

HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY SECTION 8 VOUCHER PROGRAM FACT SHEET

WHAT ARE HOUSING CHOICE (SECTION 8) VOUCHERS?

The Housing Choice (Section 8) Voucher Program is the federal government's major program for assisting very low-income families, the elderly, and the disabled to rent decent, safe, and sanitary housing in the private market. Since the rental assistance is provided on behalf of the family or individual, participants are able to find and lease privately owned housing, including single-family homes, townhouses and apartments. The participant is free to choose any housing that meets the requirements of the program.

Housing Choice (Section 8) Vouchers are administered locally by Hillsborough County Health & Social Services Department (PHA). We receive federal funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to administer this voucher program. A family that has been certified as eligible is issued a rental voucher and is responsible for finding and selecting a suitable rental unit of their family's choice. This unit may include the family's present residence. Rental units must be inspected by the PHA and pass the minimum standards of health and safety. A rental subsidy is paid to the landlord directly by the PHA 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. However, the rental paid by the family cannot exceed 40% of their income per month on new leases.

AM I ELIGIBLE?

Eligibility for a rental voucher is determined by the PHA based on the total annual gross income, family size, and is limited to U.S. citizens and specified categories of non-citizens who have eligible immigration status. 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. Median income levels are published by HUD and vary by location. During the application process, the PHA will collect information on family income, assets, and family composition. The PHA will verify this information with other local agencies, your employer and bank, and will use the information to determine program eligibility and the amount of the rental assistance payment. If the PHA determines that your family is eligible, you will be given a voucher along with instructions on finding a unit and having it inspected.

APPLICATION FOR THE WAITING LIST

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, PHA may close its waiting list when it has more families on the list than can be assisted in the near future. Hillsborough County selects families from the waiting list in the order of preferences. The preferences are:

- Elderly ~ Head or Spouse 62 years or older;
- Permanently Disabled ~ Head, Spouse or child receiving Social Security, SSI, or VA benefits;
- Working Family ~ Head or Spouse working 20 hours or more per week or currently enrolled in a government employment-training program as part of the Welfare Reform Act of 1998.

Families who qualify for these preferences will move ahead of other families on the waiting lists who do not qualify for any preference. Non-Preference families will be selected by date and time of application.

RENTAL VOUCHERS--HOW DO THEY FUNCTION?

The Housing Choice Voucher Program places the choice of housing in the hands of the individual family. A very low-income family who has been selected by the PHA to participant is encouraged to consider several housing choices to secure the best rental housing for their needs. The rental unit must meet an acceptable level of health and safety before the PHA can approve payments to landlords over the lease terms, the PHA must inspect the dwelling and review the lease for approval. A rental voucher holder is also advised of the unit size for which they are eligible, based on family size and composition, and the applicable rent levels. The PHA determines a payment standard which is used to calculate the amount of rental assistance a family will receive, but does not affect the amount of rent a landlord may charge or the family may pay. A family that receives a rental voucher can select a unit, which rents below or above the payment standard. The rental voucher family must pay more than 30% of its monthly-adjusted gross income for rent and utilities if the rent is greater than the payment standard. However, the family would pay less than 30% of their monthly-adjusted gross income if the total rent was less than the payment standard. The family will not be approved for a unit where the initial family portion of the rent will be 40% of the family's adjusted monthly gross income or greater.

THE RENT SUBSIDY

Under the Housing Choice Voucher Program, a family may choose a unit that rents for more than the payment standard and may pay more or less than 30% of its monthly-adjusted gross income for rent. The PHA calculate the maximum amount of rental assistance allowable, which is the difference between the applicable payment standard and 30% of the family's monthly adjusted gross income. The amount of rental assistance paid by the PHA changes with the payment standard while the amount the tenant pays varies with the actual rent. For example, if a family locates a unit that rents below the payment standard, the family would pay less than 30% of its monthly-adjusted gross income for rent. On the other hand, if a family decides to rent a unit above the payment standard, it would pay over 30% of its monthly-adjusted gross income for rent. The family's rent share also changes when its income or family circumstances change.

CAN I MOVE AND CONTINUE TO RECEIVE ASSISTANCE?

A family's housing needs change over time, which 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 rental assistance. Moves are permissible as long as the family notifies the PHA ahead of time, terminates its existing lease within the appropriate provisions, and finds acceptable alternate housing. All new voucher holders must initially lease a unit within jurisdiction for the first twelve months of assistance. A family that wishes to move to another PHA's jurisdiction must consult with the PHA that currently administers their rental assistance to verify the procedures for moving.

ROLES ~ TENANT, LANDLORD, HOUSING AGENCY,

AND HUD.

Once a PHA approves an eligible family's lease and housing unit, the family and the landlord sign a lease and, at the same time, the landlord and the PHA sign a housing assistance contract which runs for the same term as the lease. This means that everyone—tenant, landlord and PHA—has obligations and responsibilities within the voucher program.

Tenant's Role: when a family selects a housing unit, and the PHA 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. 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, maintains the unit in good condition and notify the PHA of any changes in income or family composition.

Landlord's Role: The role of the landlord 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 housing standards and be maintained up to those standards as long as the owner receives housing assistance payments. In addition, the landlord is expected to provide the services agreed to as part of the lease signed with the tenant and the contract signed with the PHA.

Housing Authority's Role: The PHA administers the voucher program locally. The PHA provides a family with the rental assistance that enables the family to seek out suitable housing and the PHA enters into a contract with the landlord to provide rental assistance payments on behalf of the family. If the landlord fails to meet his/her obligations under the lease, the PHA has the right to abate and terminate assistance payments.

HUD's Role: To cover the cost of the program, HUD provides funds to allow PHAs to make housing assistance payments on behalf of the families. HUD also pays the PHA a fee for the costs of administering the program. When additional funds become available to assist new families, HUD invites PHAs to submit applications for funds for additional rental vouchers. Applications are then reviewed and funds awarded to the selected PHAs on a competitive basis.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION CONTACT:

Hillsborough County
Health & Social Services Department
Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program
3402 N. 22nd Street, Suite 223
Tampa, Florida 33605
(813) 273-3794

Web Site: Hillsboroughcounty.org