



Landlord's Guide to the Housing Choice Voucher (Mobile Section 8)

What is the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) 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.

How Does the HCV (Section 8) Program Work?

The HCV program (Section 8) is a federal assistance program to help low-income people pay their rent. Participants with housing choice vouchers find their own housing and pay a tenant portion based on a percentage of their income for rent. The PHA pays the landlord the rest of the contract rent.

In Massachusetts, it is against the law to refuse to rent to someone just because the person has a Section 8 voucher.

These are the steps involved in renting to an HCV participant:

- A family with a current Housing Choice Voucher views the unit and wants to rent it
- The landlord/property manager may screen the applicant to make sure they are suitable.
- The landlord/property manager agrees to lease to the tenants and contact the PHA Leased Housing Office for approval.
- The PHA Leased Housing Office sends the landlord/property manager a Request for Tenancy Approval packet.
- The PHA Leased Housing Office verifies:
 1. The family can afford the rent
 2. The rent is reasonable compared to other rents in the community
- The Leased Housing Office schedules an inspection for the unit to see if it qualifies under Housing Quality Standards (HQS).
- After the unit passes inspection, the Leased Housing Office sends the landlord/property manager and tenant the Housing Assistance Contract packet.
- The landlord/property manager and tenant sign the contract and submit to the Leased Housing Office.
- The landlord/property manager executes an initial lease agreement, which must be at least one year for new admissions, and sends a copy of the signed version to the Leased Housing Office.
- The family pays its portion of the rent and the PHA pays the rest.

How can I list my Unit to HCV Participants?

1. If you would like to advertise your unit to HCV participants, please contact the Watertown Housing Authority (WHA) Leased Housing Office. WHA will distribute your listing as a lead to any active voucher-searchers.
2. Listings can be placed online at www.AffordableHousing.com.
3. You may also use the HUD Housing Authority Listing to find housing authorities local to you in the area: https://www.hud.gov/sites/dfiles/PIH/documents/PHA_Contact_Report_MA.pdf

Does the Housing Authority Screen HCV Participants?

All HCV participants are screened via CORI Background check as part of the eligibility process. WHA does not do any additional screening and cannot share CORI Background check results. Landlord/property managers are responsible for screening at their own discretion, just as they would for market-rate tenants.

If information is available, WHA can disclose how many individuals are on the voucher, current/previous addresses, and current/previous landlords.

Leasing Restrictions

WHA will not approve a unit to be leased if the owner is the parent, child, grandparent, or sibling of any member of the assisted family household. WHA may approve the unit for lease-up if it determines that approving the unit would provide reasonable accommodation for a family member who is a person with disabilities (as defined in 24 CFR 8.3 and in section 3(b)(3)(E) of the United States Housing Act of 1937).

Security Deposits

Security deposits and any additional monies such as parking fees, pet fees, or apartment insurance are not paid for by WHA. Landlords/property managers must collect this directly from the tenant. WHA's Leased Housing Office has no responsibility for damages, unpaid tenant rent, or other claims the landlord/property may have against the tenant.

New Admission Leases

The landlord/property manager must execute and sign an initial lease with the tenant for a minimum of one year. The lease should include:

- names of the landlord and tenant
- address of the rental unit
- term of the lease and how it will be renewed
- monthly rent amount

- which utilities are paid by the tenant
- which appliances must be provided by the tenant
- the lease may include any other conditions that are normally included, as long as they do not violate any laws

Housing Quality Standards (HQS) – Inspections

Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program regulations at 24 CFR Part 982 set forth basic housing quality standards (HQS) which all units must meet before assistance can be paid on behalf of a family and at least annually throughout the term of the assisted tenancy. HQS define "standard housing" and establish the minimum criteria for the health and safety of program participants. Current HQS regulations consist of 13 key aspects of housing quality, performance requirements, and acceptability criteria to meet each performance requirement. HQS includes requirements for all housing types, including single and multi-family dwelling units, as well as specific requirements for special housing types such as manufactured homes, congregate housing, single room occupancy, shared housing, and group residences.

More information can be found on the HUD website at:

https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/public_indian_housing/programs/hcv/hqs

A family will not be allowed to lease the unit until the landlord/property manager has made any needed repairs and the unit passes the inspection.

The unit will be re-inspected each year. If problems are found, repairs must be made within the time allotted, or Housing Assistance Payments will be stopped.

Lead-Based Paint

If the building was built prior to 1978 and is to be occupied by a family with children under the age of 6, you must provide a Letter of Compliance from a licensed de-leading inspector. It must state that the unit and relevant common areas are in compliance with Massachusetts Lead Law, MGH c11s190-91. If the building was constructed after 1978, a copy of the original permit is required.

Contract Rent – What Can be Charged

Contract rent must be reasonable compared to other units of similar size in the community. The PHA will conduct a rent reasonableness study once a Request for Tenancy Approval packet is submitted.

If the gross rent (rent plus utilities) for the unit is less than or equal to the payment standard, the tenant pays 30% of their monthly income for rent (their tenant portion) and the PHA pays the remaining amount. If the rent is higher, the tenant must make up the difference. However, they are not allowed to pay more than 40% of their income for rent upon new admission.

Contract rent increases can be made once a year. Landlord/property managers must get approval from the WHA Leased Housing Office and must submit a request at least 60 days prior to when the rent change would be in effect (if approved by WHA).

Payments to Landlords

WHA sends Housing Assistance Payments (HAP) every 1st of the month via Direct Deposit – Direct Deposit is required for Housing Assistance Payments at WHA. If the 1st falls on a weekend or holiday, the HAP payment is immediately processed the following business day. WHA will continue to do so as long as the tenant remains eligible for the Housing Choice Voucher and the unit meets HCV program requirements and standards.

The landlord/property manager is responsible for collecting the tenant portion of the rent each month.

Please note that WHA conducts Annual Recertifications for participants, which will likely change the tenant portion and HAP. Occasionally, household composition and income may change for a tenant before the Annual Recertification is done. In this case, Interim Recertification will be processed. If the tenant portion and/or HAP changes, the landlord/property manager and tenant will be mailed a rent adjustment letter.

Eviction

Landlords/property managers may evict a HCV tenant in the same way they would evict a market-rent tenant. The same laws apply.

If an NTQ or eviction notice has been distributed to the tenant, please send a copy to WHA.