Housing Choice Voucher Program FAQ's

The housing choice voucher program is the government's major program for assisting very-low-income families to afford decent, safe, and sanitary housing in the private market. Participants are able to find their own housing, including apartments, townhouses, and single-family homes. The participant is free to choose any private rental housing that meets the requirements of the program. **Section 8** housing choice vouchers are federally funded through the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and are administered locally by public housing agencies (PHAs) across the state.

A family that is issued a housing voucher is responsible for finding a suitable housing unit of the family's choice where the owner agrees to rent under the program. **This unit may include the family's present residence.**
Rental units must meet minimum standards of quality and safety as determined by HUD. A housing subsidy is paid by the PHA to the landlord directly on behalf of the participating family. The family then pays the difference between the actual rent charged by the landlord and the amount subsidized by the program.

Who is eligible?

Eligibility for a housing choice voucher is determined based on the household's annual gross income and the Public Housing Agency's definition of a family. Participation is limited to U.S. citizens and specified categories of non-citizens who have eligible immigration status.

In general, the family's income may not exceed 50% of the median income for the county or metropolitan area in which the family chooses to live. [By law, a PHA must provide 75 percent of its vouchers to applicants whose incomes do not exceed 30 percent of the area median income.] Median income levels are published annually by HUD and vary by location within the state.

During the application process, information on family composition, income, and assets will be collected by the PHA. The PHA will verify this information and use it to determine the family's eligibility and the amount of their housing assistance payment. If the PHA determines that a family is eligible, the PHA will place the family on a waiting list.

Once a family is chosen from the waiting list, the PHA will contact them and issue them a housing voucher.

HUD requires the housing authority to deny assistance if:

- any member of household has ever been convicted of drug-related criminal activity for the production or manufacture of methamphetamine in any location
- any household member is currently registered as a sex offender under a State registration requirement

How do I apply?

The Washington County Housing Authority will open the waiting list to accept applications when most people on the waiting list have been served. When the list is about to be opened, a notice will be placed in local newspapers and media outlets as well as this website.

How does the application process work?

Section 8 is a Federal program administered nationally by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Individuals or households in need of rental assistance must first place their name on the Housing Authority Section 8 Voucher Waiting List. When your family reaches the top of the list, you will then be asked to complete an application to determine your eligibility for the Housing Choice Voucher program (HCV).

Will I need to produce any documentation?

Yes, the HA representative will request whatever documentation is needed (e.g., birth certificates, tax returns) to verify the information given on your application. The PHA will also rely on direct verification from your employer, etc. You will be asked to sign a form to authorize release of pertinent information to the PHA.

When will I be notified?

An HA has to provide written notification. If the HA determines that you are eligible, your name will be put on a waiting list, unless the HA is able to assist you immediately.

Once your name is reached on the waiting list, the HA will contact you. If it is determined that you are ineligible, the HA must say why and, if you wish, you can request an informal hearing.

How is rent determined?

Rent is determined based on household income. Typically, renters pay about 30% of adjusted income, or 10% of gross household income. Rent is calculated in accordance with HUD regulations.

What if someone in my family does not have a photo ID?

Photo IDs must be submitted by everyone in your household over the age of 18.

What if someone in my family does not have a social security number/card?

All members of your family are required to have and provide a social security card, if they have a social security number. If you cannot find your card, or you have never had a social security number, copies of your green card, or a receipt showing you have purchased a replacement social security card will be accepted.
In the chance that someone in your family does not have a social security number, a signed certification must be submitted to verify they have no number.

To apply for a Social Security card, click here: [Social Security Number and Card | SSA]

What if someone in my family does not have a birth certificate?

Birth certificates must also be submitted by everyone in your family, with the exception of those under the age of 6. Purchase receipts from the State Health Dept will be accepted to show you have purchased a replacement certificate if you cannot find/do not have one.

Birth certificate applications are available at: Birth Certificates (pa.gov)

How long may I remain on the Section 8 program?

The program currently allows you to continue receiving housing assistance as long as you are income-eligible and are fulfilling your tenant obligations established by HUD for the program. You will no longer be eligible for assistance once your income rises to the point that your portion of rent matches or exceeds the full amount of rent and stays that way for a period of 6 months. You can also be asked to leave the program if you have violated rules or regulations established by HUD and the Housing Authority.

Can I move and continue receiving housing choice voucher assistance?

A family's housing needs change over time with changes in family size, job locations, and for other reasons. The housing choice voucher program is designed to allow families to move without the loss of housing assistance.
Moves are permissible as long as the family notifies the PHA ahead of time, terminates its existing lease within the lease provisions, and finds acceptable alternate housing.

Under the HCV program, new voucher-holders may choose a unit anywhere in the United States if the family lived in the jurisdiction of the PHA issuing the voucher when the family applied for assistance, this is called Portability.

Those new voucher-holders not living within the jurisdiction of the PHA at the time the family applied for housing assistance must initially lease a unit within that jurisdiction for the first twelve (12) months of assistance.
A family that wishes to move to another PHA's jurisdiction must consult with the PHA that currently administers its housing assistance to verify the procedures for moving.

Local preferences and waiting list - what are they and how do they affect me?

Since the demand for housing assistance often exceeds the limited resources available to HUD and the local housing agencies, long waiting periods are common. In fact, a PHA may close its waiting list when it has more families on the list than can be assisted in the near future.

PHAs may establish local preferences for selecting applicants from its waiting list. For example, PHAs may give a preference to a family who is:

(1) homeless or living in substandard housing

(2) paying more than 50% of its income for rent, or

(3) involuntarily displaced.

Families who qualify for any such local preferences move ahead of other families on the list who do not qualify for any preference. Each PHA has the discretion to establish local preferences to reflect the housing needs and priorities of its particular community.

Sources: www.hud.gov , www.pa.gov , www.ssa.gov ,