

Presented by the Columbia County
Housing & Redevelopment Authority

THE HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER AND YOU



What is the Housing Choice Voucher Program?

The Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program is the federal government's primary program for assisting very low-income families, the elderly, and persons with disabilities to afford decent, safe, and sanitary housing in the private market. Since housing assistance is provided on behalf of the HCV tenant, participants are able to find their own housing, including single-family homes, townhouses, and apartments. Housing choice vouchers are administered locally by public housing agencies (PHAs) that receive federal funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). This means that the tenant, landlord and PHA all have obligations and responsibilities under the HCV program.





HUD: HUD provides funds to allow PHAs to make housing assistance payments on behalf of the HCV tenants. HUD also pays the PHA a fee for the costs of administering the program. HUD monitors PHA administration of the program to ensure program rules are properly followed.

Public Housing Agency: The PHA administers the HCV program locally and provides the HCV tenant with the housing assistance. The PHA must examine the tenant's income, household composition and ensure that their housing unit meets minimum housing quality standards. The PHA enters into a contract with the landlord to provide housing assistance payments on behalf of the family

Landlord: The role of the landlord in the HCV program is to provide decent, safe, and sanitary housing to a tenant at a reasonable rent. The dwelling must pass the program's housing quality standards and be maintained up to those standards as long as the owner receives housing assistance payments. The landlord enters into a lease agreement with the tenant

Tenant: When a tenant selects a housing unit, they are expected to comply with the lease and the program requirements, pay their share of rent on time, maintain the unit in good condition and notify the PHA of any changes in income or family composition.

The PHA determines a payment standard that is between 90% and 110% of the Fair Market Rents regularly published by HUD representing the cost to rent a moderately-priced dwelling unit in the local housing market. The housing voucher tenant must pay 30% of its monthly adjusted gross income for rent and utilities, and if the unit rent is greater than the payment standard, the tenant is required to pay the additional amount.

HCV Households

- 8.75 years is the average household time in the program
- 29.2% are elderly (older than 62)
- 25.5% are non-elderly disabled
- 45.5% are single person
- Over 75,000 HCVs are designated for Veteran Affairs Supportive Housing

The PHA's Role in the Housing Choice Voucher Program

PHAs are State-Created Entities: each state's law governs how PHAs are formed. There may be state, county, or city PHAs that are authorized to administer the program. PHAs are not federal agencies, although HUD has regulatory oversight over many of the programs PHAs administer. Under program regulations, PHAs have discretion to run their own programs in ways that best support their local communities. As each community has its own unique needs and issues, PHAs in different areas will operate the HCV program in different ways.

- PHAs have discretion in **setting payment standards**. Payment standards determine the maximum amount of rental assistance a PHA may pay to a landlord on behalf of an assisted tenant. Two PHAs serving the same area may have vouchers operating under different payment standards.
- PHAs may **offer distinct or special purpose vouchers that are specifically designed to help serve different high-need groups** of people in their community. Some examples of high-need groups include veterans experiencing homelessness, non-elderly people with disabilities, and youth aging out of foster care.
- PHAs are allowed to determine how to **prioritize which families receive vouchers among all applicants** for the program depending on the local housing needs. For example, some PHAs may have adopted a preference for people experiencing homelessness, while other PHAs may have adopted a preference for working families.

- PHAs **follow different inspection schedules** for their HCV units. For example, some PHAs may conduct inspections annually, while other PHAs may conduct them biennially, or even every three years in some rural areas.

PHAs perform a variety of tasks in administering the HCV program.

- **PHAs help families join the HCV program** by maintaining waiting lists, processing applications, determining eligibility, issuing vouchers, providing search assistance, approving units, and executing contracts with landlords.
- PHAs provide a portion of the voucher family's rent to the landlord. Typically— though not in every instance— families **pay 30% of their monthly income towards rent**, while the PHA covers the remaining portion of the rent through a Housing Assistance Payment (HAP). PHAs will adjust the family's portion of the rent, as well as the payment to the landlord, if the voucher family experiences a change of income.
- PHAs help families retain assistance through the HCV program by verifying their income at regular intervals and when requested by the family. They also **assist the family in ensuring they still meet program requirements** during a move. PHAs may help families leave the HCV program by administering a Family Self-Sufficiency program, which helps HUD-assisted families increase their earned income so they can afford to leave the program. Some PHAs may refer families to other social service organizations to address specific challenges or needs.



- PHAs help **ensure that units are decent, safe and sanitary** by conducting inspections. Activities related to inspections include scheduling, notifying and preparing for inspections; conducting inspections; and enforcing inspection standards. Inspectors are looking at key aspects of housing quality, including, but not limited to, sanitary facilities, illumination and electricity, lead-based paint, smoke detectors, and interior air qualities.
- In some instances, PHAs may provide certain supportive services to landlords. These activities may include **aiding in advertising rental units; providing incentive or bonus payments to landlords; or connecting landlords with potential tenants.**

HCV Unit Type*

- 24.6% are single family detached
- 11.4% are semi detached
- 17.2% are rowhouses/ townhouses
- 33.9% are low-rise buildings
- 10.3% are high-rise buildings
- 1.9% are manufactured homes

*Does not include MTW agency data.

HCV Unit Location

- 59.1% are in central cities
- 37.4% are in suburbs
- 2.9% are in rural areas

This data is current as of December 2020

Myth-Busting for HCV Landlords

“Landlords can’t charge HCV participants the same rent as their non-HCV tenants”

FALSE — Landlords can charge the full rent no matter who the tenant is. The housing authority must determine that the proposed rent is reasonable and is not higher than units in that area with similar amenities.

“HCV Voucher tenants are problem tenants”

FALSE — Actually, HCV tenants are typically long-term tenants, living in a unit for 7-8 years on average. There are no documented statistics showing that HCV participants are any more likely to damage units or not pay rent than are non-HCV tenants. Landlords use their own screening criteria and should screen HCV tenants as they would screen any other tenant to avoid problem tenants.

“It is almost impossible to evict a HCV tenant when they violate the lease.”

FALSE — HCV tenants are bound by the terms of their rental agreements and are subject to eviction as is any non-HCV tenant.

“If you accept one HCV Program tenant, then all of your units must be rented to HCV Program tenants.”

FALSE — Renting unit(s) to HCV tenants does not in itself further obligate you to rent to other HCV tenants. For each vacancy, you should follow your established policies for screening prospective tenants.

Landlord Participation in the HCV Program is Free

Landlords do not pay to maintain compliance with the program, though in limited instances PHAs may charge for re-inspections after inspection violations have been found.

The role of the landlord in the HCV program is to lease decent, safe and sanitary housing to a tenant at a reasonable rent. The housing unit must pass the program’s housing quality standards (HQS) and be maintained up to those standards as long as the owner receives housing assistance payments (HAPs).

Benefits of the Housing Choice Voucher Program For Landlords

- **You will get timely and dependable payments from the public housing authority (PHA).** Participating, compliant landlords will receive timely and dependable housing assistance payments (HAP) each month once the HAP contract and lease are signed.
- **You will get your full rental payment.** When a HCV tenant’s income permanently changes, the portion of rent paid by the PHA and the tenant is adjusted to reflect this change. This provides financial protection to landlords in that if a HCV tenant’s income decreases, there is a process for the PHA to pay a larger portion of the rent to the landlord so the landlord continues to receive a full rental payment.
- **You will receive regular inspections.** Some landlords appreciate the routine inspections because they provide an opportunity to check on the condition of the unit. This can result in identifying maintenance needs that may have otherwise gone unnoticed for some time. Landlords that own or manage properties across wide geographies in particular tend to appreciate the value in having a routine, objective inspection of their rental units.
- **You may request annual reasonable rent increases.** Compliant landlords may request a rent increase at the annual anniversary of the HAP contract by written notice to the PHA.
- **You have the opportunity to help low-income elderly, disabled, and veteran households, as well as families with children by providing affordable housing.** More than 50 percent of vouchers serve elderly or non-elderly disabled families. About 45 percent of vouchers assist single-parent families.

Interested in becoming a Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Landlord?

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Contact Your Local Public Housing Authority (PHA)

Landlords who would like to rent to voucher holders should contact their local PHA(s). The PHA may provide you details on the local process and the method for posting your vacant units. The PHA may also share locally used websites or platforms for advertising available rental units.

Select a Tenant

The PHA admits eligible families to its HCV program. Select and approve one of these voucher holders based on your own rental criteria, then fill out the voucher holder's Request for Tenancy Approval form. The PHA must determine that the proposed rent is reasonable compared to similar units in the marketplace and not higher than those paid by unassisted tenants on the premises.

Make Sure Housing Meets Minimum Standards

An inspector will conduct an HQS inspection. All housing units with HCV tenants must meet the following thirteen (13) HQS performance requirements both at commencement of assisted occupancy and throughout the assisted tenancy:

- Sanitary facilities
- Food preparation and refuse disposal
- Space and security
- Thermal environment
- Illumination and electricity
- Structure and materials
- Interior air quality
- Water supply
- Lead-based paint
- Access
- Site and neighborhood
- Sanitary conditions
- Smoke detectors

Sign Lease and HAP Contract, and Start Receiving Payments

Once you and the tenant sign a lease and you submit the signed lease to your local PHA, you will receive a HAP contract from the PHA to sign. Once the HAP contract between you and the PHA is executed, you will begin to receive monthly HAPs from the PHA and the remainder of the rent payment from the tenant.



Contact Us

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Housing Quality Standards (HQS) Biennial Inspection Flowchart

Biennial Inspections

Per [24 CFR 982.405](#), HUD requires that PHAs inspect each unit at least biennially (or triennially for some small rural PHAs). However, PHAs may choose to inspect more frequently (annually). PHAs will outline their inspection policy and procedures in their PHA Administrative Plan. Landlords may want to review HUD's list of [Frequently Asked Questions](#) about HQS. Landlords may also want to contact their PHA(s), as they may be able to find useful information such as common HQS non-life-threatening (NLT) and life-threatening deficiencies.

