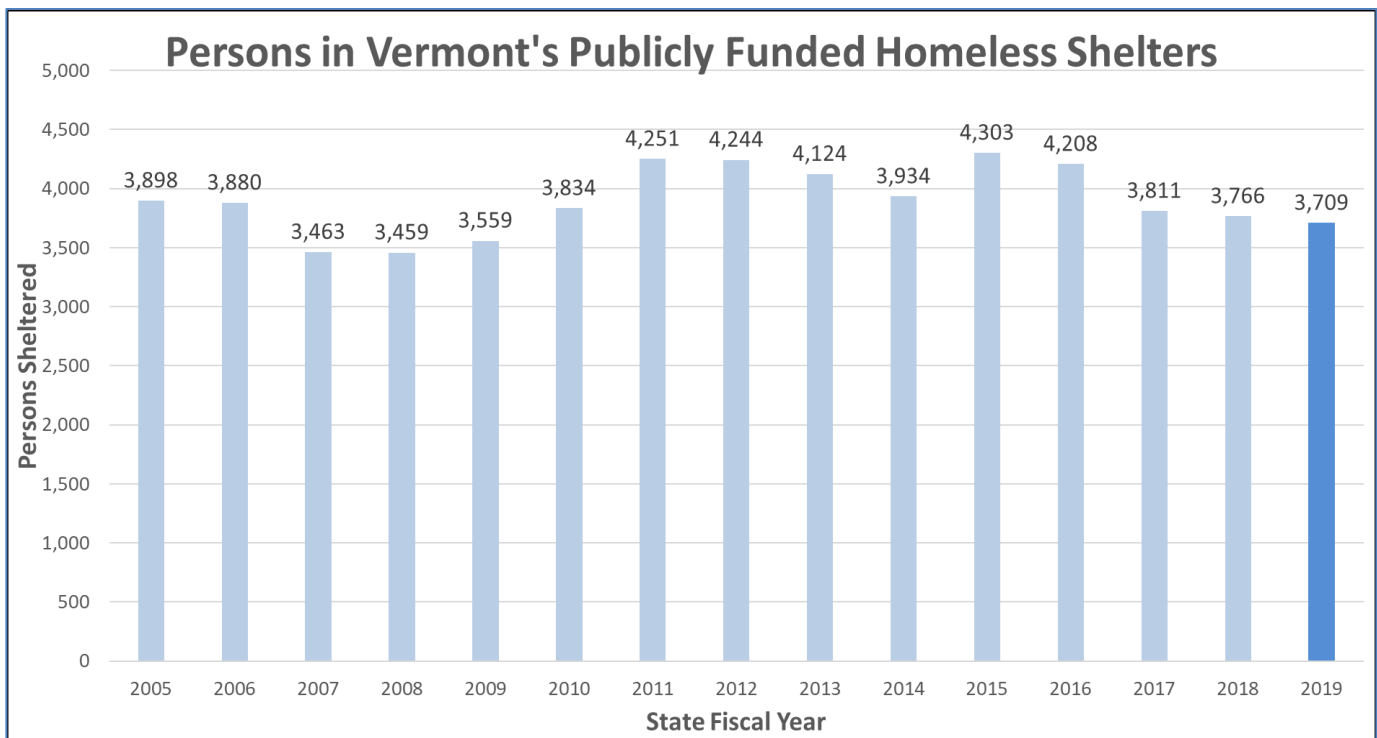
The number of persons staying in publicly funded emergency shelters decreased slightly from last year, and the number of children decreased significantly. The average length of stay in shelters stayed consistent with last year. Approximately 43% of sheltered children (429) and 45% of families (253) spent their stay at a domestic/sexual violence shelter.

The below chart reflects a sampling of demographics for all adults (5,294) served by shelters, homelessness prevention, or rapid re-housing programs.³

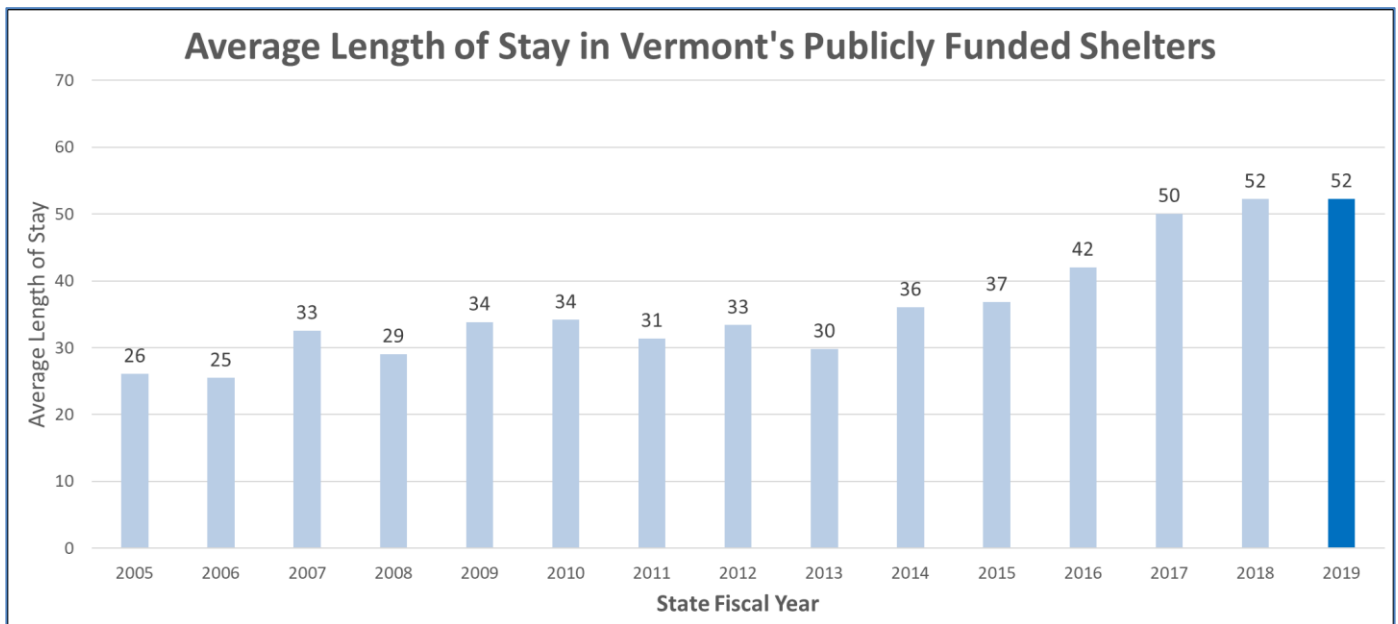


The average length of stay in homeless shelters remains at its highest level in more than 18 years. There continue to be significant barriers for shelter guests to move out of emergency settings into housing. Lack of available rentals, the high cost of rent, very low incomes, and tenant history are driving factors in the ability to quickly re-stabilize into housing. This difficulty in finding permanent housing artificially constrains the number of persons that can be sheltered within existing capacity. Total persons served by shelters reflects changes in the homeless population, but is also impacted by changes in homeless shelter capacity

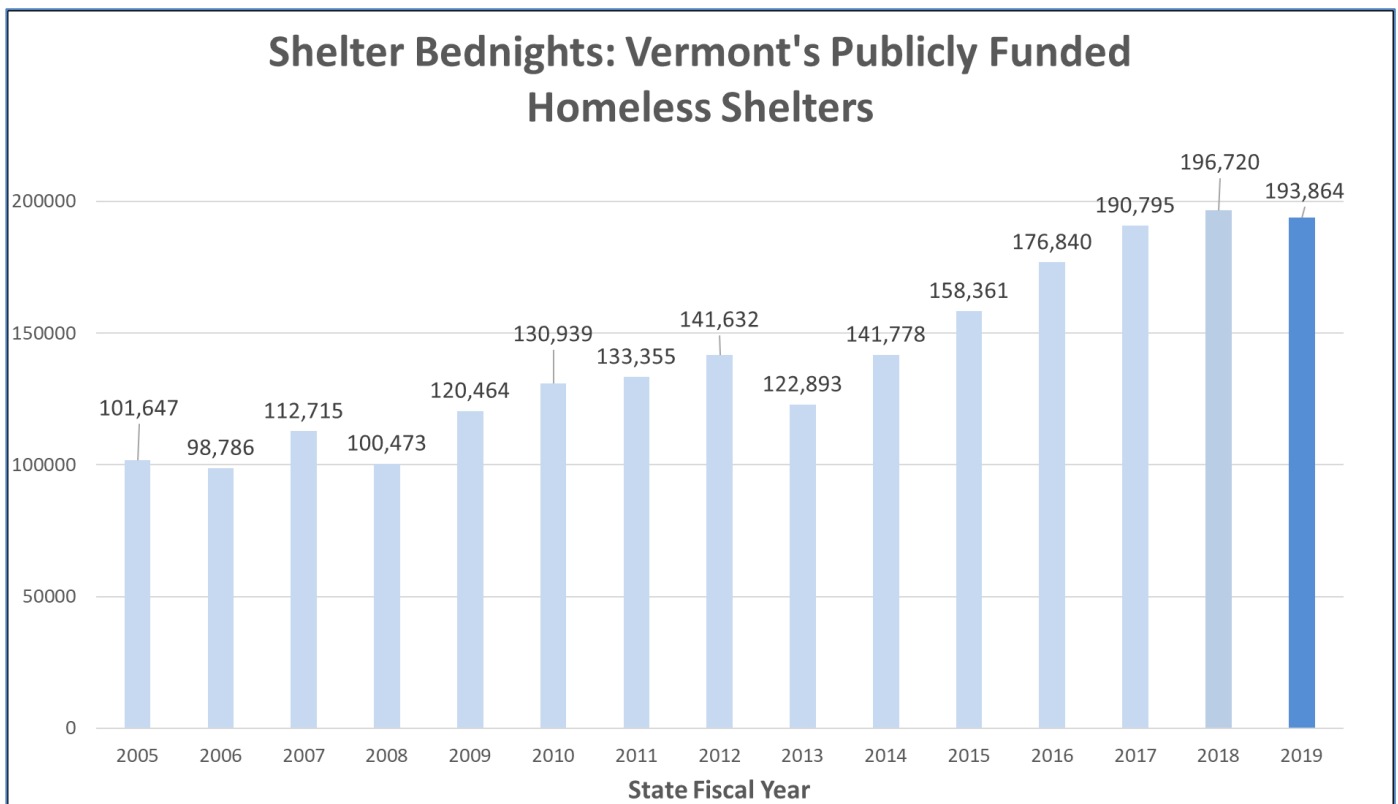
³ The 2018 report mistakenly reported percentages for all persons served when it should have included adults only. Revised SFY 2018 data is included to allow for accurate comparison.



The number of persons in shelter has decreased slightly over the past three years, down nearly 600 persons from a high of 4,303 persons in 2015. The number of children as a proportion of total shelter guests returned to prior levels after a spike in 2017 and 2018. In 2019, some emergency shelter capacity for families with children was lost as two projects providing emergency apartments ended, which may explain some of this change.



Emergency shelter providers report that longer shelter stays this year were the result of very low vacancy rates, and limited access to affordable rental units.



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 2019 performance are included below. By reporting the “% of Grantees Meeting Target”, the Office of Economic Opportunity is able to better understand which areas the network may require training and support to improve or where targets may need to be reconsidered.

Performance Measures by Activity	Target	State FY 2019 Performance	% of Grantees Meeting Target
EMERGENCY SHELTER OPERATIONS			
Year-round Shelter facilities are open, staffed, insured, clear of safety violations, and available to shelter the homeless ⁴	365 nights	Open 354 nights on average or 97%	90%
Warming/Seasonal shelter facilities are open, staffed, insured, clear of safety violations, and available to shelter the homeless	166 nights ⁵	Open 166 nights on average or 100%	33%
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	76%
		Transitional	100%
		Youth	94%
Households who exit emergency shelter, exit to stable permanent or transitional housing	baseline	30%	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%	82%	100%
ESSENTIAL SERVICES CASE MANAGEMENT⁶			
Homeless households referred for case management will meet with a case manager within 3 days of the referral.	90%	78%	67%
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%	56%	29%
Households receiving case management will be stabilized in transitional or permanent housing	70%	35%	14%
Households stabilized or re-housed will continue to be in stable housing at least 90 days following assistance	70%	58%	19%
HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION⁷			
Households at-risk of homelessness will have their housing stabilized or be safely re-housed	70%	83%	100%
Households stabilized or re-housed will continue to be in stable housing at least 90 days following assistance	70%	64%	44%
RAPID RE-HOUSING⁷			
Homeless households will be safely re-housed	70%	87%	78%
Households re-housed will continue to be in stable housing at least 90 days following assistance	70%	66%	56%

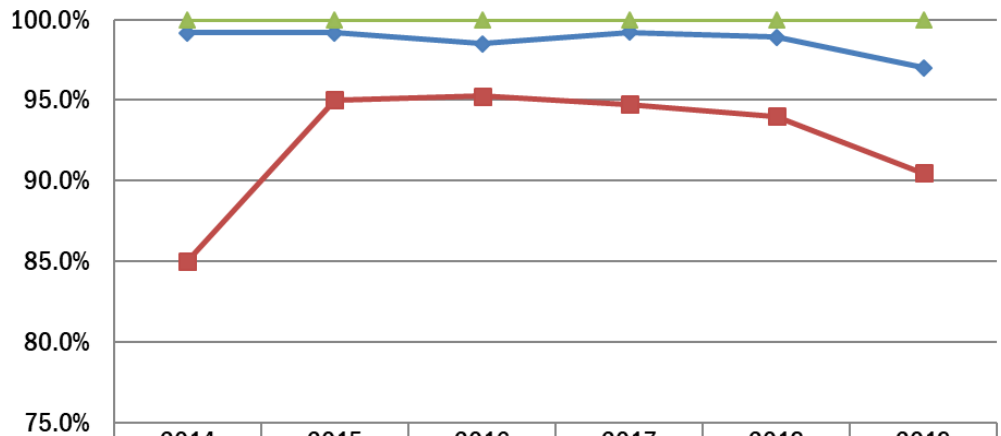
⁴ Year-round figures do not include day shelters, warming shelters, or transitional housing.

⁵ 166 nights is November 1st – April 15th, cold weather months. Some seasonal shelters were open longer due to funding from other sources.

⁶ Only organizations that receive HOP funding for essential services case management report on these performance measures. In 2019 this measure was changed to include all households who were stabilized instead of just those stabilized within 90 days.

⁷ Only households receiving services and financial/rental assistance (vs. services only) were included in SFY 2019 reporting.

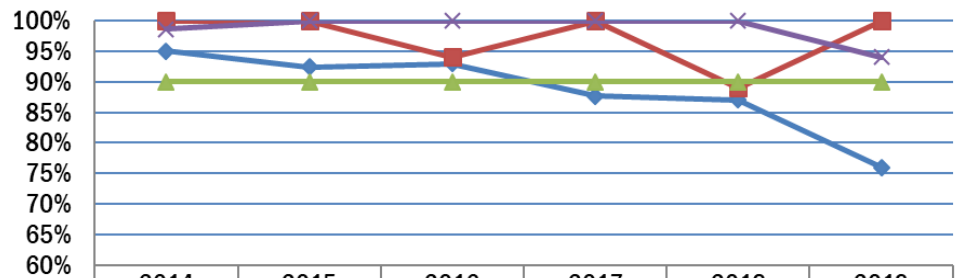
Housing Opportunity Program Performance: Emergency Shelter Operations



◆ % of calendar days that the shelter was open, staffed, insured, clear of safety violations and available to shelter residents	2014 Performance	2015 Performance	2016 Performance	2017 Performance	2018 Performance	2019 Performance
▲ Target	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
■ % of Grantees Meeting Target	85%	95%	95%	95%	94%	90%

Statewide, year-round emergency shelters were open and available to shelter the homeless for 97% of calendar days. Shelters occasionally need to close or reduce capacity for maintenance and repairs or to resolve potential public health issues. OEO works closely with grantees during these times to ensure guests have alternative accommodations, and to see shelters are back at full capacity as soon as possible.

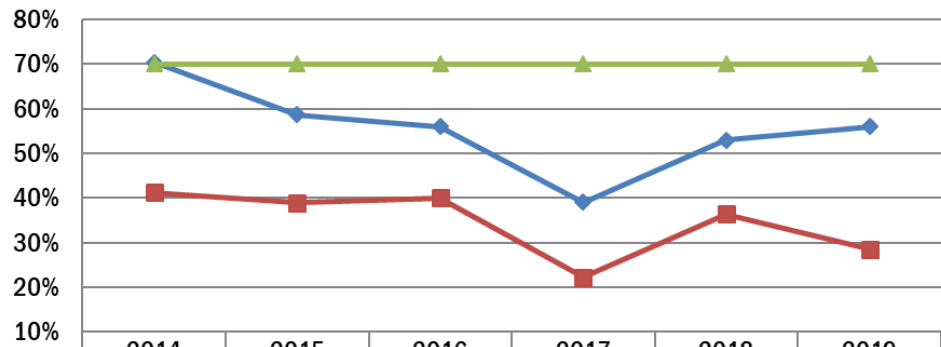
Housing Opportunity Program Performance: Shelter Operations, Service Referral



	2014 Performance	2015 Performance	2016 Performance	2017 Performance	2018 Performance	2019 Performance
◆ Emergency Shelter: % of new HH who met with a case manager or advocate within 3 days of entrance	95%	92%	93%	88%	87%	76%
■ Transitional Housing: % of new HH who met with a case manager within 3 days of entrance	100%	100%	94%	100%	89%	100%
✕ Youth Shelter: % of youth who met with a case manager within 3 days of entrance	99%	100%	100%	100%	100%	94%
▲ Target	90%	90%	90%	90%	90%	90%

Some emergency shelters provide services onsite, while other programs refer guests to another service provider for case management support. 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. Most households were connected to a case manager within 3 days (76%).

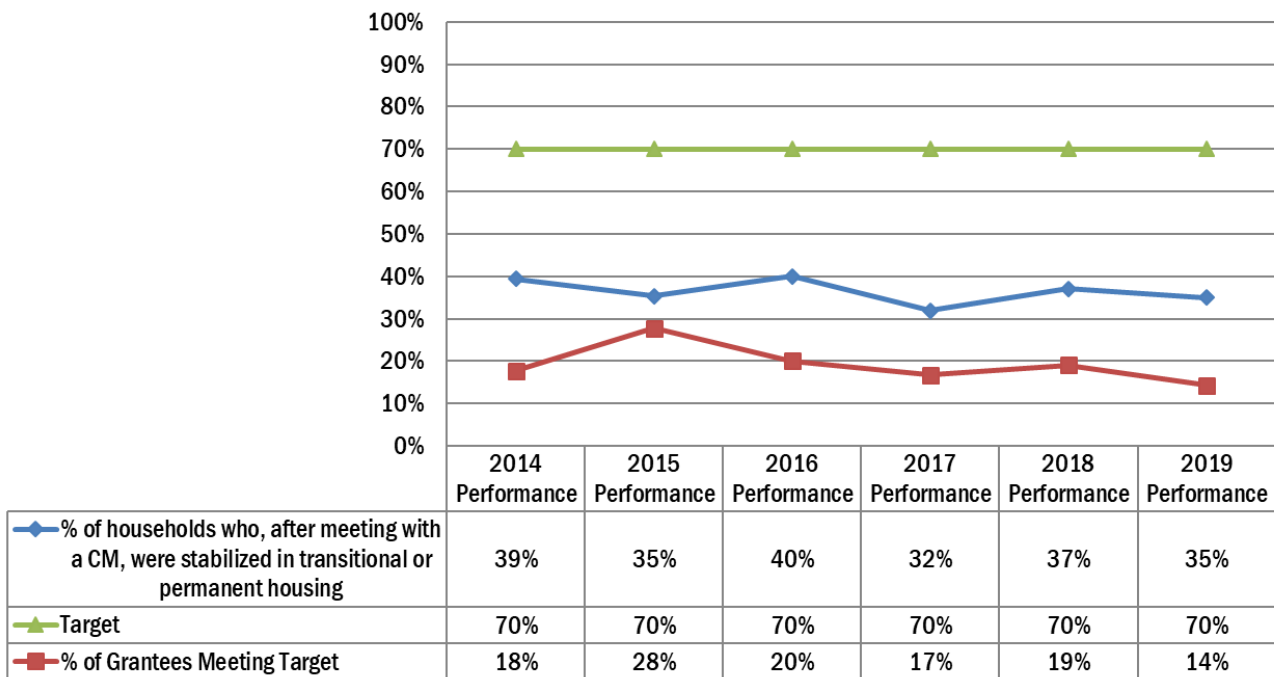
Housing Opportunity Program Performance: Case Management for Homeless Households (HH), Income



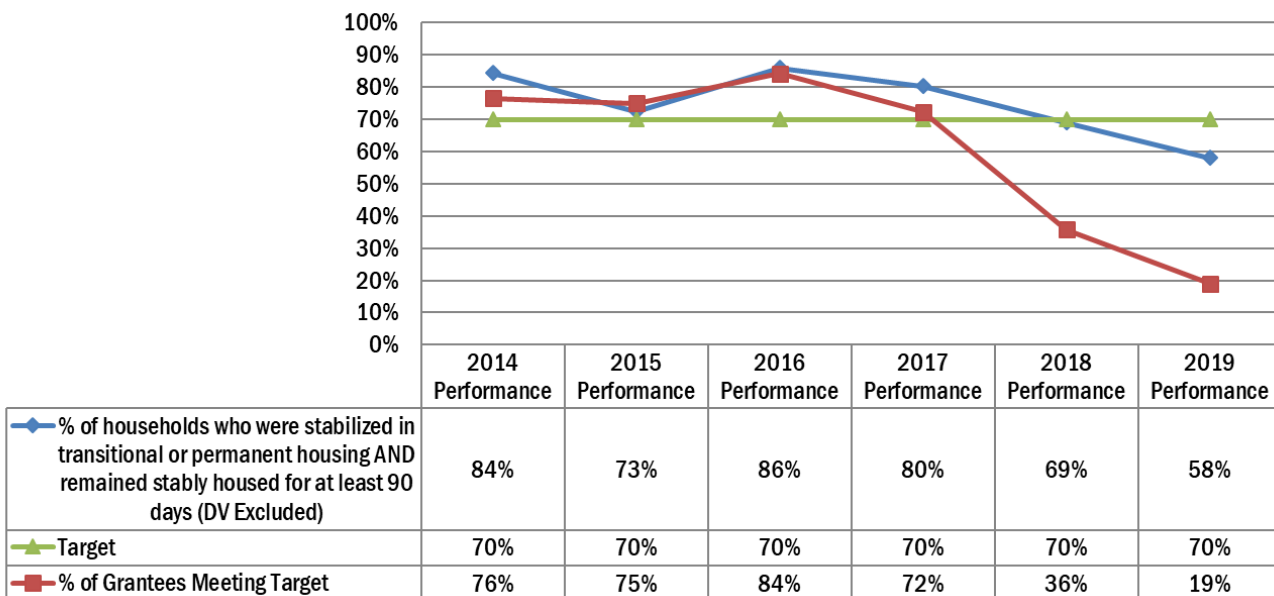
	2014 Performance	2015 Performance	2016 Performance	2017 Performance	2018 Performance	2019 Performance
◆ % of HH who - within 90 days of case management - have at least 1 adult who has found employment OR enrolled in education or training OR qualified for income benefits (e.g., TANF, SSI, GA)	70%	59%	56%	39%	53%	56%
▲ Target	70%	70%	70%	70%	70%	70%
■ % of Grantees Meeting Target	41%	39%	40%	22%	36%	29%

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 increased slightly this year, but remains below the program goal. OEO will continue focus additional training and technical assistance in the next few years on improving connections between homeless shelter/service providers with employment training and support resources and strengthening referrals to mainstream case management resources to leverage additional capacity. The coordinated entry process, which connects clients to housing help through a uniform assessment process, is now active in every area of the state and includes screening for employment and income. Anecdotally, grantees report that most clients already are connected to benefits and/or are employed, and that increasing income within 90 days is very challenging.

Housing Opportunity Program Performance: Case Management for Homeless Households (HH), Housing



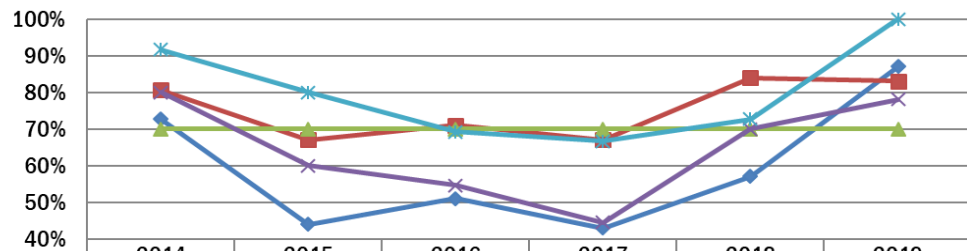
Housing Opportunity Program Performance: Case Management for Homeless Households (HH), Housing Stability



In 2019, 58% of households who were stabilized in housing continued to be stably housed for at least 90 days. There was a marked decrease in the percentage of grantees able to meet the target of (70%). Expansion of warming shelters in the past few years accounts for some of the decline seen in both charts. Warming shelters are a critical component of the shelter continuum in many communities, offering a safe, warm place for households to stay. By design, warming

shelters seek to engage those who may be reluctant to engage in services due to life experience, substance use or mental health challenges. Some of the decline in the above outcomes likely reflects system-wide effort to make services and shelter more accessible to all in need.

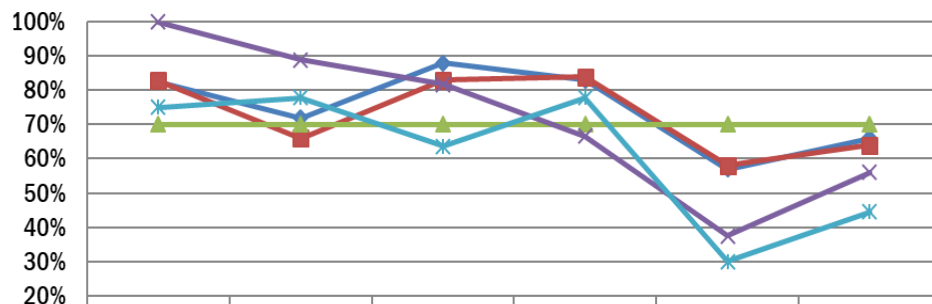
Housing Opportunity Program Performance: Homelessness Prevention & Rapid Re-Housing



	2014 Performance	2015 Performance	2016 Performance	2017 Performance	2018 Performance	2019 Performance
◆ % of homeless households served who were re-housed.	73%	44%	51%	43%	57%	87%
■ % of households at-risk of homelessness who were stabilized or rehoused	81%	67%	71%	67%	84%	83%
▲ Target	70%	70%	70%	70%	70%	70%
✕ % of Rapid Rehousing Grantees Meeting Target	80%	60%	55%	44%	70%	78%
✕ % of Homelessness Prevention Grantees Meeting Target	92%	80%	69%	67%	73%	100%

Between 2013 and 2017, OEO reported a steady decline in the percentage of households able to be stabilized in permanent housing within 28 days of program entry. Based on analysis and feedback from stakeholders, OEO adjusted reporting on this measure for 2018. While the target to stabilize at least 70% of households within 28 days remains an important aspirational benchmark, HOP grantees also report on the percentage of all households who attained stable housing regardless of the 28-day goal. In SFY 2019, HOP grantees reported that nearly 85% of total households served by Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing were stabilized in permanent housing (a nearly 10% increase over the prior year). Outcomes reported here for SFY19 reflect households receiving both services and financial/rental assistance. Although not reflected above, the average length of time clients spent in the program prior to stabilization was 26 days, which meets the statewide target of 28 days.

Housing Opportunity Program Performance: Homelessness Prevention & Rapid Re-Housing - Housing Stability



	2014 Performance	2015 Performance	2016 Performance	2017 Performance	2018 Performance	2019 Performance
◆ % of homeless HH who remain in stable housing 90 days after assistance (rapid re-housing)	83%	72%	88%	83%	57%	66%
■ % of HH at-risk of homelessness who remain in stable housing 90 days after assistance (prevention)	83%	66%	83%	84%	58%	64%
▲ Target	70%	70%	70%	70%	70%	70%
✕ % of Rapid Re-Housing Grantees Meeting Target	100%	89%	82%	67%	38%	56%
✱ % of Homelessness Prevention Grantees Meeting Target	75%	78%	64%	78%	30%	44%

Housing stability outcomes for Rapid Re-Housing and Homelessness Prevention programs improved significantly after a sharp decline in 2018. The percentage of households remaining stable 90 days after receiving assistance increase nearly 10% to 66% for Rapid Re-Housing, and from 58% to 64% for Prevention. In both cases, the percentage of grantees meeting the performance target increased dramatically.

Full implementation of coordinated entry has helped to identify appropriate levels of assistance based on the household need. Additional training and support on best practices for post-lease support services has also boosted housing stability outcomes.

While it is difficult to draw broad conclusions about the efficacy of all homeless assistance programs from these performance measures, it is clear that some strategies are successful. Access to case management and supportive services is critical for households experiencing homelessness; however, financial assistance and services together through rapid re-housing demonstrates an effective combination of resources to help families achieve and maintain housing stability.