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Agency of Human Services

To: State Partners
From: Commissioner Chris Winters and Deputy Commissioner Miranda Gray
Date: May 31, 2023
Subject: Pandemic Emergency Housing Ending

The Department for Children and Families is writing to share that, after three years, Vermont will be ending our Pandemic response to Emergency Housing over the course of the summer. Your community may feel the impact of this change and local officials may receive questions. This letter provides important information about the wind-down of this program and shares resources about where to go for additional support.

For Current Information Visit: <https://dcf.vermont.gov/pandemic-era-ga-program-2023>

The Wind-Down

The program wind-down will take place in three phases. First, on June 1, anyone who was housed due to the extended Adverse Weather Conditions Policy (AWC) will no longer be eligible for housing under the General Assistance AWC policy. Typically, the policy ends on March 15 each year; however, this year the Legislature extended this date to May 31. DCF expects approximately 690 households to exit the motels by June 1.

Next, on July 1, DCF expects approximately 45 additional households to exit the program. For an estimate by community visit: <https://dcf.vermont.gov/pandemic-era-ga-program-2023>. These households will predominately be those in the Pandemic-era extended eligibility categories not included in the GA Rules, namely those aged 60-64 years-old and pregnant individuals who are not in their third trimester of pregnancy.

Finally, eligibility is extended beyond July 1 for an additional 28 days for certain households and 84 days for other households (see Appendix A). Around the end of July, DCF expects approximately 475 households to have exhausted their 28-day maximum under the GA Emergency Housing rules and consequently no longer be eligible for the program. The remaining households, approximately 600, are anticipated to begin exiting the program by late-September, in accordance with the 84-day maximum under the Rules. In addition, during this period, the pre-pandemic eligibility rules for the GA program require participants to pay

30% of their income toward housing. This means the exact exit date will vary among households. Details regarding this population are included in Appendix A.

After this final extension of eligibility expires, eligibility for emergency housing will be determined in accordance with the General Assistance Rules:

<https://outside.vermont.gov/dept/DCF/Shared%20Documents/ESD/Rules/2600-GA.pdf>

Work To Date and Future Plans

Teams of AHS staff have been screening and providing comprehensive case management support for households in the Pandemic Emergency Housing Program since October 2022. As we have done throughout the pandemic and before, the Agency of Human Services continues to work with community partners to help households plan their next steps following the wind-down of the program. Some of those plans could include:

- obtaining their own housing with or without a voucher to help pay a portion of the rent;
- transitioning to specialized service-supported housing;
- remaining at motels and self-paying;
- moving in with family or friends; or
- transferring to shelters other than the hotel and motel program, or camping.

In addition, AHS Field Services Directors are organizing local communities to strategize, and leadership from AHS are meeting with municipalities to discuss their plans and how the State might be able to support their efforts. Local solutions could involve congregate shelter sites, as well as supporting enhancements in local programming to increase shelter beds and day station capacity. We anticipate making such options available over the summer.

Expectations

Some individuals may refuse to leave their hotel room at the end of this program. It is important to note that the individuals housed under this program are not tenants of rental units but are hotel guests. They have a right to their room as a paying guest. They do not have rights under eviction or similar proceedings, and their ability to stay in their room is based on their agreement with the hotel owner, not based on their relationship with the State.

Additionally, individuals who have followed the Pandemic Emergency Housing Program's guidelines may be due repayment of a security deposit when they leave their unit, generally \$3300. The hotel/motel may decrease this repayment based on damages to the room but must provide an itemized list of costs and damages if they are withholding or reducing the deposit.

We will make every effort to help support households with planning and exiting to safe housing situations. However, Vermont is facing unprecedented limitations in housing units,

both in price and availability. We recognize that many households exiting the program will be facing very difficult situations. Consequently, emotions could run high with fear, anxiety, and anger. We know a significant number of households require medical care and have conditions that may be exacerbated by becoming unhoused. Many of you have partnered with us throughout the pandemic to provide services to these households, and with this awareness, we are reaching out to ensure you are aware of these dates and changes in eligibility (Appendix A) which will lead to increased pressures on our systems of care.

Resources

DCF is committed to continuing the work of housing Vermonters, and we are here to provide whatever support we can. We encourage you to reach out to AHS with questions or to help solve non-emergency challenges with households exiting the program. Contact local law enforcement in the event of an emergency.

- For general questions please contact the Economic Services Division main line 1-800-479-6151
- If you are working with someone who has specific complex health needs and need help making a plan, please contact your local field services director: <https://humanservices.vermont.gov/about-us/field-services>
- To reach the Economic Services Deputy Commissioner's office call 802-241-0637 or email AHS.DCFESDASU@vermont.gov
- To see weekly data updates and information for communities and municipalities visit <https://dcf.vermont.gov/pandemic-era-ga-program-2023>

Sincerely,



Chris Winters, DCF Commissioner



Miranda Gray, DCF Deputy Commissioner

Appendix A – DCF General Assistance Emergency Housing Eligibility

As of July 1, all motel programs other than the General Assistance Emergency Housing program, terminate. Consequently, households will need to be eligible under the existing rules in order to access the motel program. In addition to the categories below, households will have to exhaust all available resources and there will be a 30% income contribution. For example, a household who meets eligibility criteria and receives Social Security Disability Insurance benefits at \$900 per month would pay for two or three nights of housing before receiving the GA program benefit for an additional 28 or 84 nights of housing, regardless of how many nights of housing was paid for by DCF in the past 12 months.

GA Emergency Housing Eligibility after July 1, 2023

84-day limit in a rolling twelve-month period (Catastrophic Category)

- Fire, Flood, Natural Disaster
- Death of a spouse or minor child
- Court ordered or Constructive eviction
- Domestic Violence

28-day limit in a rolling twelve-month period (Vulnerable Category)

- 65 years of age or older
 - In receipt of SSI or SSDI
 - Family with a child 18 years of age or 19 years of age if still in school
 - In the third trimester of pregnancy
- OR**
- A household that has been assessed a total of 4 or more points according to the point system in GA rule 2652.3

In colder months, the Adverse Weather Policy expands eligibility, which serves more households for longer periods of time.