

# Vermont's Course to A Resilient Recovery

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**Release Date: Août 10, 2020**

**Montpelier, VT** – For weeks, Vermont garnered attention, posting some of the lowest numbers for confirmed new cases of COVID-19 in the nation, according to information provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Yet, Gov. Phil Scott isn't taking any chances. As the month of August began, Scott ushered in a mandatory mask requirement for the state of Vermont. Public schools will reopen September 8th to give faculty and staff more time to prepare for teaching in this unfamiliar pandemic environment. Life, as residents have known it, has changed; regardless of how few or how many, COVID-19 has left its mark. What lies ahead now is a road to recovery.

State, local, rural, non-profit agencies, federal partners and FEMA have been paving that road since the pandemic surfaced. "This is the most significant disaster in terms of size, scope, scarcity and also susceptibility that our agency has faced in its 41-year history," said Regional Administrator and Federal Coordinating Officer Captain Russ Webster, who oversees FEMA's operations in Vermont. "I can't think of a single FEMA member who hasn't had a friend, or a family member affected by the COVID virus."

In January, FEMA and the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR) joined forces to track, analyze and prepare for COVID, coordinating with numerous partners to support communities with resources needed to combat the virus. More than \$11.6 million in federal Disaster Relief Funds have been granted to Vermont. As of August 3, the federal government provided a significant amount of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to the state, including more than 783,000 gloves, 211,000 N95 respirator masks, 70,000 face shields and 100,000 non-surgical gowns.

## **Public Assistance**

FEMA also approved \$12,516,240 for the Vermont Agency of Human Services (VAHS) to help defray the costs of preparing for and responding to COVID-19 under FEMA's Public Assistance program.



“We’re here for the long haul,” said Webster. “The projects that Public Assistance grants fund are necessary to support Vermont on its road to recovery. It’s critical to the mission.”

During the incident period, the COVID-19 pandemic created an immediate threat to the health and safety of the general public requiring emergency response and protective measures. In response to the pandemic, the state of Vermont utilized contracts for non-congregate sheltering for individuals that include high-risk populations, and those who had been exposed to COVID-19 who are considered high risk to COVID-19.

## **Crisis Counseling**

Providing for the people of Vermont during these stressful times FEMA, in close coordination with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA), has provided \$140,645 through the Crisis Counseling Program (**CCP**) Immediate Services Program (ISP) to help counsel those affected by all aspects of COVID-19. The ISP grant was awarded on May 26, originally funding the program for 60 days, however, the State of Vermont requested, and was granted, a 60-day extension, through September 27, 2020.

“FEMA’s mission has, and will always be, to support people before, during and after a disaster,” said Webster. “The crisis counseling program is imperative to doing just that.”

Due to the COVID-19 nationwide emergency and the need to protect the safety and health of all Americans, Crisis Counseling services, which are free and anonymous, can be provided via telephone, internet, or social media. Vermont’s crisis counseling program, “**COVIDSupportVT**” offers resources for businesses, individuals and communities and can be accessed at: <https://covidsupportvt.org/>: <https://www.facebook.com/covidsupportvt/> and <https://www.instagram.com/covidsupportvt/>.

## **Long-Term Recovery**

In addition to resources and funding, FEMA’s role is to increase communication and collaboration among stakeholders, and support disaster recovery planning by leveraging opportunities to recover stronger, safer and smarter. A Long-Term



Recovery Task Force was formed to chart the resurgence process in FEMA Region 1, which includes the states of Vermont, Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Rhode Island. One of the group's first steps was to do a Rapid Needs Assessment for each state.

The Global Resilience Institute (GRI) recently completed its Rapid Needs Assessment for the State of Vermont and is being reviewed by the State. The "representative" communities selected by Vermont were Bennington, Middlebury and Newport, where the GRI conducted 89 interviews with public officials, private sector leaders, and community leaders in the nonprofit and social services sectors to form an understanding of the impacts COVID-19 had on the communities studied.

"With the state's concurrence, what we will do with the information from the Rapid Needs Assessment is bring together the appropriate federal agencies, among the 108 federal agencies that are partnered to the CARES Act," said Webster. "And then with a laser-focus, we will facilitate discussions with state officials on how they can quickly access CARES Act funding."

The findings and recommendations for long-term recovery will consider the conditions experienced by towns and cities of different sizes and economic characteristics. The results will be made available as the review and analyses are completed.

Key issues identified are:

- Dairy, tourism and healthcare have been heavily impacted
- Food and housing insecurities are core challenges.
- Investments should be considered in workforce development and broadband infrastructure.

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*FEMA's mission is helping people before, during, and after disasters.*

