



# State of Working Vermont 2021

Essential work  
Unpaid work  
Looking for work  
Looking for workers  
Working from home  
Out of work  
Can't work  
Left the workforce  
Joined the workforce  
Working multiple jobs



December 2021

# Introduction

In 2020 and 2021 the COVID-19 pandemic changed work. Parents and caregivers, mothers especially, racked up hours of unpaid labor caring for kids and overseeing schoolwork while holding down jobs. Essential workers went out to work, patched together child care, and worried about bringing illness home. These frontline workers were newly visible and respected—low-paid grocery clerks alongside higher-status health care professionals.

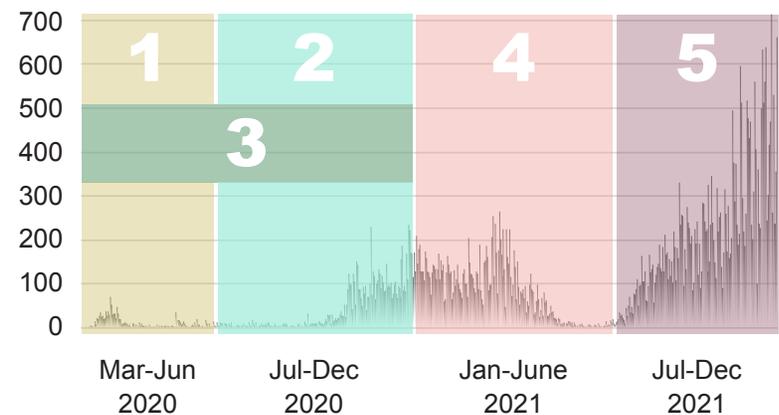
In March 2020, when the government declared a state of emergency and Vermont shuttered nearly all public spaces, 80,000 Vermonters were suddenly unemployed, many without income. Later, some returned to jobs and offices, but others left the labor force for good.

The slowdown gave many people time to reorder their priorities and recalibrate the balance among work, family, and other pursuits. And a labor shortage strengthened workers' position to demand better pay and working conditions. Nationally, public support for unions grew. If the power shift is sustained, it will be one good outcome of the pandemic.

The pandemic illuminated problems Vermont already faced: policy gaps that leave families struggling to pay rent and other bills or systemic health inequities, from authorities' neglect of language differences to the physical effects of generational trauma, that render Vermont's Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) more vulnerable to illness and death. But the economic crisis caused by the health crisis, and the government's robust response to it, also offered lessons that, if heeded, can improve Vermonters' lives during both normal times and emergencies.

## Vermont daily COVID cases and pandemic phases

Mar 19, 2020 - Dec 15, 2021



Data source: Vermont Center for Geographic Information  
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*To make sense of the pandemic so far, this report covers Mar. 19, 2020 through the end of 2021. It is divided into five phases, marked by major developments in the disease and the economy, in federal and state government responses, in medical advances, and in Vermonters' work and family lives.*

**☀ People do better, materially and psychologically, when they have enough money—and so does the economy.** Individual payments, supplementary unemployment benefits, and rent and food aid helped people weather joblessness. This aid also provided them income to pay down debt, make needed investments, and attend to their families' wellbeing. Government loans to businesses allowed them to keep employees on payroll. Along with individual government aid those paychecks allowed Vermonters to stay home—and keep spending. In the end, the blow to people and the economy was significantly softened.

**☀ When crisis hits, BIPOC and women get hit the hardest—but policy can change that.** Systemic racial inequities showed up in disproportionately high rates of illness and low rates of vaccination among BIPOC Vermonters. But good data and midstream policy adjustments helped reverse this trend. Increased family responsibilities and gender-disparate working conditions contributed to more women than men losing jobs during the pandemic. The data are not all in, but one thing is clear: Universal health care, livable wages, affordable child care, and paid family leave would improve the lives of all workers and their families.

**☀ When government springs into action it can meet people's needs.** Many Vermonters unemployed by the pandemic had never been jobless. Not just the vulnerable but also healthy young people succumbed to COVID. Middle-income families struggled to find childcare. Those who'd always gotten by faced hunger. State benefits and services must be consistently funded even when the need is less visible than in a pandemic.

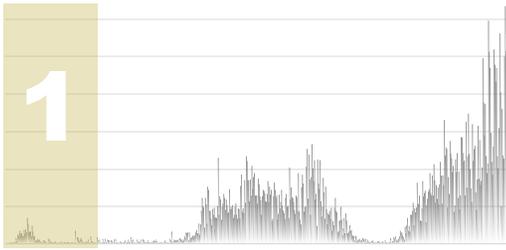
We have witnessed the most comprehensive, aggressive government response to a crisis since World War II. It wasn't perfect, but the systems delivered testing, care, and vaccines swiftly and effectively. The pandemic is not over. But so far, government has prevented the worst and in some ways even changed lives for the better.

**About the data.** *State of Working Vermont typically relies on data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey. But in 2020 health concerns prevented Census takers from going door to door. As a result, the usual statistics are not available. At the same time, the government kept close track of health trends by race, age, and geography, as well as changes in work and spending. We've used both traditional and pandemic-specific data, as well as other sources of information, including budget data and alternative labor force measures.*

## People do better when they have enough money—and so does the economy

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## March-June 2020

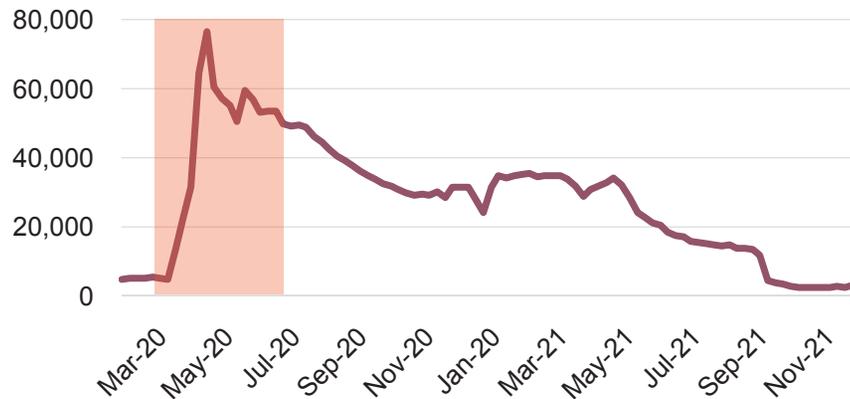
### State of emergency, rapid government response, dire revenue forecast

On March 13, 2020 President Trump declares a national emergency because of the COVID pandemic. Governor Scott follows suit, declaring a state of emergency in Vermont under [Executive Order 01-20](#). The order immediately shuts down visitation to nursing homes and congregate settings, prohibits nonessential travel, and prepares state agencies to go virtual. Closures that follow affect all Vermonters, including over 100,000 children and their families.

**Unemployment.** Almost immediately, 80,000 Vermonters—more than quadruple the number at the worst point of the Great Recession—are out of work.

### Jobless claims spike in spring 2020

Total continued unemployment claims, Feb 2020-Nov 2021



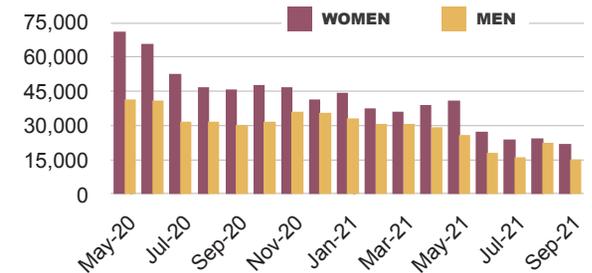
Source: Economic Policy Institute analysis of U.S. Department of Labor Data  
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**On the job, at home.** While many close-contact businesses close and suspend employees at the beginning of the pandemic, more than 110,000 Vermonters—two-thirds of them women—are working remotely.

• **March 13 - 25, 2020. Shutdown begins.** To keep Vermonters safe, the administration closes schools and most child care, suspends nonessential health care and businesses, and encourages workers to telecommute.

### More Vermonters—mostly women—work remotely during initial lockdown

Number working remotely for pay, by sex, May 2020-Sep 2021



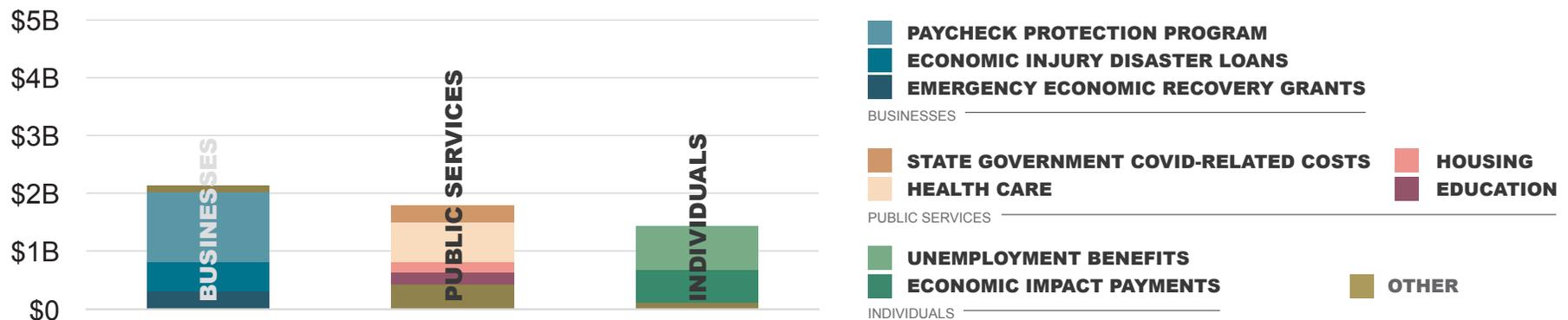
Data source: IPUMS-CPS, University of Minnesota, [www.ipums.org](http://www.ipums.org), 2020, 2021 basic monthly data  
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• **March 27, 2020. President Trump signs the CARES Act**, the first round of federal pandemic aid.

The CARES Act [expands unemployment benefits](#) to workers not typically covered, extends eligibility by 13 weeks, and includes \$600 a week in supplemental benefits through the end of July. And it provides direct stimulus payments of \$1,200 per qualifying adult and \$500 per child. The CARES Act also includes significant funding for public services including health care. And the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) provides forgivable loans to businesses, designed to keep workers on payroll even if those businesses need to close temporarily. The law initiates a housing eviction moratorium, among other provisions.

## Vermont receives \$5.4 billion in first round of federal aid

Pandemic relief allocated from CARES Act, March 2020

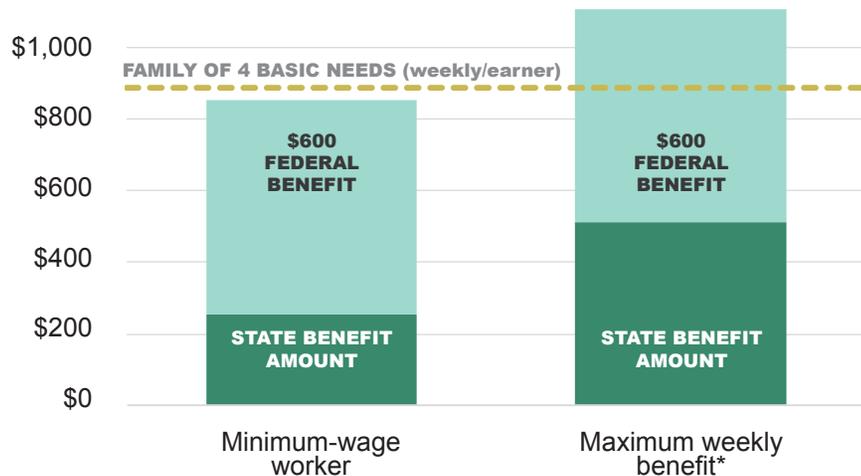


Data sources: Internal Revenue Service, Joint Fiscal Office, U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Small Business Administration, Vermont Department for Children and Families, Vermont Emergency Management  
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**Boosted benefits.** Federal supplemental unemployment support of \$600 per week more than triples benefits for minimum-wage workers and doubles benefits for average-wage workers. At peak, 76,000 Vermonters qualify for traditional unemployment, and an additional 11,000 workers (mostly self-employed) get benefits under expanded access provisions. In addition to unemployment aid, this round of aid provides 90 percent of Vermonters with stimulus payments, totaling over \$570 million, and more than 12,000 businesses get \$1.2 billion in forgivable PPP loans. The goal is to keep as many people home as possible to limit the spread of COVID.

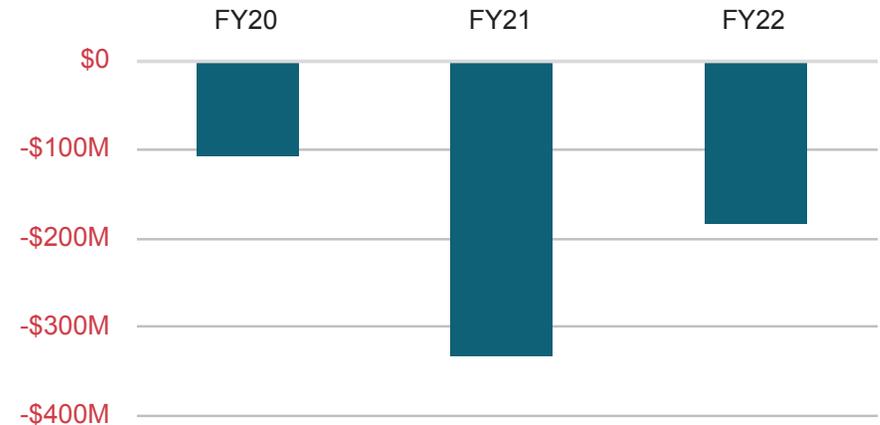
**• June 8, 2020. Vermont projects big revenue drop.**  
The Joint Fiscal Office warns that revenues for fiscal years 2020-22 could be as much as 8 percent lower than the January forecast. The official August forecast affirms the warning, estimating a combined 9 percent drop for fiscal 2021 and 2022.

**Temporary unemployment support meets basic needs** Estimated weekly unemployment benefits for selected full-time workers, Mar-Jul 2020, cost of basic needs for a family of 4, 2020

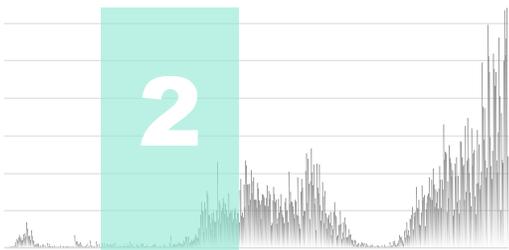


\*Paid to workers earning Vermont's average weekly wage or higher  
Data sources: Vermont Department of Labor, Joint Fiscal Office  
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**June 2020: State projects \$621 million less revenue over 3 years**  
Projected revenue loss, by fiscal year, June 2020



Data source: Joint Fiscal Office  
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## July-December 2020

### Gradual reopening, health care inequities, vaccines

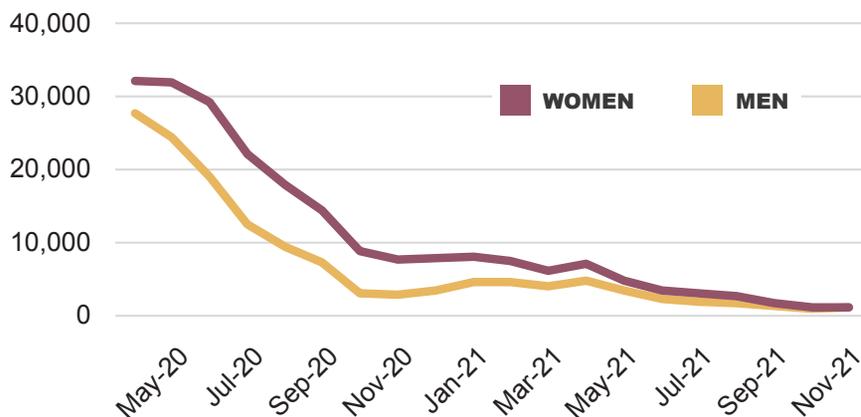
*Businesses begin reopening over the summer, many at reduced capacity and with significant new public health practices: social distancing, hand-washing, minimal interaction between workers and the public. Child care providers and summer camps either close or operate at reduced capacity, leaving kids home longer. As the winter holidays approach, Vermont enters its strictest lockdown yet. Cases stay high, averaging over 100 per day, but the newly released vaccine lifts spirits.*

**The she-cession.** Throughout 2020, women’s monthly claims for regular unemployment outnumber men’s. Unlike the Great Recession, when more men were unemployed because sectors where they dominate lost the most jobs, the pandemic has put more women out of work, and not because they’re overrepresented in the hardest-hit sectors.

[National data suggest](#) that women are bearing the brunt of kids being home. While federal and state aid helps keep Vermont child care providers afloat, school-age children are learning remotely for much of the 2020-21 academic year.

### In 2020, more women than men need unemployment checks

Regular unemployment claims, by month and sex, Apr 2020-Nov 2021



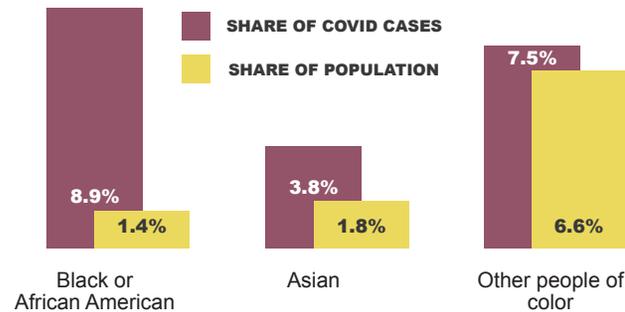
Data source: U.S. Department of Labor  
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- **July 31, 2020. U.S. ends weekly unemployment supplements of \$600.** In total Vermonters have received more than \$590 million from these supplements, but 46,000 workers are still relying on jobless benefits.
- **Sept. 8, 2020. A new pandemic school year begins for 87,000 children.** While some districts are fully remote or fully in person, most districts alternate between in-person and remote-learning days to maintain social distancing. But new cases frequently cancel in-person classes.

**Racial inequities.** In the first six months of the pandemic, BIPOC Vermonters endure more than their share of COVID cases. Similar national trends suggest they are more likely to be essential workers, live in more densely populated areas or crowded housing, and have more limited access to health care.

### Early on, BIPOC Vermonters contract COVID disproportionately

Cases and population by selected races, Mar-Oct 2020



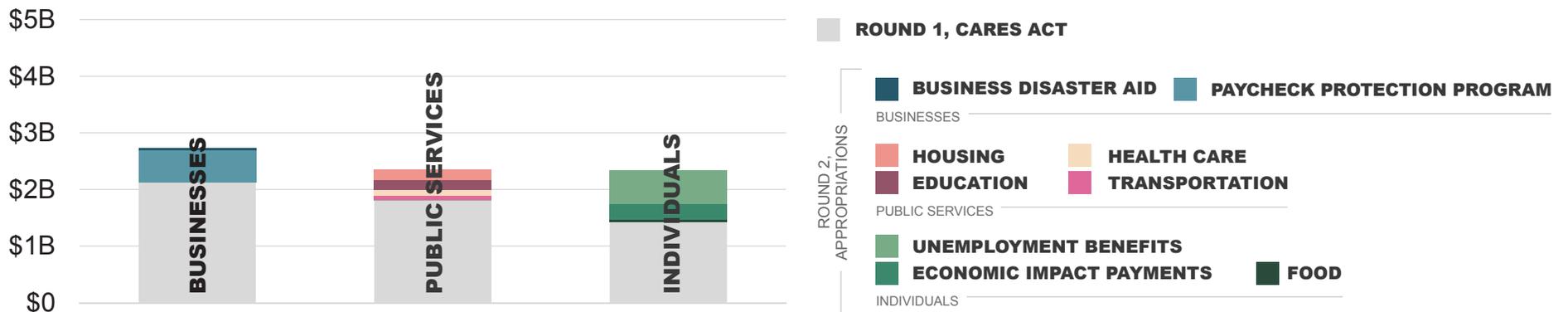
Data sources: Vermont Department of Health, U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Decennial Population  
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**Federal aid, round 2.** Appropriations include more funding for forgivable PPP loans, another round of individual stimulus payments, \$300-a-week supplemental unemployment checks through March 14, 2021, and continuation of the unemployment insurance eligibility expansion and the eviction moratorium.

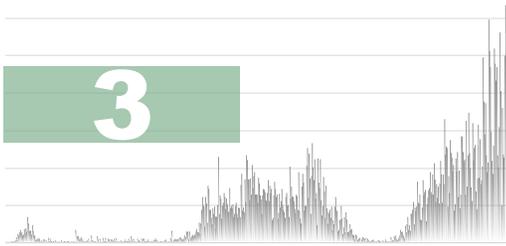
- Nov. 11, 2020. Post-Halloween, daily case counts exceed 100 for the first time.
- Nov. 13, 2020. Governor bans multi-household gatherings.
- Dec. 15, 2020. University of Vermont nurse receives state's first COVID vaccination.
- Dec. 27, 2020. Federal appropriations act includes \$2.1 billion in new COVID relief for Vermont.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> round of federal relief puts Vermont's total at \$7.4 billion

Pandemic relief allocated from federal legislation, December 2020



Data sources: Internal Revenue Service, Joint Fiscal Office, U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Small Business Administration, Vermont Department for Children and Families, Vermont Emergency Management  
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## March-December 2020 Yearend overview: Mixed signs

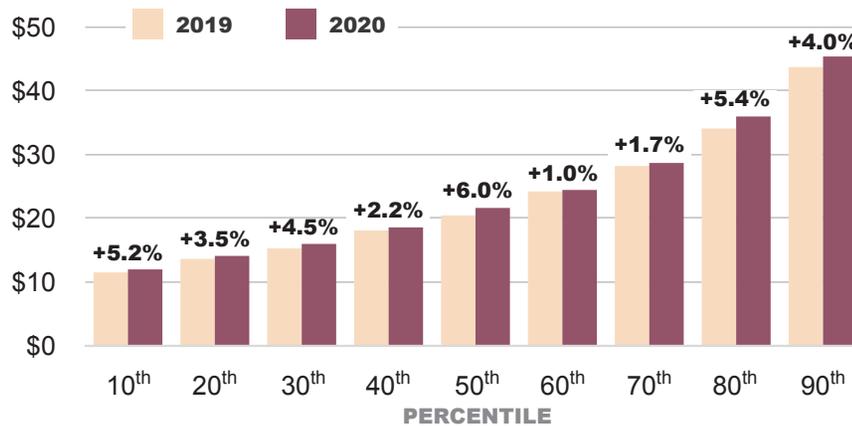
*The first 10 months of the pandemic end with some hope and a lot of unknowns.*

*Government aid makes a difference in family economic security. But economic uncertainty and fluctuations show up in the yearend data too, producing some paradoxical results. The state also has begun to allocate \$1.25 billion in Coronavirus Relief Funds, primarily for health care, businesses, education, housing, and food.*

**Wages.** At all levels those who are able to keep working see some wage growth in 2020. Part of the rise appears to be the result of workers being paid more, but the [loss of low-wage jobs](#) also pushes up the average and percentile wages. Vermont's wages are still low in the region and about 15 percent below the national average.

### Real wages grow for those who can work

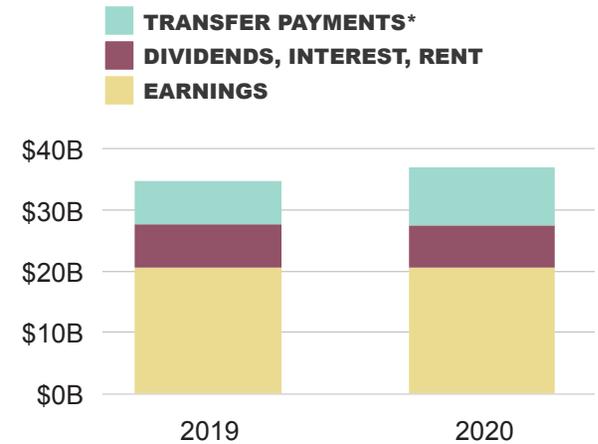
Hourly wages by percentile, adjusted for inflation, 2019 and 2020



Data source: Economic Policy Institute analysis of Current Population Survey  
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### Government support boosts personal income

Major components of Vermont total personal income, 2019 and 2020

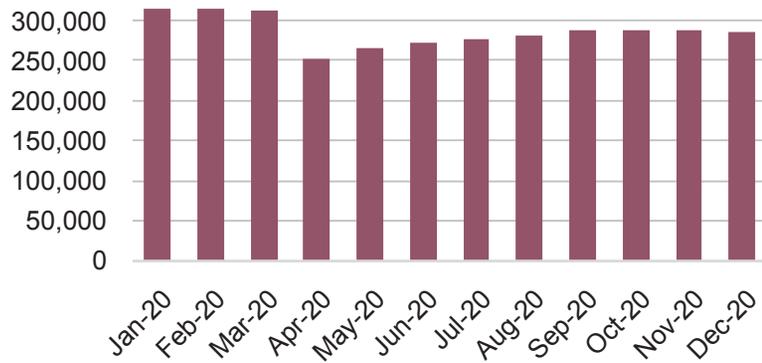


\*Includes supplemental unemployment and stimulus checks  
Data source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis  
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**Income.** Stimulus payments and supplemental unemployment benefits (government transfer payments) increase total personal income.

## At the end of 2020, jobs are halfway back

Total nonfarm jobs, by month, seasonally adjusted, 2020



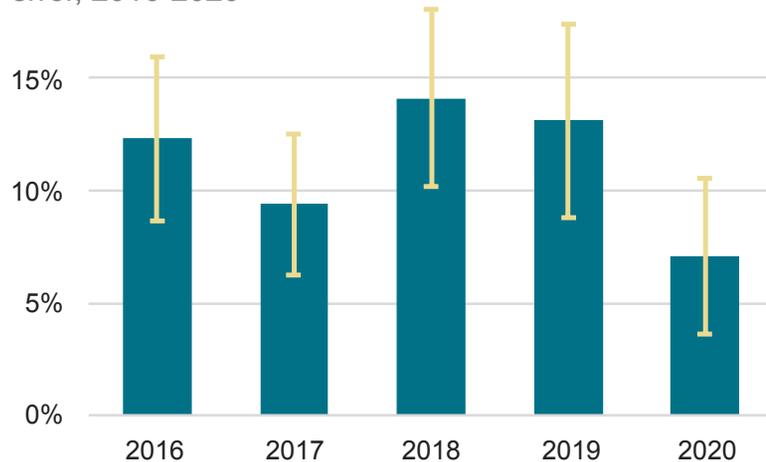
Data source: Vermont Department of Labor  
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**Jobs.** Hiring is steady over the second half of 2020, but large job losses in the spring are not recovered, and 2020 ends with 26,000 fewer jobs.

**Child poverty.** Thanks to pandemic aid to their parents and caregivers, fewer Vermont children are living in poverty.

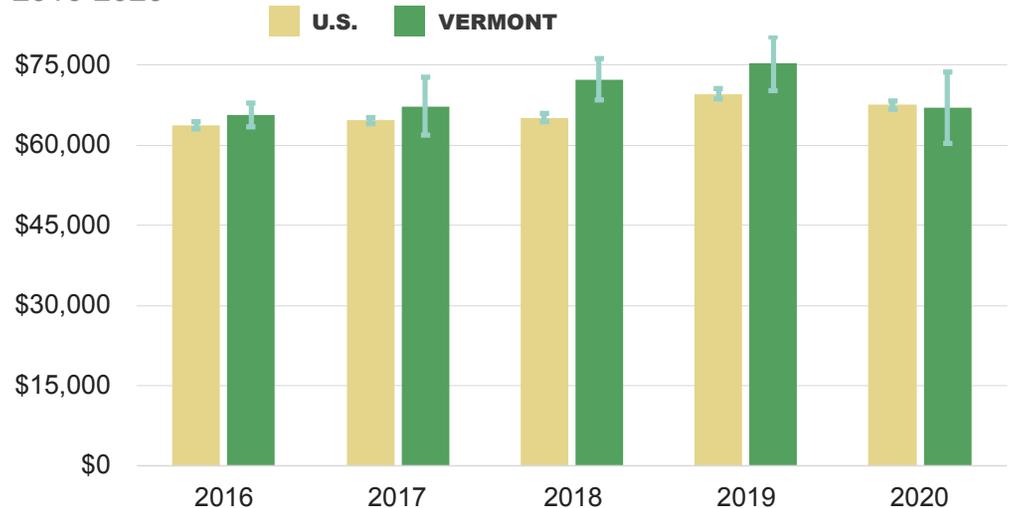
**Median household income.** In spite of the brighter signs, income for a typical Vermont household falls in 2020, probably because nearly 25,000 Vermonters remain out of work and continue to lose income.

**Child poverty drops** Share of Vermont children below the federal poverty level, with margins of error, 2016-2020



Data source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 1-yr estimates  
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**...but Vermont real median income falls** Vermont inflation-adjusted median household income with margins of error, 2016-2020



Data source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 1-yr estimates  
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**Consumption.** Spending patterns change along with Vermonters' altered lifestyles. But most cut back, and total consumption falls by 5 percent. That contributes to a 2 percent drop in Gross State Product.

**Supplemental unemployment returns.** The second round of federal aid includes \$300 per week in supplemental unemployment benefits.

### During COVID, Vermonters spend more and less

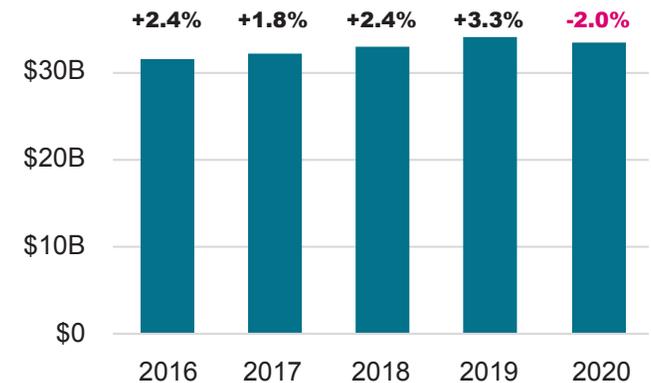
Change in consumer spending, selected categories, 2019-2020



Data source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis  
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### Economic output takes a hit

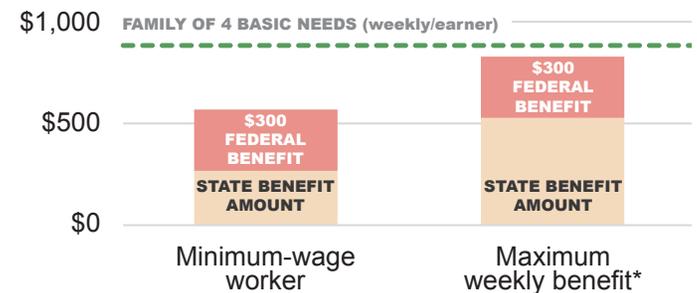
Vermont Gross State Product (GSP) with annual change, 2016-2020



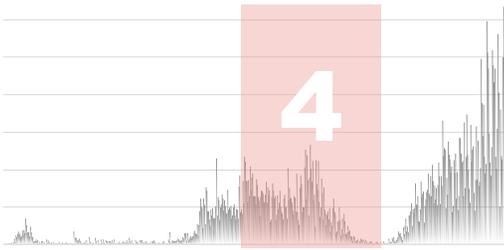
Data source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis  
©2021 Public Assets Institute

### Unemployment benefit plus \$300 leaves some families short

Estimated weekly unemployment benefits for selected full-time workers, Dec 2020-Sep 2021, cost of basic needs for a family of 4, 2020



\*Paid to workers earning Vermont's average weekly wage or higher  
Data sources: Vermont Department of Labor, Joint Fiscal Office  
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## January-June 2021 Vaccines for all, funds for towns and housing

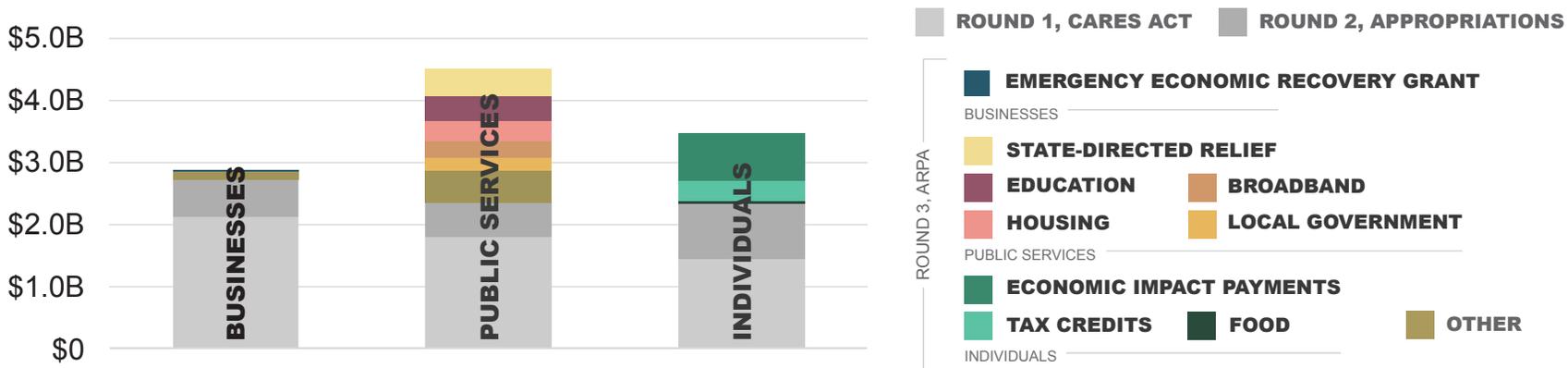
While COVID vaccination begins in Vermont in December, the initial focus is on high-risk populations: older Vermonters, those in congregate settings, and health care workers. Over the spring, Vermont opens vaccination access by age band. By June, Vermont becomes the most vaccinated state in the country.

- **Jan. 25, 2021. Vermont offers vaccinations to all residents over 75**, and expands access by age band through the spring.

- **March 11, 2021. President Biden signs the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)**, sending an additional \$3.5 billion to Vermont.

## With ARPA, Vermont totals \$10.9 billion from the feds

Pandemic relief allocated from federal legislation, March 2021



Data sources: Institute for Taxation and Economic Policy, Internal Revenue Service, Joint Fiscal Office, U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Small Business Administration, U.S. Department of the Treasury, Vermont Department for Children and Families, Vermont Emergency Management

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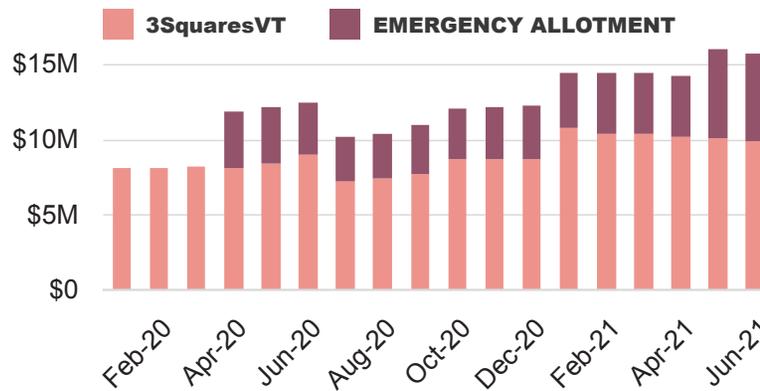
**Federal assistance, round 3.** [The American Rescue Plan Act](#) includes additional individual stimulus payments, expands the Child Tax Credit and makes it fully refundable, extends \$300 supplemental unemployment benefits to Sept. 6, 2021, and provides funding for Vermont municipalities. ARPA increases Vermont’s total federal relief for housing to nearly \$700 million. More than half goes to rental and mortgage assistance to prevent evictions and foreclosures; 20 percent to housing the homeless; and the remainder to permanent housing construction. Over 9,000 Vermont households get rental assistance, and about 900 use mortgage assistance.

**Food security.** With the end of the school year, increased food aid remains accessible and available. Nearly 70,000 Vermonters are getting 3SquaresVT each month (under emergency rules, all receive the maximum benefit), and thousands are also taking advantage of other programs including emergency food distribution, universal school meals, Meals on Wheels, pandemic-EBT cards, Farmers to Families food boxes, and Everybody Eats.

**Persistent vaccination inequities.** As of mid-May, vaccination rates for Black, Indigenous, and other Vermonters of color still lag behind that of white Vermonters.

## Emergency food aid increases total monthly food benefits by millions

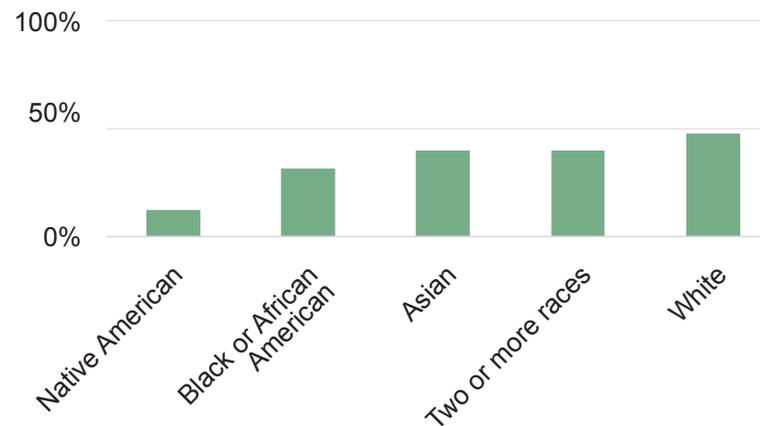
Total monthly 3SquaresVT benefits, 2020-2021



Data source: Vermont Department for Children and Families ©2021 Public Assets Institute

## White Vermonters have the highest vaccination rates

Residents 16 and older who have been vaccinated, by race, through May 15, 2021



Data sources: Vermont Center for Geographic Information, Vermont Department of Health ©2021 Public Assets Institute

• **April 1, 2021. Governor opens vaccine access to BIPOC Vermonters** over 18 because of the [disparity in vaccination rates](#) and the increased risk of hospitalization. At this point white Vermonters over age 50 are also eligible.

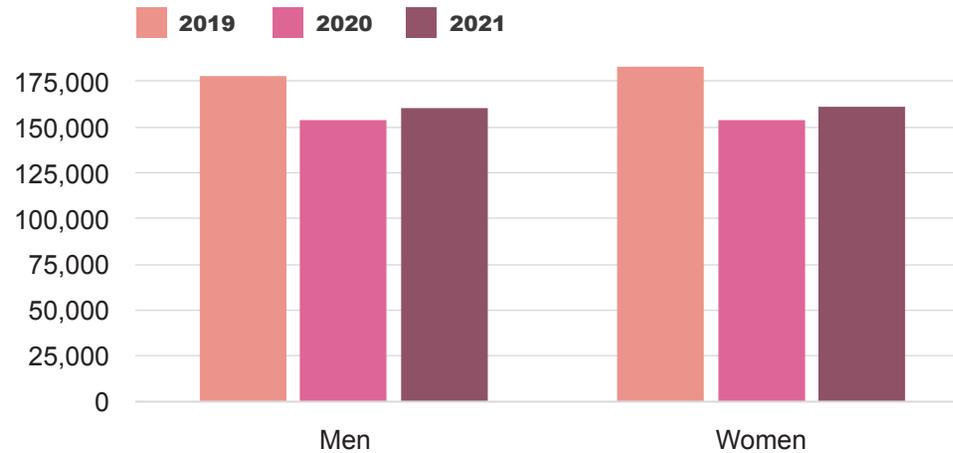
• **May 12, 2021. Vermont opens vaccines to children ages 12 and up**, a day after the Centers for Disease Control approves them.

• **June 15, 2021. COVID restrictions end.** Vermont hits target of vaccinating 80 percent of those eligible. Governor Scott ends state of emergency.

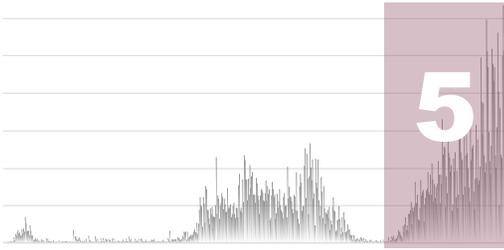
**Gender gap?** Men and women lose jobs during the pandemic at close to the same rates, but the decline for women is slightly greater. In the second quarter of 2021, April through June, the number of women on payrolls is 12 percent lower than in the same period in 2019; for men the drop is 10 percent. While still below pre-pandemic levels, both women and men are gaining ground. In the spring of 2020, when workers were feeling the brunt of COVID-19, the number of working women was down more than 16 percent from the previous spring; men's numbers had fallen more than 13 percent.

### Vermont women hold 22,000 fewer jobs than before pandemic, men 18,000

Jobs held, by sex, 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter (Apr-Jun), by year



Data source: Vermont Department of Labor  
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## July-December 2021

### Delta whiplash, narrowing race gap, revenue projections up

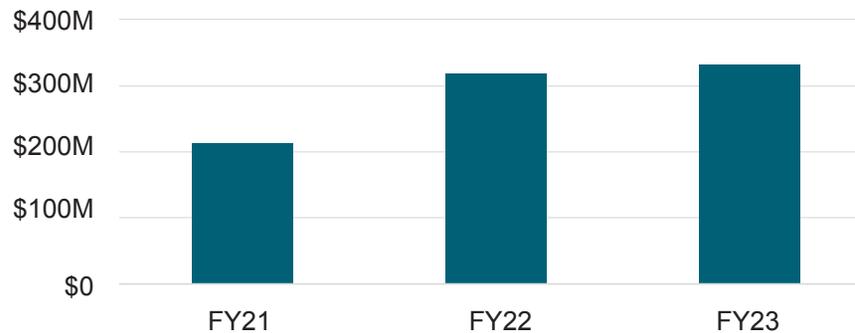
The summer brings optimism. With the end of restrictions and high vaccination rates, revenue projections are adjusted upward, [reflecting Vermonters' spending federal aid on basic needs](#) and visitors arriving from out of state. But soon the delta variant arrives. Even as the vaccine is made available to children ages 5 to 11, cases are hitting schools and other unvaccinated populations hardest. After Halloween and Thanksgiving, the highest daily case total surpasses 700, more than triple the worst day in 2020, and hospitalizations and deaths climb as winter arrives. Supplementary unemployment benefits end. The economic recovery stalls, the labor market remains chaotic, and the omicron variant surges. One positive note: Racial disparities in illness and vaccination rates diminish.

#### Buoying benefits.

Between the two rounds of supplementary benefits, Vermonters have received over \$880 million in extra unemployment compensation during the pandemic. For context, Vermonters earn wages of \$14 billion to \$15 billion total in a typical year.

#### July 2021: State 3-year revenue estimate is \$864 million higher than pre-pandemic

Projected revenue gain, by fiscal year, July 2021\*



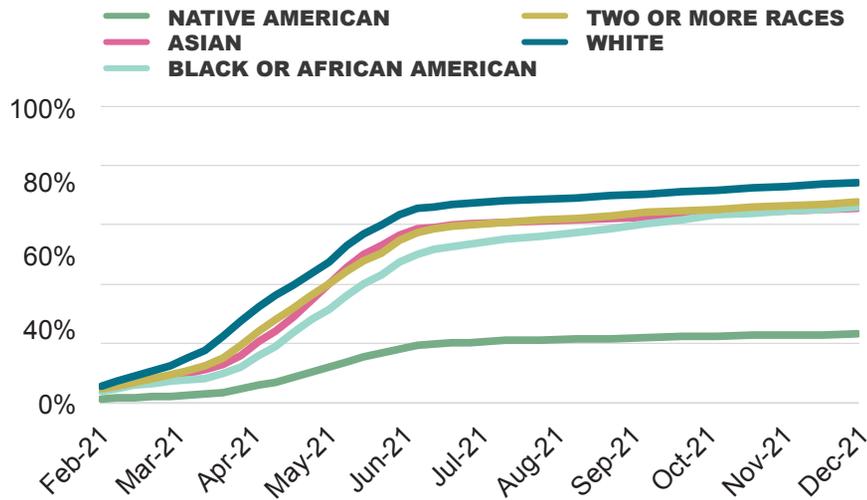
\*Compared with January 2020 forecast  
Data source: Joint Fiscal Office  
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- **July 30, 2021. Vermont ups its three-year revenue forecast 11 percent from pre-pandemic (Jan. 2020) estimate.**
- **Sept. 6, 2021. Supplementary federal unemployment benefits of \$300 weekly ends.**

• **Dec. 9, 2021. COVID cases set a record:** above 700 daily. Total COVID deaths hit 437, of which two-thirds are in 2021.

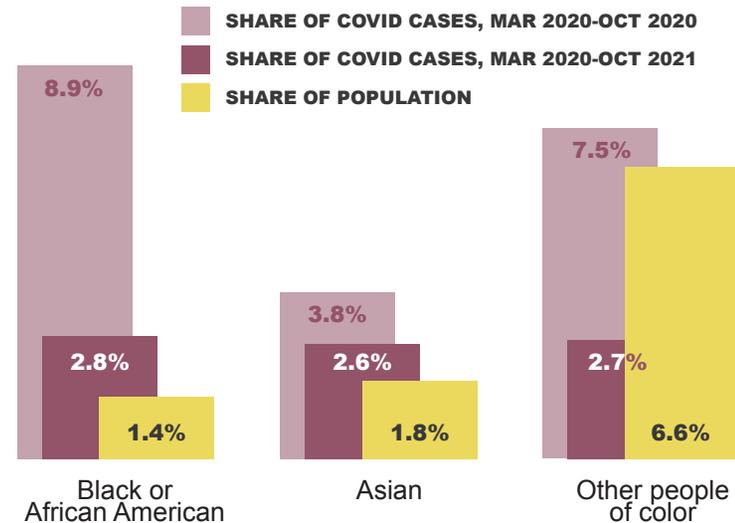
**Diminishing disparities.** The race gap, both for COVID cases and vaccination rates, narrows.

**Vaccination rates for Black and other Vermonters of color are rising** Percent of population 5 and older fully vaccinated, by race, 2021



Data sources: Vermont Center for Geographic Information, Vermont Department of Health ©2021 Public Assets Institute

**By fall 2021 BIPOC share of cases drops** Share of Vermont COVID cases and population by selected races, Mar 2020-Oct 2020 and Mar 2020-Oct 2021

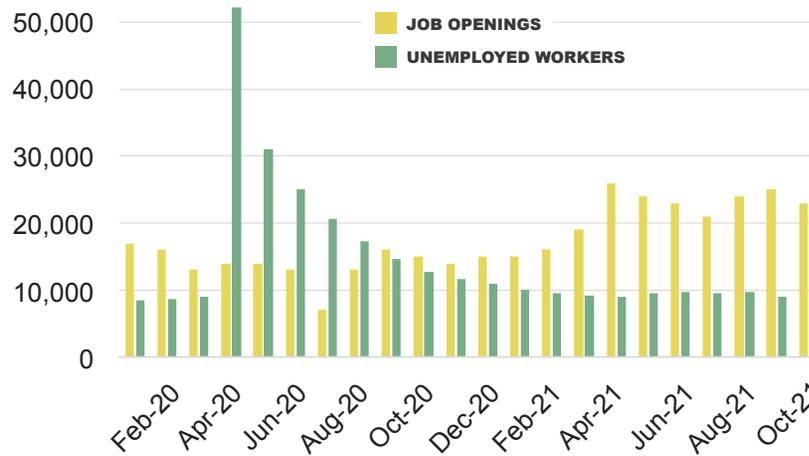


Data sources: Vermont Department of Health, U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Decennial Population ©2021 Public Assets Institute

**Jobs and labor mismatch.** At the end of 2020, there began to be more jobs available than workers looking. A year later, openings outstrip workers almost 3 to 1. The job openings data are not available by sector, but some of the sectors that lost the most jobs have not fully recovered. And nearly 25,000 Vermont workers have left the labor force altogether since the pandemic began, leaving a smaller pool for employers to hire from.

**Rising expectations.** [Workers are trading up.](#) Many aren't returning to the hospitality industry because of low pay, health risks, and confrontations with customers. Employers are responding with higher wages and better benefits—a gain for Vermont workers and their families.

**In 2021 job openings far outnumber available workers** Job openings and unemployed workers by month, seasonally adjusted, 2020-2021



Data sources: Vermont Department of Labor, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics ©2021 Public Assets Institute

**Job recovery slows after July 2021**

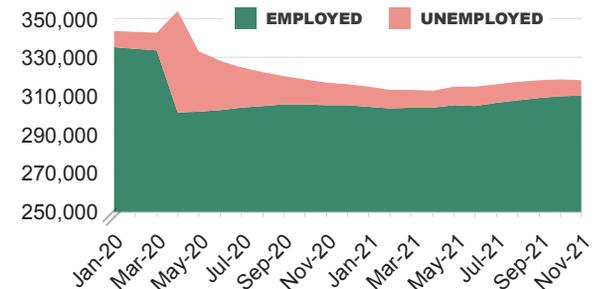
Total nonfarm jobs, seasonally adjusted, Jan 2020-Nov 2021



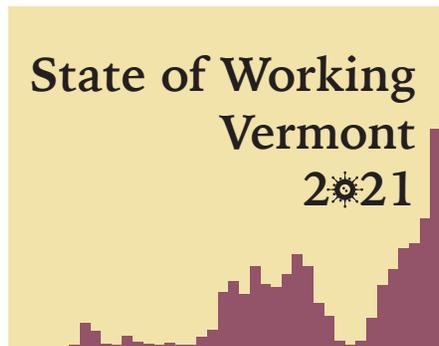
Data source: Vermont Department of Labor ©2021 Public Assets Institute

**The labor force is down 25,000 workers from January 2020**

Employed and unemployed Vermonters, by month, Jan 2020-Nov 2021, seasonally adjusted



Data source: Vermont Department of Labor ©2021 Public Assets Institute



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