

Johnson County Social Services General Assistance Program FY22 Annual Report

July 1, 2021 - June 30, 2022

Prepared by: Lynette Jacoby, LMSW Social Services Director

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. Verification of immigration status no longer required.
- 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 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 2022 federal poverty guidelines a single person household could earn up to-

\$2,265/month, \$3,052/month for a two-person household, \$3,838 for a three -person household and \$4,625 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. (2022 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 FY22, the Fair Market Rent for an efficiency apartment was \$757, \$848 for a one-bedroom, \$1,063 for a two- bedroom unit and \$1,510 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 2022 estimated housing wage (wage needed to afford a two- bedroom home at the Fair Market Rent rent) was \$20.44/hour (*National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2022*).

Services Provided

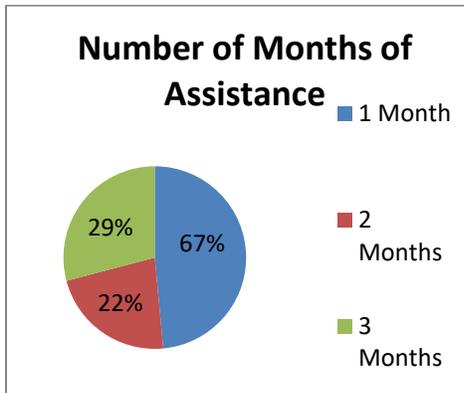
Households seeking assistance must submit an application for each month in which help is requested. For those seeking subsequent months of assistance, documentation of employment search is required unless medical verification supports the applicant’s inability to work. In FY22, the General Assistance Program approved 1,440 of the 1,629 applications received. Applications for assistance increased 245% from FY21 to FY22. 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 FY22, 3,338 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 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

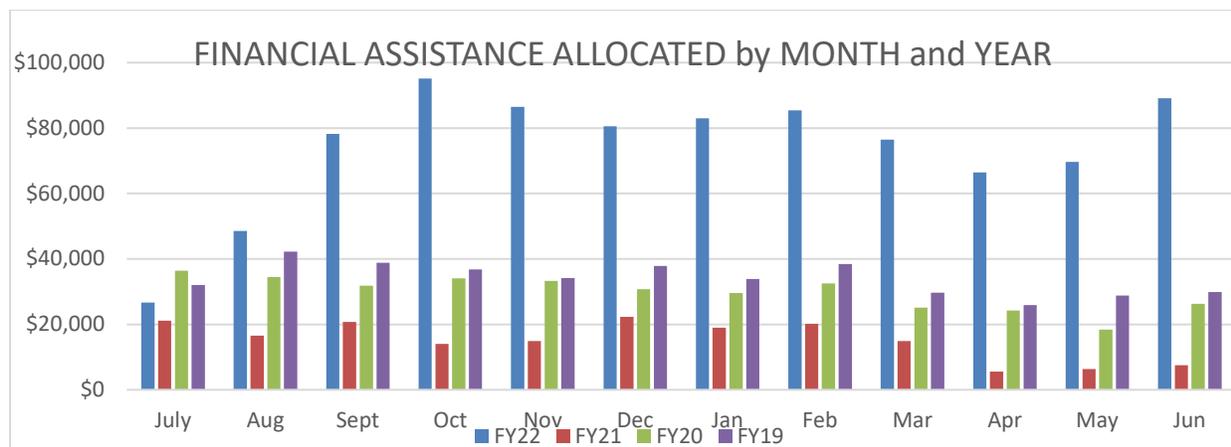


67% of households accessing General Assistance received help only one time during the fiscal year. On average, households received 1.8 months of assistance, up from 1.5 months of assistance the previous year. The average amount of assistance provided per application, excluding burials, was \$691, up \$101 from \$590 the previous 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 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. 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.



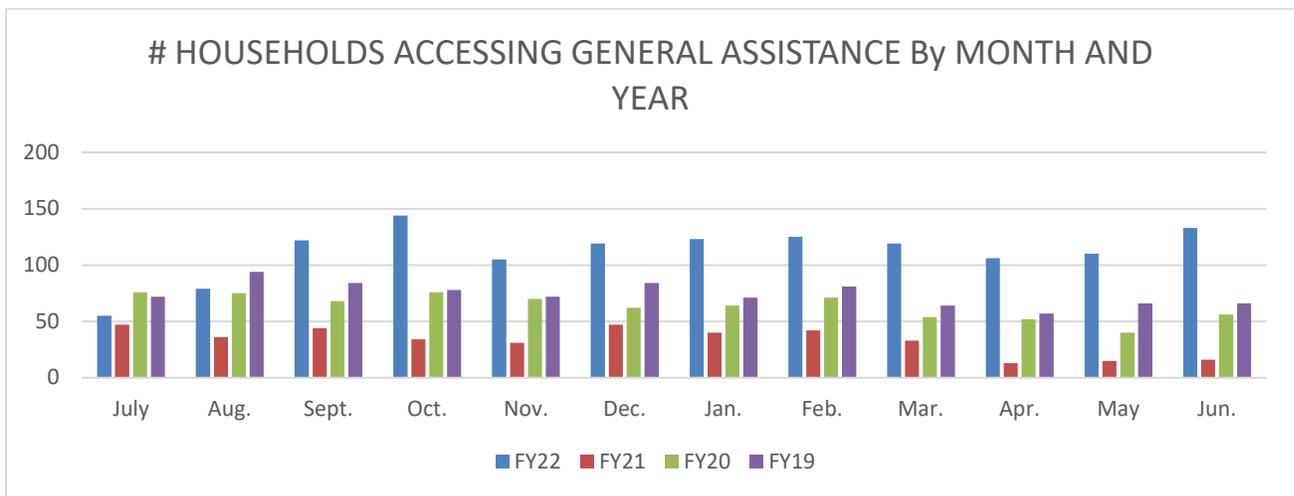


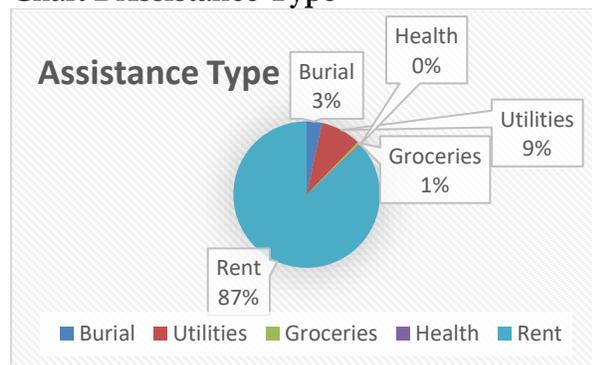
Table 3 provides a summary of funding by type of assistance. Rent assistance accounted for 91% of expended funding. The amount of funding provided for funeral assistance was higher than previous years due to an increase the maximum amount of assistance provided per burial. The number of funeral assists increased by only one in FY22 compared to the previous fiscal year.

Table 3: Financial Assistance Detail

	Medical	Prescriptions	Rent	Groceries	Utilities	Funeral	Bus/Trans
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

Chart 2 Assistance Type



Assistance type based on total number of assists.

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
FY 22	5	2 (1 from prior year)	1	\$6,132
FY 21	8	2	2	\$1,750
FY 20	4	1	1	\$ 450
FY 19	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 FY22, 782 households were approved for General Assistance. This represented a 139% increase over the previous fiscal year. Fifty-one percent were single- family households compared to 58% last year, a 12% decrease. Households with children in the home increased by 20%, up from 35% last fiscal year to 42% in FY22. Households that included children had an average of 2.2 children. Applicants approved reported employment income on 73% of applications compared with 54% the prior year, an increase of 35%. The decrease in employment income the prior year was a direct result of businesses closing or reducing staff hours due to the pandemic as well as individuals out of work, as a result, of contracting COVID-19 or requiring to quarantine due to an exposure.

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
FY 22	27%	29%	22%	15%	8%
FY 21	28%	24%	22%	18%	8%
FY 20	28%	29%	22%	16%	5%
FY 19	29%	28%	24%	15%	5%

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

	African American /Black	Asian	Caucasian	Latino/Hispanic	Native American	Other	Not Identified
FY 22	58%	0%	29%	11%	0%	1%	1%
FY 21	55%	1%	35%	6%	.6%	1%	3%
FY 20	58%	1%	32%	6%	.1%	1%	3%
FY 19	54%	.3%	36%	6%	.1%	1%	3%

Percent of cases by city of residence:

61% Iowa City
26% Coralville
9% North Liberty
1% Tiffin
1% Hills
<1% Oxford
<1% Solon

Conclusion

The General Assistance Program helped to provide housing stability and prevent homelessness for nearly 782 households that included 1,710 individuals, 710 whom were children. The expansion of the General Assistance Guidelines resulted in a 139% increase in households accessing emergency assistance and a 245% increase in approved applications. 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.