

Johnson County Social Services
General Assistance Program
FY21 Annual Report

July 1, 2020 - June 30, 2021

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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 for those who are often ineligible for other governmental programs and promotes community strength by encouraging individual stability, and self-sufficiency. Financial assistance is available to eligible applicants for rent, utilities, prescriptions, food/provisions, and burial/cremation.

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.

In fiscal year 2021, the General Assistance Program was greatly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In an effort to protect employees and the public and to help mitigate the spread of the virus, County buildings closed to the public from March 17, 2020 – June 8, 2020. From June 2020 – June 2021, offices were open by appointment only. The General Assistance Program moved to processing applications electronically and telephonically while staff staggered remote work schedules. The new service delivery model was quickly implemented, allowing additional flexibility with application submission.

Programs Offered

The General Assistance Program (GA) provides one-time, short-term and burial assistance to Johnson County residents in need. 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 Interim Assistance Reimbursement Program (IAR) provides ongoing financial assistance for individuals applying for disability benefits through Supplemental Security Income (SSI) of the Social Security Administration. An eligible applicant may receive monthly assistance, not to exceed the current General Assistance benefit per month, for the duration of eligibility. Upon approval of SSI benefits, the Social Security Administration reimburses Johnson County the total amount that the client received in benefits through the IAR program.

The General Assistance Program utilizes the federal poverty guideline to determine financial eligibility. Households must have an income not to exceed 50% of the federal poverty guideline - \$537/month for single; \$726/month for a 2-person household – in order to meet the income eligibility criteria of the guidelines and potentially be eligible for the Short-Term Program (up to 3-months of assistance in a 12 month period). Households with incomes between 51% and 130% of the federal poverty guidelines - \$1395/ month for a one- member household - may be eligible for the One-Time Assistance Program (one month of assistance in a 12 month period) if other eligibility criteria are met.

Johnson County Profile

Johnson County is home to an estimated 152,854 residents or 59,134 households. The average household size is 2.38 persons. (2020 US Census data estimate). Youth under the age of 18 consist of 20% of the population and persons over 65 year constitute 12.3% of the population. 18.1% of residents live in poverty compared to 11.5% statewide. (American Community Survey Tables, US Census Bureau)

The FY21 Fair Market Rent per month for an efficiency apartment was \$735, \$803 for a one-bedroom, \$1,036 for a two- bedroom unit and \$1,483 for a three bedroom. The 2021 estimated average wage of renter household in Johnson County was \$10.37/hour, while the estimated housing wage (wage needed to afford a two bedroom home at the Fair Market Rent rent) was \$19.92/hour (*National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2020*). In FY21 the maximum rent benefit available from Johnson County General Assistance Program was \$450 per month for a one person household, \$500/month for 2 persons, \$550/month three persons and \$600 for four or more person household.

Services Provided

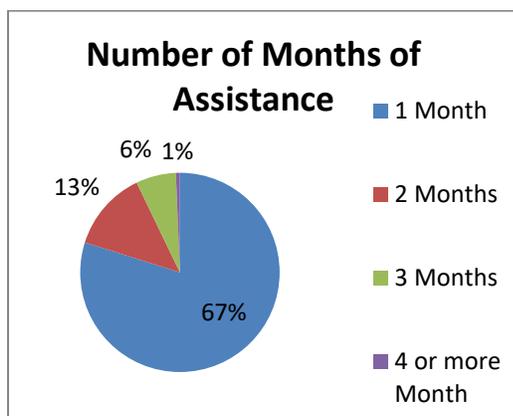
Households seeking assistance must submit an application for each month in which help is requested. For those seeking subsequent months of assistance, documentation of employment search is required unless medical verification supports the applicant’s inability to work. In FY21, the General Assistance Program approved 417 of the 598 applications received. Applications for assistance declined 40% from FY20 to FY21. The decline in applications was primarily attributed to households accessing other assistance programs, including the state’s federally funded rent and utility emergency assistance program. Additionally, the federal stimulus payments provided an important safety net to help families meet their basic needs.

Providing information and referrals to other community resources is an important component of the General Assistance Program. In FY21, 383 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 21	598	327	417	235	92
FY 20	1003	536	782	392	144
FY 19	1125	604	915	409	193
FY 18	1094	564	871	417	147
FY 17	1091	549	874	404	145

Chart 1: Months of Assistance



67% of the applications approved for assistance qualified for the Short-Term Program, 26% for One-time, 5% burial and 2% for the Interim Assistance Reimbursement Program. 67% of households accessing General Assistance received help only one time during the fiscal year (Chart 1). On average, households received 1.5 months of assistance. The monthly average amount per assist, excluding burials, was \$590.

Table 2: Applications 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 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
FY 18	559	\$226,189	244	\$ 99,517	50	\$15,405	20	\$41,323
FY 17	498	\$198,454	254	\$100,957	87	\$29,957	26	\$49,405

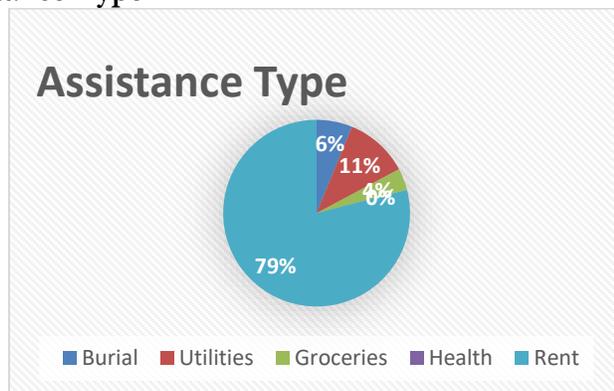
FY19 first year for expanded one time – extending eligibility from 100% Federal Poverty Guidelines to 130%.

Table 3: Financial Assistance Detail

	Medical	Prescriptions	Rent	Groceries	Utilities	Burial	Bus
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							
FY 18 Assistance	\$0	\$410	\$316,411	\$3,098	\$21,872	\$43,423	\$1,894
Total: \$387,108							
FY 17 Assistance	\$0	\$489	\$307,389	\$4,056	\$20,814	\$44,924	\$ 742
Total: \$378,415							

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

Chart 2 Assistance Type



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 21	8	2	2	\$1,750
FY 20	4	1	1	\$ 450
FY 19	4	3 (2 from prior year)	1	\$9,155
FY 18	8	6 (1 from prior year)	1	\$29,096
FY 17	13	2 (1 from prior year)	3	\$5,145

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 FY21, 327 households were approved for General Assistance. This represents a 39% decrease over the previous fiscal year. Fifty-eight percent were single-family households while 35% included children in the home. The average number of children per household was two. 54% of approved applicants who reported being able to work had employment income, a decrease of 22% over the previous year. The decrease in employment income is 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 21	28%	24%	22%	18%	8%
FY 20	28%	29%	22%	16%	5%
FY 19	29%	28%	24%	15%	5%
FY 18	32%	30%	20%	13%	5%
FY 17	28%	29%	22%	16%	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 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%
FY 18	52%	1%	37%	8%	0	.05%	0%
FY 17	47%	1%	40%	7%		2%	3%

Percent of cases by city of residence:

- 60% Iowa City
- 28% Coralville
- 8% North Liberty
- 2% Tiffin
- <1% Hills
- <1% Oxford
- <1% Solon
- <1% West Branch

Community Collaboration

A multi-lingual General Assistance Specialist provided weekly outreach at Center for Worker Justice assisting immigrant and refugee families in completing the Iowa Rent and Utility Assistance Program application. The General Assistance Specialists regularly attended the Refugee Alliance and Local Homeless Coordinating Board meetings. The GA specialists also visited several agencies, providing program updates.

General Assistance staff completed the annual update of the Johnson County Directory of Social Services and the Johnson County Guide to Food Assistance.