Chapter 7: Large and Small Households

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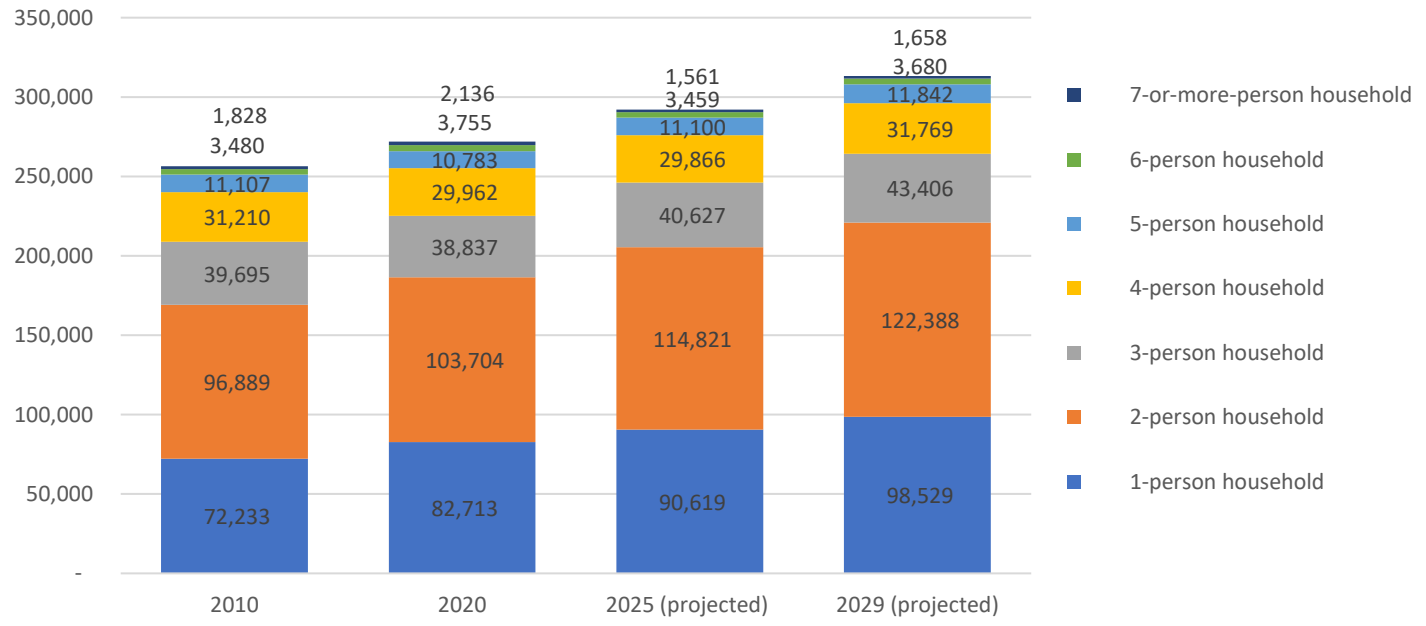
Vermont Household Composition

As the Baby Boom generation ages and births dwindle, Vermont's 1-2 person households have grown, comprising 70% of the state's year-round residents. Although overcrowding can be a serious concern for the state's small population of large, low-income households, the prevalence of large Vermont homes creates opportunities to use the existing housing stock in new ways. Exploring opportunities for utilizing existing large homes for large families and for multiple households through ADU development and other subdividing could help Vermont meet multiple housing needs.

In 2022 the average Vermont household size dropped to 2.3 people from 2.6 people in 1990.[115] This pattern is likely to persist through 2029. Households that own their homes in Vermont tend to be slightly larger than renter households, with an average household size of 2.5 compared to 2.0 people in renter households. Only 16% of Vermont households have four or more people as of 2022 Census Bureau estimates. Large households of 5 or more members will likely comprise about 6% of all Vermont year-round residents by 2029.

Figure 7-1 Projected Vermont households by number of people, 2025 and 2029



Source: Based on data from U.S. Census Bureau 2010 and 2020 Decennial Census and American Community Survey 1-year estimates for 2019-2022.

[115] U.S. Census Bureau: American Community Survey 5-year estimates, 2018-2022 (Table B25010)

Figure 7-2 Households by household size and tenure, 2010-2029

	2010 (actual)	2020 (actual)	2025 (projected)	2029 (projected)
Owner occupied:	181,407	190,041	212,032	221,231
1-person household	39,950	46,158	53,368	55,684
2-person household	75,142	79,358	90,612	94,544
3-person household	29,326	28,612	31,115	32,465
4-person household	24,668	23,540	24,181	25,230
5-person household	8,425	8,183	8,668	9,044
6-person household	2,562	2,738	2,794	2,915
7-or-more-person household	1,334	1,452	1,293	1,349
Renter occupied:	75,035	81,849	80,023	92,041
1-person household	32,283	36,555	37,251	42,845
2-person household	21,747	24,346	24,209	27,845
3-person household	10,369	10,225	9,512	10,941
4-person household	6,542	6,422	5,685	6,539
5-person household	2,682	2,600	2,433	2,798
6-person household	918	1,017	665	765
7-or-more-person household	494	684	269	309

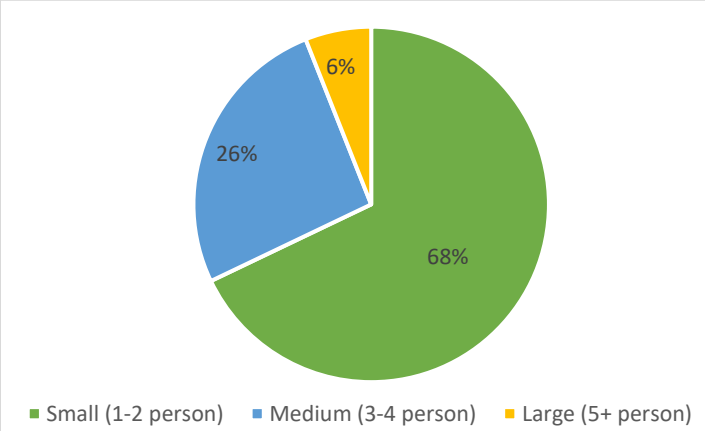
Source: Based on data from U.S. Census Bureau 2010 and 2020 Decennial Census and American Community Survey 1-year estimates for 2019-2022.

Small Households

Vermont has the second smallest average household size by state after Maine.[116] As of 2022, there were approximately 187,000 1- and 2- person households in Vermont.

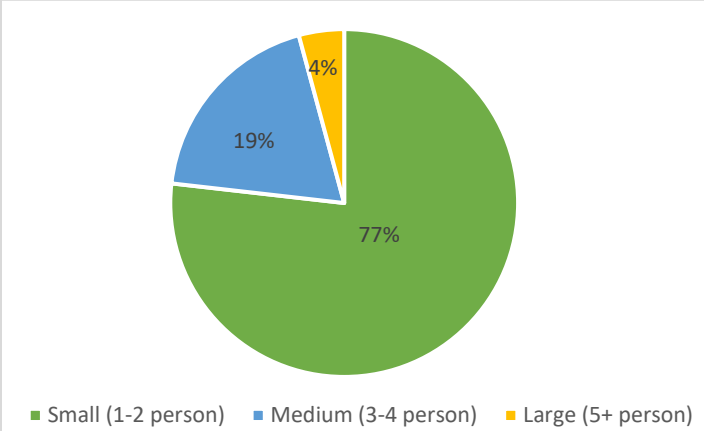
An estimated 70% of these small households own their homes. They comprise 68% of all homeowner households and 77% of all renter households. There are more one person households (33,812) than two person households (21,974) among all rental households. The reverse is true for homeowner households where 2-person households outnumber 1-person households.

Figure 7-3 Owner households by number of people



Source: U.S. Census Bureau: American Community Survey 5-year estimates, 2018-2022 (Table B25009)

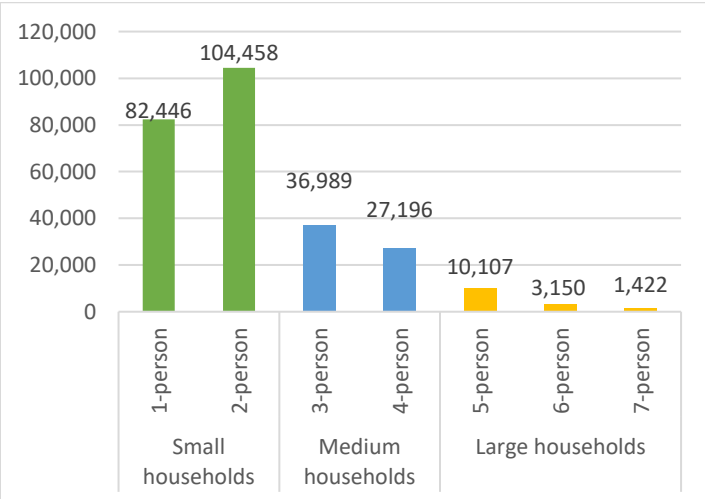
Figure 7-4 Renter households by number of people



Source: U.S. Census Bureau: American Community Survey 5-year estimates, 2018-2022 (Table B25009)

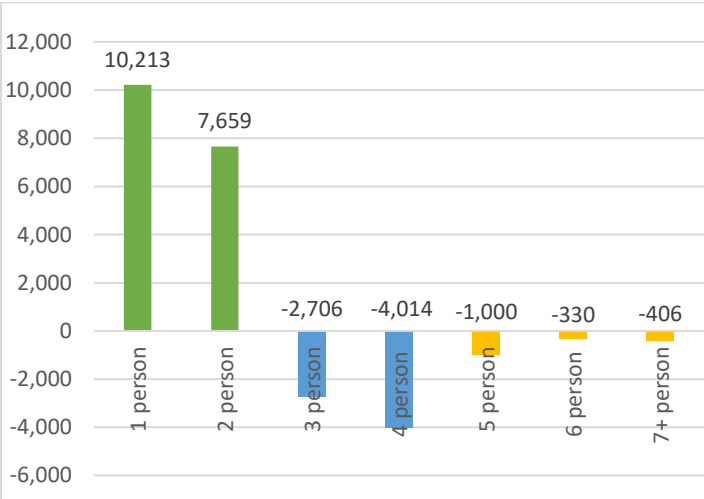
While 2-person households make up a larger percentage of all Vermont households (39%), the number of 1-person households is increasing faster than any other type of household.

Figure 7-5 Number of small, medium, and large households, 2022



Source: U.S. Census Bureau: American Community Survey 5-year estimates, 2018-2022 (Table B25009)

Figure 7-6 Change in households, 2010-2022



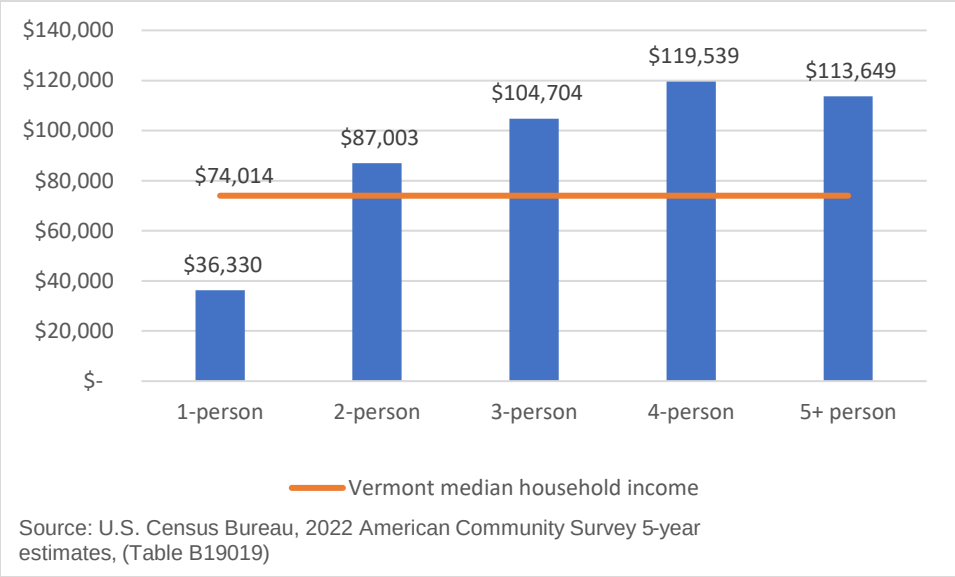
Source: U.S. Census Bureau: American Community Survey 5-year estimates, 2018-2022

Between 2010 and 2022 the number of one-person households expanded by over 10,000 (14%). Two-person households grew by 8% in the same period, while households with 3 or more people contracted by 10%. There are over twice as many 1-2 person households as those with 3 or more people.

[116] U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-year estimates, 2018-2022

The median household income for a one-person household in 2022 was $36,330 which is less than 50% of Vermont's area median income (AMI). Lower income households are more likely to encounter housing problems, such as being cost burdened by monthly housing costs, being overcrowded, or lacking a complete kitchen or working plumbing. 75% of households earning less than 50% AMI face housing problems.

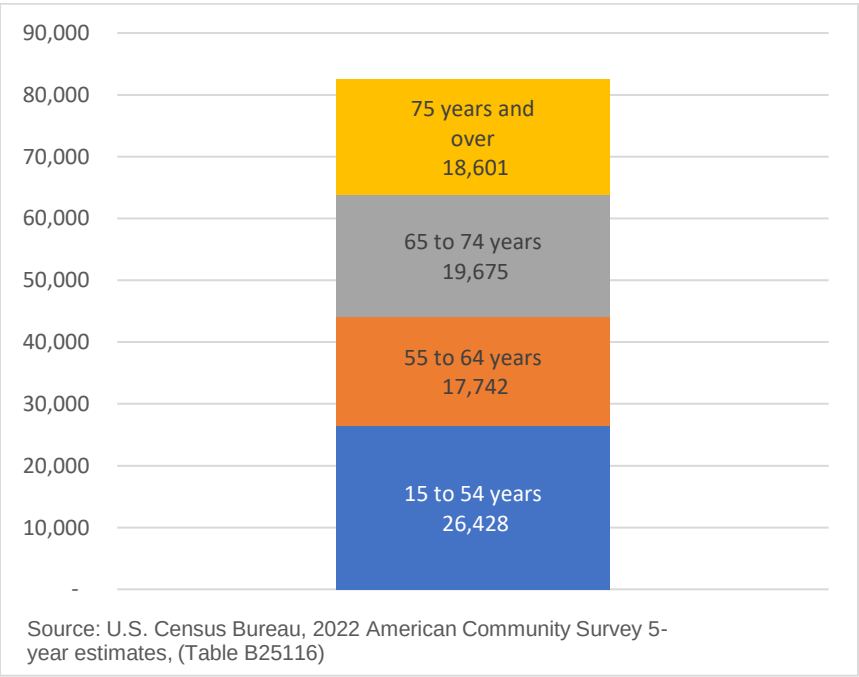
Figure 7-7 Median income by household size, 2022



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, (Table B19019)

Roughly 85% of Vermonters over 65 live in small households of one or two people. 46% of all householders over 65 years of age live alone, and they are more likely to be homeowners than renters. There are 4 times as many owner households as renter households in this age group. An estimated 26,500 homeowners and 12,000 renters over 65 years of age live alone. These older homeowners make up more than half (54%) of all homeowners that live alone.

Figure 7-8 Single person households by age of householder, 2022



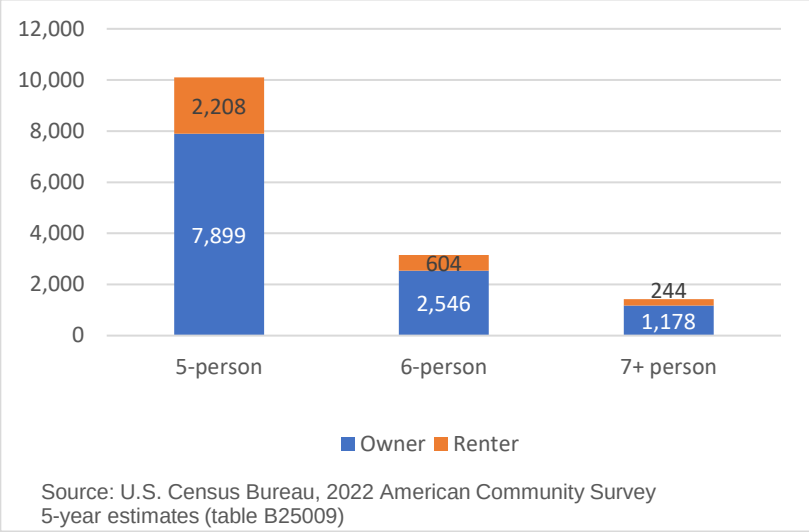
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, (Table B25116)

Large Households

Large households, comprised of 5 or more people, have been on the decline in Vermont and in the U.S. Between 2010 and 2022 the number of large households in Vermont decreased by 11%. As of 2022, Vermont's 14,679 households with 5 or more members represent only 6% of total Vermont households. This figure is down from 16,415 households in 2010.

96% of these large households are comprised of families of related members. There is a higher rate of large households among homeowners (6%) than among renters (4%). Notably, there has been a large (22%) decline in households with 7 or more people between 2010 and 2022.

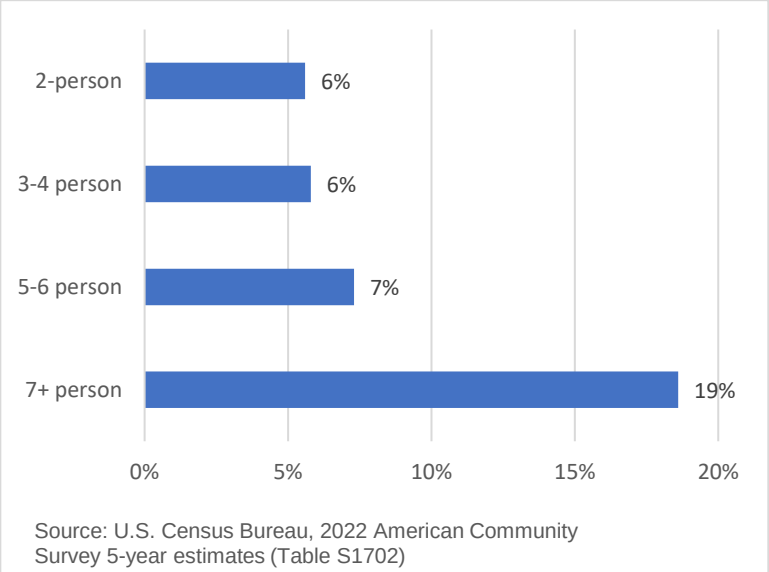
Figure 7-9 Large households by tenure, 2022



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey 5-year estimates (table B25009)

Poverty rates increase as family size increases. There is a sharp increase in the rate of family poverty between 5-6 person households and 7+ person households, with households of 7+ people having a higher rate than small households that is statistically significant. While large households are a small share of the overall market, there were an estimated 270 families of 7 or more people living on household incomes of $42,000 or less in 2022.

Figure 7-10 Poverty rate by household size, 2022



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey 5-year estimates (Table S1702)

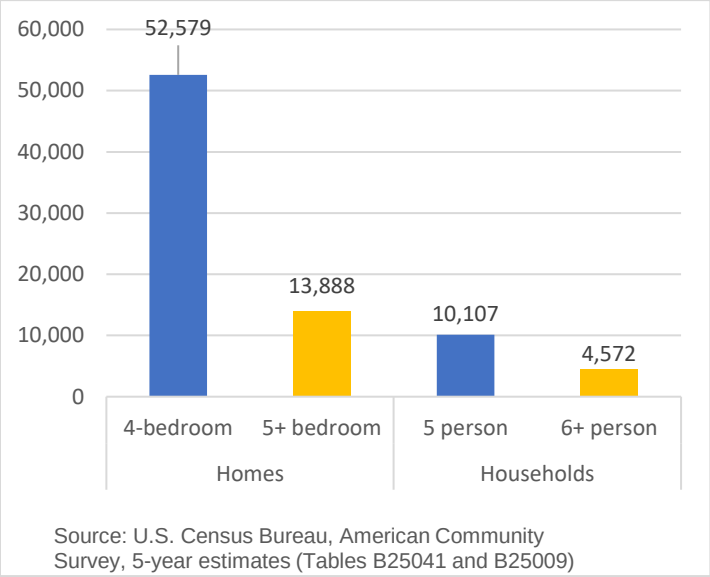
Household size	Poverty threshold for household size
2-person	$18,310
3-4 person	$23,030-$27,750
5-6 person	$32,470-$37,190
7+ person	$41,910

Size of Homes

Large owner-occupied homes on large lots dominate Vermont's year-round housing stock. HUD guidelines state that for every bedroom in a home, two occupants are adequately housed. [117]

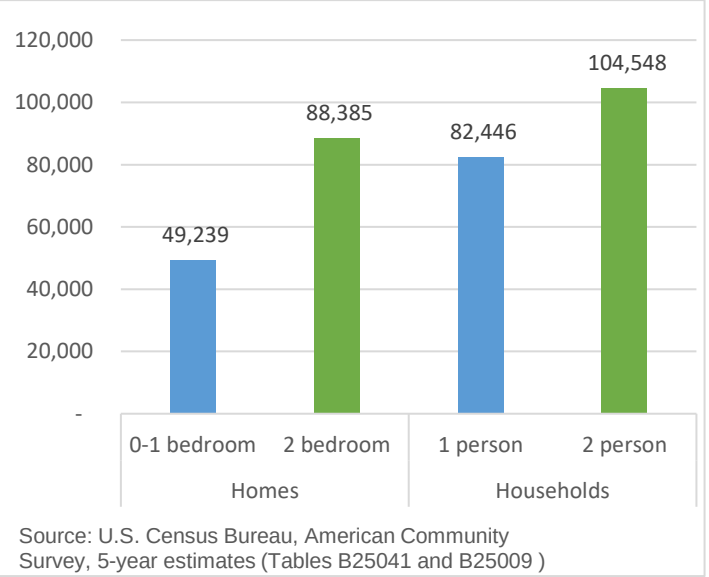
The number of large homes in Vermont far outweighs the large households that would be considered commensurate for them based on size alone. There are 66,467 homes with four bedrooms or more in Vermont, with only 14,679 households that technically need homes that large, based on the HUD guidelines for overcrowding.

Figure 7-11 Large homes outnumber large households



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-year estimates (Tables B25041 and B25009)

Figure 7-12 Small households outnumber small homes



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-year estimates (Tables B25041 and B25009)

Conversely, there are not enough small homes to accommodate the number of small households in Vermont. The number of 1 and 2 person households exceeds homes with two or fewer bedrooms by 49,370 households. 31% of Vermont households are made up of a single person living alone, whereas only 15% of the total homes have 0-1 bedrooms. Although some households in Vermont can afford to have more bedrooms than they require, there are many more households that have no choice but to accept the cost burden of having more bedrooms than necessary since larger homes typically come with a higher price tag (i.e. rent or home price).

Based on VHFA estimates, the maximum affordable rent for a 1-bedroom apartment for a household at 50% AMI would be $921 including all utilities.[118] Vermont's median gross rent for a 1-bedroom rental home was $930 in 2022. However, due to the lack of supply of 1-bedroom homes, at least 40% of 1-person households must live in a larger home. For a 2-bedroom rental the median rent was $1,290, an additional $360 per month or $4,320 per year. For a person living alone with an income of $36,330 (median for a 1-person household in 2022) the additional unnecessary bedroom would absorb the equivalent of 12% of their annual income.

Despite a national decline in the size of homes for sale, homes for sale in Vermont consistently fluctuate around 2,000 square feet, according to Realtor.com.[119]

[117] HUD defines an overcrowded home as having more than one person per room of the unit OR more than two people per bedroom. HUD, Measuring Overcrowding in Housing

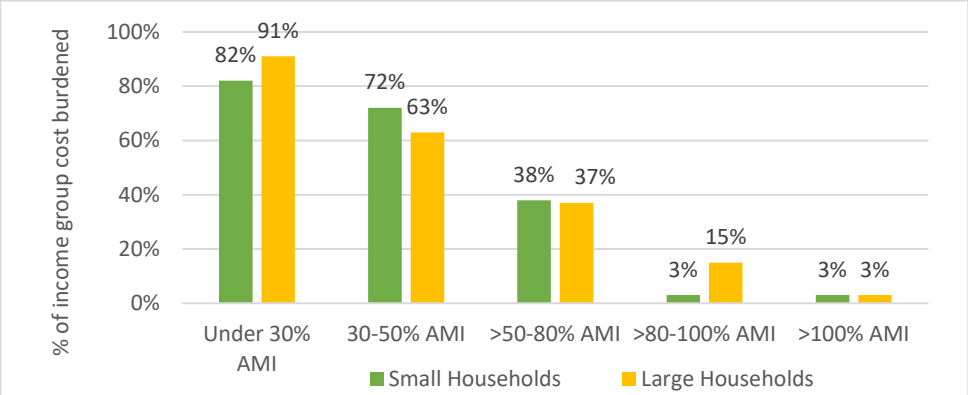
[118] Vermont Housing Finance Agency, HousingData.org, Maximum rent and purchase price affordability thresholds by income and household size

[119] Federal Reserve Bank, St. Louis, *Realtor.com from FRED, May 2, 2024*

Housing Problems

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) tracks and tabulates households with housing problems.[120] Housing problems include living in a home that lacks complete kitchen or plumbing facilities, is overcrowded, or costs above 30% of household income (cost burdened). A household is categorized as having a housing problem if it has any one or more of these four problems. An estimated 83,180 households (about 33% of the households in the state) at all income levels in Vermont have housing problems. However, for about 95% of these households, paying more than 30% of their income for housing is their only problem or one of their housing problems.

Figure 7-13 Cost burden of small (1-2 person) and large (5+ person) households by income level

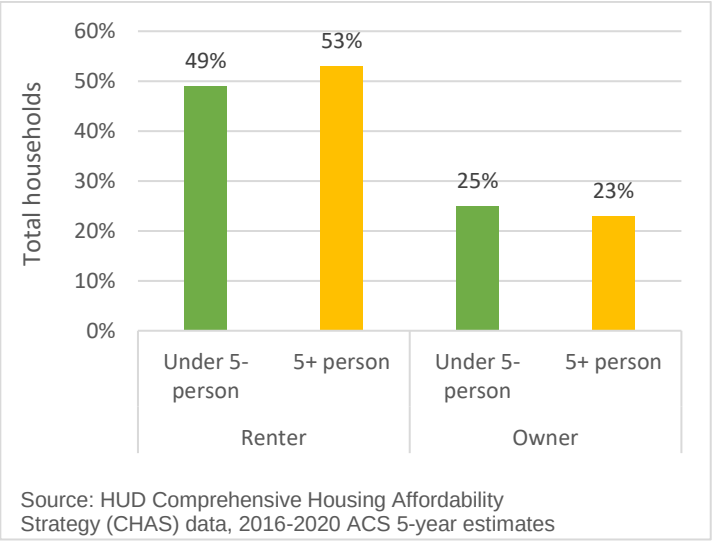


Source: HUD Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS) data, 2016-2020 ACS 5-year estimates

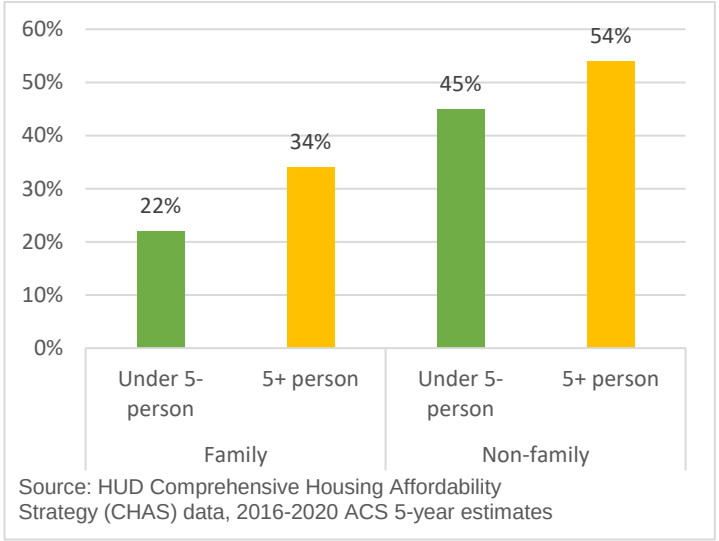
Households that rent are twice as likely to have housing problems as homeowners. Large renter households (over 5 people), while representing a small share of Vermont total households, are more likely to have housing problems than not. Over half of large renter households have at least one of four housing problems.

Non-family households also have a high rate of housing issues, with 45% of all non-family households experiencing at least one housing problem. Large non-family households have the highest incidence of housing problems of all the demographics discussed (54%).

Figure 7-14 Households with one housing problem as a percentage of total households by household size, tenure, and family status



Source: HUD Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS) data, 2016-2020 ACS 5-year estimates



Source: HUD Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS) data, 2016-2020 ACS 5-year estimates

[120] Office of Policy Development and Research (PD&R), Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS) data based on 2016-2020 ACS 5-year estimates, September 5, 2023

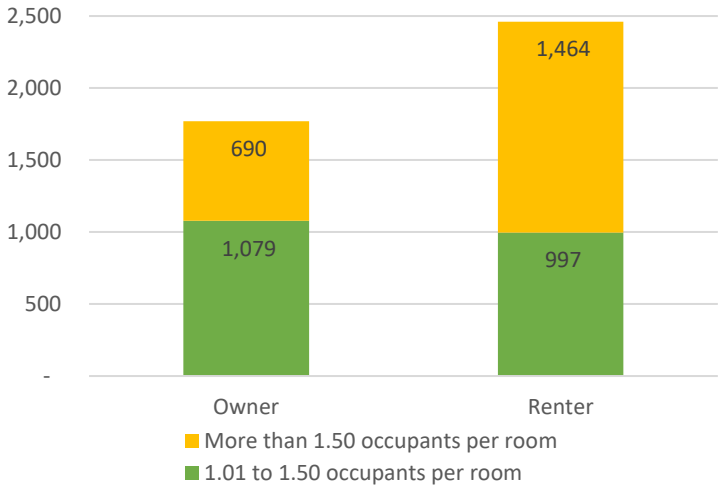
Overcrowding

There are fewer overcrowded homes in 2022 than were reported in the 2020 Vermont Housing Needs Assessment. About 4,200 (or 2%) of Vermont households live in overcrowded homes.[121] Such homes are defined as those with fewer rooms than household members. For example, a one-bedroom home with a living room and kitchen has 3 rooms.[122] Thus, it would be considered overcrowded if the household had 4 members.

Studies have reported a direct association between crowding and adverse health outcomes, such as infectious disease[123] and mental health problems.[124] Recent national research into the impacts of overcrowded housing has focused on COVID outcomes. In Vermont, a direct correlation between large multi-generational households and increased vulnerability to COVID was indicated by several outbreaks in Winooski. These outbreaks occurred repeatedly among new American communities with larger family sizes and multiple generations living together in crowded households. The families were unable to isolate sick members of the household to protect other family members from infection.

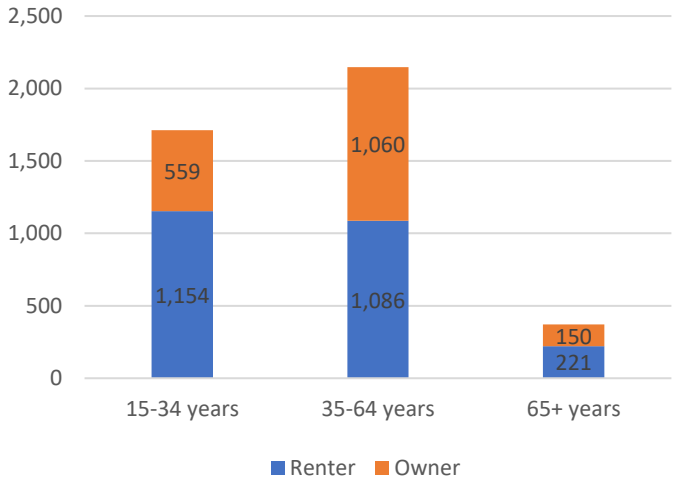
Renter households experience overcrowding at over three times the rate of homeowners, with 3.4% of renter households overcrowded versus just under 1% of owner households. More than one-half (2,154) of Vermont's overcrowded households have more than 1.5 person per room, which qualifies them as severely overcrowded. 2% of rental households are severely overcrowded.

Figure 7-15 Overcrowded households by tenure, 2022



Source: U.S. Census Bureau: American Community survey 5-year estimates, 2018-2022 (Table S2501)

Figure 7-16 Overcrowding by age and tenure, 2022



Source: U.S. Census Bureau: American Community Survey 5-year estimates, 2018-2022 (Table B25015)

Overcrowding rates also vary by householder age and race. Households headed by someone under 35 years of age are more likely to be overcrowded, with 4% of all households in this demographic overcrowded. Rates of overcrowding drop in older households, whether renter or owner households. Less than 1% of households led by someone who is age 65+ are overcrowded.

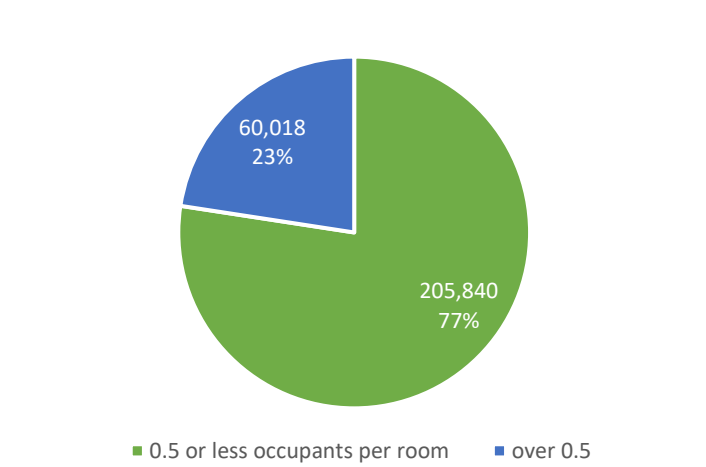
Due to Vermont's small sample sizes and large margins of error it is difficult to determine differences in overcrowding rates by race. However, at a national level there are clear divisions by race of households. Black or African American households (4%) are twice as likely as white households (2%) to be overcrowded. The rate of overcrowded Asian households is even higher at 7%. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander households are the most likely to be overcrowded (15%).

[121] U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Measuring Overcrowding in Housing, 2007.
[122] Bathrooms are not considered in room calculations under HUD standards.
[123] Ghosh, A.K et. al, Association between overcrowded households, multigenerational households, and COVID-19: a cohort study, Public Health, Volume 198, 2021
[124] U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, Healthy People 2030 - Housing Instability

Under-Occupied Homes

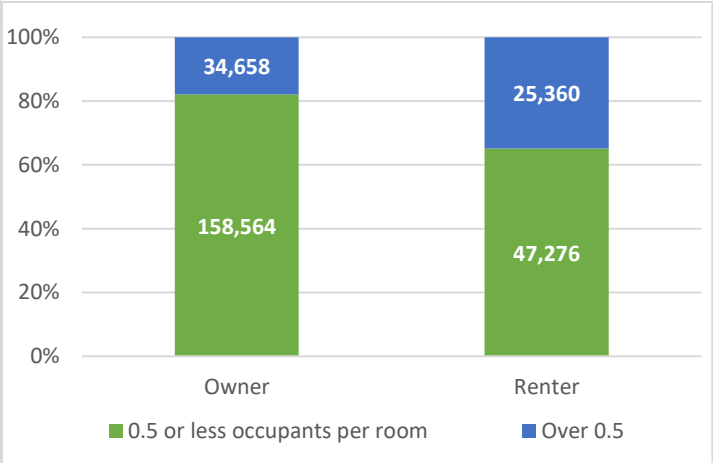
While Vermont has a small percentage of overcrowded households, a much larger portion of households in the state have more than 2 rooms for every household member. These homes could be referred to as underutilized or under-occupied, or the households could be considered over-housed. Over three-quarters of all Vermont homes contain more than 2 rooms for every household member.

Figure 7-17 Vermont's under-occupied homes, 2022



Source: U.S. Census Bureau: American Community Survey 5-year estimates, 2018-2022 (Table B25014)

Figure 7-18 Under-occupied homes by tenure, 2022



Source: U.S. Census Bureau: American Community Survey 5-year estimates, 2018-2022 (Table B25014)

Under-occupancy in the Vermont housing stock presents multiple problems. For households that cannot find right-sized housing options, affordability may be sacrificed to find an available home. There are far fewer one- and two-bedroom options in Vermont than there are 1- and 2-person families. As housing size increases, so does the cost of the home.

Figure 7-19 Overcrowded and under-occupied homes by county, 2022

	Under-occupied (0.50 or less occupants per room)	Under-occupied %	Overcrowded (1.01 to 1.50 occupants per room)	Severely Overcrowded (More than 1.51 occupants per room)	Overcrowded %	Total households:
Addison County	11,533	80%	94	109	1%	14,416
Bennington County	11,589	80%	125	65	1%	14,566
Caledonia County	9,893	77%	98	36	1%	12,819
Chittenden County	51,682	75%	489	547	1%	69,318
Essex County	2,138	80%	30	51	3%	2,667
Franklin County	14,879	77%	167	21	1%	19,233
Grand Isle County	2,429	80%	6	6	0%	3,027
Lamoille County	8,491	76%	111	30	1%	11,176
Orange County	9,697	76%	169	50	2%	12,690
Orleans County	9,071	79%	111	55	1%	11,528
Rutland County	19,266	76%	160	726	3%	25,334
Washington County	20,183	80%	153	89	1%	25,166
Windham County	15,565	80%	118	95	1%	19,382
Windsor County	19,424	79%	245	274	2%	24,536
Vermont	205,840	77%	2,076	2,154	2%	265,858

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-year estimates, 2018-2022, Table B25014