



Housing Choice Voucher Program

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Housing Choice Voucher Program?

The Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program, formerly referred to as Section 8, is the federal government's major program for helping eligible households rent safe, healthy and affordable homes by paying some or all of a voucher holder's rental costs. Administered by RIHousing, the program assists low-income individuals and families in obtaining and affording privately owned, market rental housing.

How does the HCV Program work?

This type of subsidy is tenant-based, meaning the assistance is tied to the individual rather than the property. The program provides housing assistance in the form of a "voucher" so tenants can find a home that fits their needs. Under this program, families find their own rental apartment and use the voucher to pay for all or a portion of the rent.

How are rents determined in the HCV Program?

Tenants are required to pay 30-40% of their gross household income for rent and utilities. Regulations prohibit families from paying more than 40% of their adjusted monthly income. RIHousing calculates the family share of the rent by annualizing all income received in the household. Voucher holders must contribute at least \$50.00/month toward rent and utilities (minimum rent).

How are rents determined for rental units?

Fair Market Rents (FMR) are determined annually by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The FMR is used to determine the maximum rent that can be charged by landlords to participants of the HCV Program. The FMR varies based on bedroom size and the community in which the apartment is located.

What rental units qualify for the HCV Program?

All units must pass Housing Quality Standards (HQS) in order to qualify. The HQS inspection ensures that the unit is maintained in decent, safe, and sanitary condition.

What are the landlord/owner obligations?

The owner must agree to rent to the family and abide by the rules governing the program. Property owners are not permitted to refuse to participate because of illegal discrimination based on, for instance; a family's race, ethnicity, or disability. Landlords are permitted to screen applicants for income, rent payment history, lease compliance and criminal background. The rent charged by the owner must be 'reasonable,' which means the owner is prohibited from charging a voucher family more for the same unit than a family who is renting a similar unit without a voucher.



What are the roles of the tenants, landlords/owners and RIHousing?

Once RIHousing approves an eligible family's housing unit, the family and the landlord sign a lease, and at the same time, the landlord and RIHousing sign a Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) contract that runs for the same term as the lease. This means that everyone – the tenant, landlord and RIHousing – have obligations and responsibilities under the HCV program.

TENANTS: When a family selects a housing unit, and RIHousing approves the unit and lease, the family signs a lease with the landlord for at least one year. The tenant may be required to pay a security deposit to the landlord. After the first year, the landlord may initiate a new lease or allow the family to remain in the unit on a month-to-month lease. When the family is settled in a new home, the family is expected to comply with the lease and the program requirements, pay its share of rent on time, maintain the unit in good condition and notify RIHousing of any changes in income or family composition.

LANDLORDS/OWNERS: The role of the landlord/owner in the voucher program is to provide decent, safe, and sanitary housing to a tenant at a reasonable rent. The dwelling unit must pass the program's HQS inspection and be maintained up to those standards for as long as the owner receives housing assistance payments. The landlord is expected to provide the services agreed to as part of the lease signed with the tenant and the contract signed with RIHousing.

RIHOUSING: RIHousing administers the voucher program, providing families with housing assistance and entering into a contract with the landlord to provide housing assistance payments (HAP) on behalf of the family. If the landlord fails to meet the owner's obligations under the lease, RIHousing has the right to terminate assistance payments. RIHousing must reexamine the family's income and composition at least annually and must inspect each unit at least annually to ensure that it meets minimum housing quality standards. If a unit passes an HQS inspection, they are then inspected biennially (every 2 years).

Are there families who are not likely to find units with vouchers?

Yes, many families face barriers while searching for eligible housing. Families with very poor tenant histories or poor credit scores may not find owners willing to rent to them. In addition, very large families may have difficulty finding units that are large enough.

RIHousing is always searching for landlords willing to rent to families and individuals with barriers.

