

# Johnson County Social Services General Assistance Program FY23 Annual Report

July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2023

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General Assistance (GA) is a program that provides short-term help to Johnson County residents in financial crisis and most generally at risk of homelessness. GA offers a safety net by assisting individuals and families in maintaining housing stability. Financial assistance is available for rent, utilities, prescriptions, food/provisions, and burial/cremation services for eligible applicants.

As per the Code of Iowa, Chapter 252.25, counties are required to provide General Assistance for poor persons in need. The code directs the Board of Supervisors in each county to establish general rules and eligibility requirements for the program.

## General Assistance Guidelines

On July 29, 2021, in response to the emergency housing assistance needs of households disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 health pandemic, the Board of Supervisors approved a broad expansion of the General Assistance Program. Federal pandemic relief funding was used to support the program expansion. The program changes included the following:

- Streamlined the program by combining the Short-term and One-time assistance options. Increased income-eligibility to 200% of federal poverty guidelines (FPG) and expanded assistance to three times in a 12-month period. Previously households earning less than 50% of the FPG were eligible for up to three months of assistance in a 12-month period and households earning between 50% -130% were eligible for one month of assistance during the same time-period.
- Eliminated the rent cap while maintaining a maximum monthly assistance cap. This allows recipients to use their entire assistance amount toward rent. Prior guidelines included up to \$200 for utilities, however many leases include utilities while charging a higher rent amount.
- Increased monthly assistance amount by \$150
- Expanded eligibility to those receiving federal and state benefits such as Family Investment Program (FIP), SSI (Supplemental Security Income) and unemployment.
- Eligibility extended to any Johnson County resident who meets program guidelines
- Added gas and pet food vouchers and supplies and physician approved equipment that aids in improving health outcomes.
- Increased income eligibility for the funeral assistance from 100% to 175% FPG and increased assistance amount. (approved in December 2021)
- Increased income eligibility from 50% to 100% of FPG for the Interim Assistance Reimbursement Program.

The General Assistance Program eligibility is determined by household income and other factors. A complete list of eligibility requirements is available on the Johnson County website at [www.johnsoncountyiowa.gov/GA](http://www.johnsoncountyiowa.gov/GA) or by contacting Johnson County Social Services.

The General Assistance Program utilizes the federal poverty guideline to determine financial eligibility. Households must have an income not to exceed 200% of the federal poverty guideline. Based on the 2023 federal poverty guidelines a single person household could earn up to-\$2,430/month, \$3,287/month for a two-person household, \$4,143 for a three -person household

and \$5,000 for a four- person household.

## Johnson County Profile

Johnson County is home to an estimated 154,748 residents or 61,301 households. The average household size is 2.4 persons. (2021 US Census data estimate) Youth under the age of 18 consist of 20% of the population and persons over 65 year constitute 13% of the population. 15.4% of residents live in poverty compared to 11.1% statewide. (American Community Survey Tables, US Census Bureau)

Johnson County consistently ranks as having the highest cost of living in the state of Iowa. In FY23, the Fair Market Rent for an efficiency apartment was \$810, \$922 for a one-bedroom, \$1,127 for a two- bedroom unit and \$1,602 for a three bedroom. The maximum monthly rent benefit available from the Johnson County General Assistance Program was \$700 for a one- person household, \$750 for 2 persons, \$800 three persons and \$850 for four or more person household. The 2023 estimated housing wage (wage needed to afford a two- bedroom home at the Fair Market Rent rent) was \$21.67/hour (*National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2023*).

## Services Provided

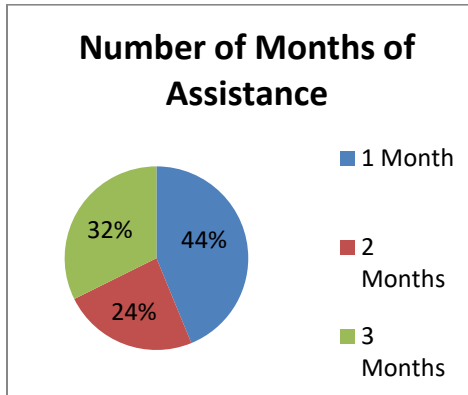
Households seeking assistance must submit an application for each month in which help is requested. For those seeking subsequent months of assistance, documentation of employment search is required unless medical verification supports the applicant’s inability to work. In FY23, the General Assistance Program approved 2,047 of the 2,345 applications received. Applications for assistance increased 292% from FY21 to FY23. The increase in applications can be attributed to expansion of program eligibility and the extension in the number of months a household can access assistance.

Providing information and referrals to other community resources is an important component of the General Assistance Program. In FY23, 3,248 referrals were provided to additional local resources.

**Table 1: Application Summary**

Year	General Assistance applications received	Number of households assisted	GA Applications Assisted (months of assistance provided)	Households assisted residing in Johnson County longer than 12 months	Households assisted residing in Johnson County less than 12 months
FY 23	2,345	1,062	2,047	854	208
FY 22	1,629	782	1,440	626	156
FY 21	598	327	417	235	92
FY 20	1003	536	782	392	144
FY 19	1125	604	915	409	193

**Chart 1: Months of Assistance**



44% of households accessing General Assistance received help only one time during the fiscal year. On average, households received 1.9 months of assistance, up from 1.5 months of assistance prior to the expansion. The average amount of assistance provided per application, excluding burials, was \$686, down \$5 per assist from last year.

**Table 2: Cases and funding approved by program**

Year	Short-Term Program	Funds allocated for Short -Term Program Assistance	One-Time Program	Funds allocated for One-Time Program Assistance	Interim Assistance Reimbursement	Funds allocated for Interim Assistance Program	Burials Assisted	Funds allocated for burials
FY 23	1,023	\$1,322,309	7	\$ 4,534	9	\$24,966	34	\$88,157
FY 22	713	\$864,331	25	\$13,070	5	\$8,084	28	\$74,860
FY 21	335	\$113,342	127	\$ 60,263	8	\$8,698	27	\$56,200
FY 20	467	\$219,024	278	\$132,106	14	\$5,579	23	\$49,975
FY 19	578	\$260,147	291	\$135,600	30	\$12,634	20	\$43,400

As noted in Table 2, and the two graphs below, the amount of assistance allocated and the number of households accessing General Assistance was down sharply in FY21 and increased significantly in FY22 and again in FY23. In FY21, many households benefitted from several pandemic relief programs including federal stimulus funds, expanded child tax credit and unemployment benefits and emergency rent assistance available through the Iowa Finance Authority. These programs either met household needs or made them over income and ineligible for General Assistance benefits. The spike in those seeking assistance through the General Assistance Program and the amount of funding allocated coincides with the expansion of the General Assistance guidelines, which went into effect in August 2021, and the elimination of other state and federal assistance programs.

The fall and winter tend to be the busiest months for the General Assistance Program. Spring generally brings a decline in program applicants as many households receive tax returns that include valuable poverty reduction credits such as the Earned Income Tax Credit and the Child Tax Credit.

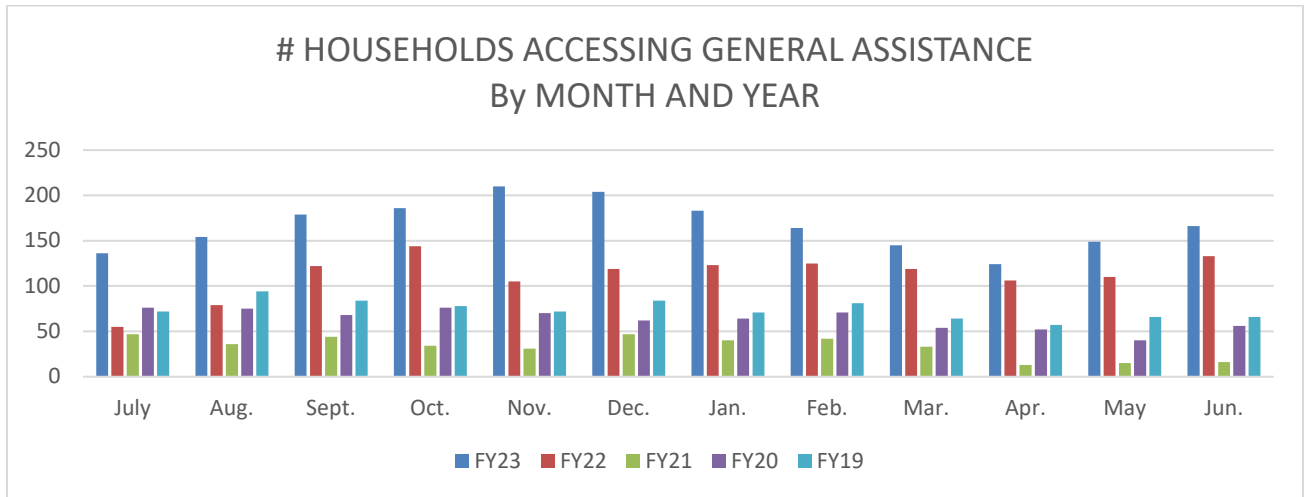
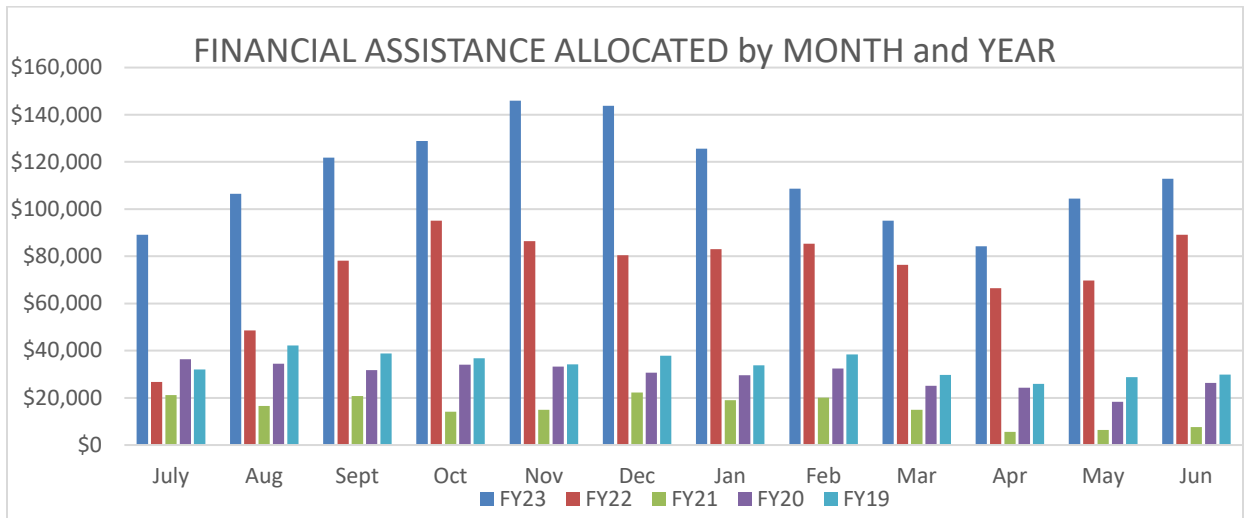


Table 3 provides a summary of funding allocated by type of assistance. Rent assistance accounted for 93% of expended funding. The amount of funding provided for funeral assistance was higher due to an increase the amount covered for services.

**Table 3: Financial Assistance Detail**

	Medical	Prescriptions	Rent	Groceries	Utilities	Funeral	Bus/Trans
FY 23 Assistance	\$0	\$214	\$1,352,568	\$1,698	\$6665	\$92,427	\$7,142
						Total: \$1,460,714	
FY 22 Assistance	\$0	\$112	\$862,260	\$1,601	\$11,888	\$67,495	\$6,517
						Total: \$949,873	
FY 21 Assistance	\$0	\$0	\$181,083	\$ 833	\$ 4,939	\$52,000	\$ 0
						Total: \$238,854	
FY 20 Assistance	\$99	\$0	\$339,635	\$2,463	\$14,052	\$53,875	\$3,196

						Total: \$413,320	
FY 19 Assistance	\$0	\$217	\$380,210	\$3,435	\$21,995	\$39,500	\$1,760
						Total: \$447,217	

*Funding amounts based on date service paid, not date services were authorized*

## Interim Assistance Reimbursement Program

The Interim Assistance Reimbursement Program (IAR) provides ongoing financial assistance for those applying for disability benefits through Supplemental Security Income (SSI). An eligible applicant may receive monthly assistance not to exceed the current General Assistance benefit per month for the duration of eligibility. Eligibility continues as long as the consumer is meeting program requirements and until a determination is made at the Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) phase. Eligibility for the IAR Program ends once denied at the ALJ stage. Upon approval of SSI benefits, Social Security Administration reimburses Johnson County up to the amount that the individual received in benefits from the IAR Program. The remainder of the SSI back pay is provided directly to the consumer.

**Table 4: Summary of IAR**

	Cases	Cases approved for SSI	Cases denied by SSI	IAR reimbursement received by County
<b>FY 23</b>	9	4	4	\$8,518
<b>FY 22</b>	5	2 (1 from prior year)	1	\$6,132
<b>FY 21</b>	8	2	2	\$1,750
<b>FY 20</b>	4	1	1	\$ 450
<b>FY 19</b>	4	3 (2 from prior year)	1	\$9,155

Cases documented as being denied SSI during one fiscal year may still be approved in future years. The cases reported have been denied at the Administrative Law Judge level. Many consumers continue to appeal beyond this stage. Should they have a favorable decision at a later stage the General Assistance Program is still reimbursed for support provided to the applicant even if they are no longer actively involved with the General Assistance Program.

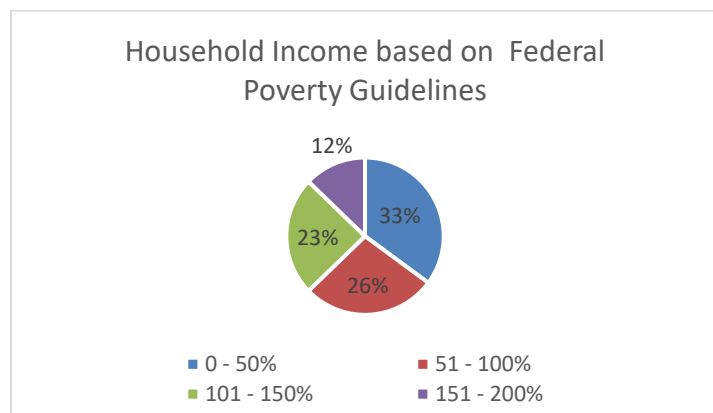
## General Assistance Demographics

In FY23, 1,062 households were approved for General Assistance. This represented a 36% increase over the previous fiscal year. Fifty percent were single-family households while 42% of households included children. There were a total of 1,028 children in households assisted by General Assistance, an average of 2.3 children per household. Applicants approved and able to work reported employment income on 76% of applications compared with 73% the prior year.

### Percent of cases by city of residence:

60%	Iowa City
25%	Coralville
11%	North Liberty
2%	Tiffin
2%	Other

## Income of General Assistance recipients based on the Federal Poverty Guidelines



**Table 5: Percent of cases by age of applicant**

	17-29 years	30-39 years	40-49 years	50-59 years	60 years and up
<b>FY 23</b>	23%	31%	19%	16%	11%
<b>FY 22</b>	27%	29%	22%	15%	8%
<b>FY 21</b>	28%	24%	22%	18%	8%
<b>FY 20</b>	28%	29%	22%	16%	5%
<b>FY 19</b>	29%	28%	24%	15%	5%

**Table 6: Percent of cases by race/ethnicity as reported by the applicant**

	African American /Black	Caucasian	Latino/ Hispanic	Other	Not Identified
<b>FY 23</b>	56%	33%	8%	1%	1%
<b>FY 22</b>	58%	29%	11%	1%	1%
<b>FY 21</b>	55%	35%	6%	2%	3%
<b>FY 20</b>	58%	32%	6%	2%	3%
<b>FY 19</b>	54%	36%	6%	1%	3%

## Outcomes

The General Assistance Program solicited consumer feedback through surveys that were distributed in October 2022. Individuals who were both approved and determined to be ineligible for assistance were invited to provide feedback. Anonymous surveys were returned from 93 program participants.

88% reported that without help from General Assistance they likely would have lost their housing (faced eviction)

78% reported that without help from General Assistance they likely would have had their utilities disconnected

96% reported that their phone calls were received in a friendly and timely manner

96% reported that they received an appointment in a timely manner

97% reported that they were greeted politely and respectfully by the receptionist  
100% reported that the General Assistance worker treated them with respect and courtesy  
100% reported that the General Assistance worker took the time to listen to them,  
understand their concerns and answer their questions  
96% reported that they were treated fairly by the General Assistance worker  
95% reported that the General Assistance worker provided referrals to other programs

Many survey respondents also included comments about their experience with General Assistance. There were many positive comments about interactions with specific staff and much appreciation expressed for the program in general. A few comments regarding the best thing about their experience with General Assistance:

- *My worker made me feel relevant again. I have never received assistance. It was hard to ask for help. She made me feel self worthy just by being kind and making me feel I wasn't alone!*
- *Feeling heard about my finances. Things have been rough and to have someone show they care was incredible.*
- *I've never applied for rental assistance before; however, (my worker) explained every step of the process which made this smooth and easy. She was very knowledgeable about other services, programs, and temp agencies. I am very thankful for her help.*
- *Respect, helpfulness, and professionalism*
- *I had a very good experience with (my worker). She's a great person. The receptionist staff is very kind, respectful and attentive. Whenever I have questions, they help me. I'm grateful to her that whenever she attends to me she is very kind and a good person.*
- *Very friendly, polite, understood my concerns, helped in more than just what was needed.*

## **Conclusion**

The General Assistance Program provided housing stability and prevented homelessness for 1,062 households, that included 2,374 individuals, 1,028 whom were children. The expansion of the General Assistance Guidelines resulted in a 225% increase in households accessing emergency assistance and a 391% increase in approved applications in FY23 compared to FY21. A third General Assistance Specialist was hired in March 2022, to help respond to the increased volume of applications. In addition to providing essential emergency housing support, the General Assistance Program plays a key role in connecting program recipients to other critical supports including healthcare, food and child care assistance and other long term housing assistance programs.