

HUMAN TRAFFICKING HOUSING OPTIONS: HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER PROGRAMS

WHAT ARE HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER (HCV) PROGRAMS?

The [Housing Choice Voucher](#) (HCV) program (also known as “Section 8”) is a rental assistance program funded by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and administered through local Public Housing Agencies (PHA). The HCV program provides vouchers to pay part of the rent for recipients. A key aspect of the program is that the voucher travels with the recipient, and is not attached to any particular unit. Therefore, the recipient is generally free to live where they like.

KEY TERMS

HCV- Housing Choice Voucher

PHA- Public Housing Agency

HUD- Department of Housing and Urban Development

HAP- Housing Assistance Payment

ELIGIBILITY

Income Requirements

Generally, individuals and families with gross incomes below 50% of their area’s median income are eligible. HUD determines median income levels for each area annually. The calculations are updated annually and posted on the [HUD website](#).

Immigration Status Requirements

The HCV program is limited to US citizens, legal permanent residents, and other eligible noncitizens, including victims of trafficking, VAWA self-petitioners, and refugees or asylees. Mixed families (with eligible and ineligible members) can qualify for a HCV, but the assistance will be based on the number of eligible family members only.

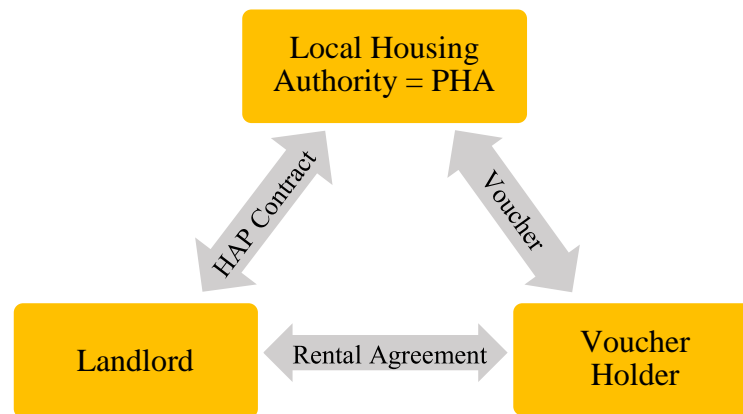
Federal law requires that all eligible members of a HCV household provide Social Security Numbers (SSNs) to the PHA, which shares this information with HUD. Ineligible family members, however, are not required to provide SSNs.

IS THE HCV PROGRAM A GOOD FIT FOR HUMAN TRAFFICKING SURVIVORS?

The HCV program does not generally provide immediate support. Voucher waitlists are typically lengthy, with some as long as 7 to 10 years. Many waitlists are closed for years at a time. However, the HCV can be an important part of the long-term housing plan for trafficking survivors, especially those who will be reunited with family members in the future.

Providers can review the program requirements with the survivor to determine their interest.

HOW DOES THE HCV PROGRAM WORK?



The Application

Service providers can contact their local PHA to know if the waitlist is open. You can find the list of local PHAs on [HUD's website](#). The waitlist for this program is often only open for a limited time which varies year by year. Applicants will submit a Section 8 HCV application with their local PHA during the open submission period. An application will typically ask for information regarding all eligible household members, including names, dates of birth, Social Security Numbers, and gross incomes. Applications are free and available online, by mail, or at the PHA's office.

Paying the Rent

Individuals and families pay approximately 30% of their adjusted income as rent to the landlord, and the HCV pays the difference up to the maximum rent for the unit, which is set by HUD. Once approved into the HCV program, individuals and families have at least 60 days to secure an apartment. If the household has zero income, many PHAs will pay the rent in full.

Program Requirements

Requirements include: annual recertification, annual inspections of rental units, any lease obligations, and allowing the owner to perform any needed repairs. Once a PHA approves a housing unit, the tenant and the landlord sign a lease and, at the same time, the landlord and the PHA sign a Housing Assistance Payments (HAP) contract that runs for the same term as the lease. This means that everyone - the tenant, landlord and PHA - have obligations and responsibilities under the voucher program.

Tenant's Obligations

After a tenant selects a housing unit, and the PHA approves the unit and lease, the individual 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, allow the family to remain in the unit on a month-to-month lease, or decide not to renew the lease.

Once in the housing unit, the tenants 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.

Tips for Service Providers

Supportive services that accompany housing subsidies are keys to success. Participants benefit from assistance navigating the housing application process. This includes reviewing the PHA requirements, accompanying them to appointments, advocating for language access, providing assistance with locating a unit, advocating with the landlord, and creating a housing-specific service plan. As a service provider, you play an essential role in securing and maintaining housing. Below are some considerations to keep in mind from anti-trafficking service providers who have been working with the HCV program.

- You can apply for the HCV program at a PHA located in a state or area where you are not currently residing. The program doesn't require residency at the time of application.
- Make sure the application is complete. Incomplete applications may be returned or terminated, adding significant time to the application process.
- Generally, you will have to live in the jurisdiction (locality) of the issuing PHA for at least one year. However, there are exceptions where a move is necessary for safety reasons. This is referred to as "porting out". Work with your local PHA to learn more.
- Some programs include a utility allowance. If landlords cover the utilities, they receive a higher rental payment. If the voucher holder or family is responsible for their own utilities, they may receive a larger voucher to offset the cost.
- When searching for a housing unit, keep in mind that income-based discrimination does happen, and is illegal. When navigating conversations with landlords, keep these things in mind:
 - Tour the housing unit BEFORE you talk about the voucher program.
 - Explain the program to the landlord. Sometimes landlords are just not familiar with it.
 - Get assistance from your PHA affiliate if you need help.
- The housing unit must meet federal Housing Quality Standards (i.e. sanitary facilities and conditions, heating and cooling, electricity, structure and materials, interior air quality, water supply, security, and smoke/carbon monoxide detectors). The survivor and the landlord should be aware of this requirement.
- Review the family obligations with the survivor and all members of the household prior to applying. Ensure they understand the rules and are willing and able to comply with all of them. Termination from the HCV program could have devastating consequences (e.g. trauma, long-term ban from subsidized housing). A survivor's ability to make an informed decision that takes benefits, risks, and requirements into account is critical.
- Lease violations can be grounds for termination of a voucher. Examples of lease violations can include, but are not limited to: failure to pay rent; failure to maintain property; violent crime on the property. If there is an incident in which the trafficker is responsible for damage to the property or violent incident, contact the PHA to ensure those actions don't impact the survivor's voucher. The lease will lay out details of what is allowable and unallowable. The survivor should read the lease carefully before signing.