

# SKILLS: HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER PROGRAM

The Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program allows low-income families to choose to lease or in some cases purchase safe, decent, and affordable privately-owned housing. HCV provides “tenant-based” rental assistance, so a family can move from one unit to another - the subsidy stays with the family.

## Concepts for HCV

### Housing Assistance Payment (HAP)

Under the HAP contract (the contract between the owner of the unit and the PHA), the family pays for a portion of the rent and utilities. The PHA provides the remainder to the landlord through the HAP.

### Portability

Eligible voucher holders may use their voucher to lease a unit anywhere in the United States where there is a housing agency operating an HCV program. If the receiving PHA decides to administer a voucher, they bill the initial PHA for the housing assistance payments. If the receiving PHA decides to absorb the voucher, the initial PHA is free to reissue the voucher.

### The Payment Standard

The Payment Standard sets the buying power of the voucher. It is set by a PHA, and is typically 90-110% of the HUD-published Fair Market Rent (FMR). It is a standard that reflects or is the amount of money generally needed to rent a moderately-priced unit dwelling in the local housing market.

### Rent Reasonableness

PHAs must have a rent reasonableness system and methodology for determining if the rent being requested by the owner is reasonable. They must ensure that it reflects the market – not too generous and not more restrictive than the actual local housing market.

### HCV Budgets

PHAs should have an HCV administrative budget. Revenue and expense reports should be reviewed each month by the board.

## KEY ACTIVITIES OF THE HCV PROGRAM

### Selecting Participants

- Taking applications
- Maintaining the wait-list
- Selecting applicants

### Leasing Vouchers

- Briefing participants
- Issuing vouchers
- Processing requests for tenancy approval

### Determining Tenant Rent

- Validating right income and deductions
- Annual and interim reexamination

### HQS Inspections

- Annual, new leases, special inspections
- Quality control inspections
- Enforcement: re-inspections, abatement

### Paying Landlords

- Maintaining HAP register
- Issuing checks or electronic payments

### Rent Reasonableness

- Determining market rent norms by neighborhood
- Assessing owner rent for individual units

## Strategies for Successful HCV Programs

Positive relationships with landlords participating in the HCV program are key. Strategies for **Landlord Outreach and Management** include:

- Reaching out to inform and recruit landlords by offering seminars or fairs, attending apartment association meetings, circulating a newsletter, etc.
- Enforcing acceptance of vouchers by Tax Credit properties.
- Establishing a HCV Program landlord group.
- Screening participants well so the PHA has a reputation for successful HCV placements.

Positive relationships with applicants and families participating in the HCV program are also very important. Strategies for **Applicant and Resident Outreach and Management** include:

- Updating your wait list periodically so that eligible families are prioritized quickly when vouchers become available;
- Informing and equipping families with information about how the program works through briefings;
- Providing strong case management and customer service to families;
- As appropriate, consider assistance programs to help with needs beyond their initial briefing to link applicants with landlords, transportation, support, and financial assistance.

The board is responsible for **Adopting Appropriate Policies and Plans** including:

- Admission and Continued Occupancy Policy
- PHA Plan
- HCV Administrative Plan, including policies on:
  - Resident selection
  - Rent reasonableness
  - Unit inspection
  - Approval processes

## HQS and SEMAP

HUD program regulations set forth basic housing quality standards (HQS) that all units must meet before assistance can be paid. HQS defines “standard housing” and establishes the minimum criteria necessary for the health and safety of residents. For a rental unit to qualify for HCV payments, the HQS measures must be met. HUD has a performance measurement tool, Section Eight Management Assessment Program (SEMAP), specifically for the HCV program. HQS measures are included in this assessment, among other indicators.