



Landlord Guide to Housing Choice Voucher Program

Thank you for taking interest in partnering with us in our Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program. This guide is designed to provide property owners and managers with information about participation in the HCV Program.

Overview

The Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCV) is a federally regulated and funded program through the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The objective of the program is to help low to moderate income families rent housing that is in a decent, safe, and sanitary condition. The Program provides direct monthly payments to the property owner on behalf of the qualified family to cover a portion of the rent.

Herein, the owner and manager will be referred to as “Landlord” and the Berks County Housing Authority will be referred to as “BCHA”. The landlord will sign a Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) Contract with BCHA, in addition to a lease agreement with the tenant.

The family’s contribution will be based on household income and family size. Families will pay approximately 30% of their monthly adjusted gross income.

How the Program Works

A family applies to the BCHA to participate in the program. “Family” as defined by HUD includes, but is not limited to the following, a single person, who may/may not be an elderly person, disabled person, or any other single person; or a group of persons residing together. Such groups include but are not limited to a family with or without children, an elderly family, a near-elderly family, a disabled family, or the remaining member of a tenant family. The applicant family is placed on a waiting list. When there are openings, the family is contacted. Upon determination of eligibility they will be invited to a briefing. During the briefing information will be provided concerning program regulations and family responsibilities.

Upon the family’s eligibility, they may find a unit to lease and discuss the program with the landlord and submit the Request for Tenancy Approval Form to completed and returned to BCHA. BCHA will determine if the unit will work within the allowable Maximum Rent for the family. If so, BCHA will schedule and conduct an inspection of the unit. After the unit has passed the inspection, BCHA will notify applicant and landlord of unit approval, and the HAP Contract will be executed. Assistance will begin on the effective date stated on the lease and HAP Contract.



Program Integrity

While most owners and landlords who participate in the HCV Program comply with the rules and the terms of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) Contract, occasionally some do not. The goal of BCHA is to prevent any misunderstanding that may result from the owner's violations by making sure that the program rules are understood.

Common Owner Violations

1. **Failure to maintain the unit-** The owner is responsible for normal maintenance and upkeep of the unit. Repairs should be made in a timely manner.
2. **Accepting payments after a tenant vacates the units-** if the family moves (leaves, dies) the owner must notify BCHA immediately and return all money received after the family vacates the unit.
3. **Demanding or accepting side payments-** since BCHA determines the amount the family pays for rent; any additional payments must be approved by BCHA.
4. **Failure to collect tenant's share of rent-** The owner is responsible for collecting the tenant's portion of rent every month including any late fees that apply.

Tenant Selection and Screening

BCHA, BY PROVIDING HOUSING ASSISTANCE IN NO WAY WARRANTS A FAMILY'S SUITABILITY AS A TENANT. As in the private market, it is the responsibility of the landlord to screen and approve a prospective tenant. BCHA strongly encourages all landlords to thoroughly "qualify" all prospective tenants.

The Payment Standard:

- ❖ Is established by BCHA and is set between (90% and 110%) of the HUD established *fair market rent (FMR)* for the program and the area.
- ❖ Is based on the occupancy guidelines established by HUD
- ❖ Depends on the family composition and the bedroom size for the unit. For example, the payment standard is higher for families requiring 3-bedroom units than for families requiring 1-bedroom units.

For families initially leasing a unit, the family's share of rent cannot exceed 40% of the family's monthly adjusted income. This will make the unit unaffordable.

In addition, the BCHA will also evaluate the rent reasonableness of the housing unit. The proposed rent will be compared to the rent for other units on the market of similar size, features, and amenities.

Security Deposits and last month's rent

Landlords may collect a security deposit that is not more than amounts collected for unassisted units. BCHA does not assist in paying for security deposits or last month's rent if required.



Inspection for Housing Quality Standards (HQS)

All assisted units will be inspected prior to occupancy and at bi-annual intervals to determine that they meet safe, decent, and sanitary conditions as established by HUD. The following is a partial list of HQS requirement:

Living Room:	An operable window, two electrical outlets, or one outlet and one permanent light fixture.
Kitchen:	Hot and cold running water, stove and refrigerator in operating condition, adequate food preparation and storage space, one outlet and one permanent fixture.
Bathrooms:	An operable window or operating fan/vent, wash basin and tub or shower, hot and cold running water.
Bedrooms:	An operable window, two electrical outlets, or one outlet and one permanent light fixture.
Heating/Plumbing:	Proper ventilation for heating and cooling pressure relief valve and discharge line on water heater, adequate plumbing, and sewer connections.
General:	All exterior doors and windows must lock and be free from breaks, stairs and halls free from hazards, no peeling or cracking lead-based paint, and no infestation. Must have working smoke detectors for each floor.

If the unit does not pass inspection, an appointment for re-inspection of the failing items will be necessary. The (HAP) Housing Assistance Contract cannot be executed and no payment will be made until the unit meets HQS. The landlord will be notified of the failed items in need of repair by the inspector once the inspection is complete.

Most common failed conditions are:

- Nonfunctional smoke detectors or carbon monoxide detector
- Missing or cracked electrical outlet covers or plates
- No railing where required
- Peeling exterior and interior paint
- Tripping hazards caused by permanently installed floor coverings (carpets/vinyl)
- Severely cracked or broken windowpanes
- No locks on windows
- Inoperable stove burners or range hoods
- Missing burner control knobs
- Inoperable bathroom fans or no ventilation in bathroom
- Leaking faucets or plumbing
- No temperature/pressure-relief valve on water heater or there is no discharge line on the water heater

The landlord must agree to maintain the property to continuously to meet (HQS) Housing Quality Standards during the term of the contract.



Lease Agreement and Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) Contract

The initial term of the lease must be for at least one (1) year. The HAP Contract is a legal agreement between the landlord and BCHA. It outlines the landlord's rights and responsibilities as a participant in the Housing Choice Voucher Program. The initial term of the HAP Contract must be the same term as the lease. Landlords or tenants who wish to terminate tenancy prior to lease expiration may do so by mutual consent and by following procedures in accordance with Pennsylvania Law. All notices to your tenant must be sent to BCHA.

Tenant-Landlord Disputes

Despite the best of intentions, at times problems arise between landlords and tenants. As a Landlord you are entirely responsible for the management of your property and compliance/enforcement of your lease. If a tenant violates the lease, the landlord should follow the same procedures as with other residents. Landlords who wish to evict should provide BCHA with copies of all legal notices and follow the eviction process as outlined in the HAP Contract and then proceed with eviction in accordance with Pennsylvania Law.

Maintenance of Unit & Collection of Tenant's Share of Rent

The landlord is responsible to make regular inspections of the rental unit to ensure the upkeep and maintenance of the premises meets the landlord's standards and expectations. BCHA is not responsible for the cost of any damages or unpaid rent.

The Tenant is solely responsible for payment of the tenant portion of rent. BCHA will not assume the obligation for the tenant's portion of the rent.

Final Paperwork

The following paperwork will be emailed to you and needs to be returned (hard copies/originals) with a copy of the signed lease. All paperwork must be executed prior to payment.

1. Housing Assistance Payment Contract-A
2. Housing Assistance Payment Contract-B
3. Housing Assistance Payment Contract-C Tenancy Addendum which must be attached to your lease.
4. Owner Certification
5. Lead information disclosure statement
6. Utility Addendum

Housing Assistance Payments

After the HAP Contract and lease are signed, BCHA makes the initial HAP payment and continues to make monthly payments to the owner as long as the family continues to meet eligibility criteria, resides in the unit and the housing unit qualified under the program.

BCHA will send the landlord and tenant a letter to verify the amount we will pay the landlord and the amount the tenant will pay monthly. If there are any changes, the landlord will continue to be updated by a letter.



Landlord Responsibilities

1. Screen and select tenants according to owner's preferences.
BCHA **DOES NOT** screen tenants.
2. Normal landlord functions during lease term, including maintenance, rent collection.
3. Comply with the Equal Opportunity Requirements & Fair Housing Laws.
4. Collect amounts due from tenants, as stated in the lease (rent, security deposits, and other tenant charges, etc.)
5. Enforce the lease.
6. Pay for owner supplied utilities and services.
7. Maintain the units to Housing Quality Standards. If the owner fails to do so, BCHA may terminate, suspend, hold or reduce the rental assistance payments, which cannot be collected from your tenant up to and including termination of the HAP Contract.
8. Comply with the HAP Contract.
9. Promptly provide copies of all notices given to your tenant including compliance, rent changes, and eviction, etc. to BCHA.

Steps for interested owners

There is no application/pre-approval process for owners to participate in the BCHA Housing Choice Voucher Program. To make an apartment/house available to voucher holders, the apartment/house should be listed with PA Housing Search, <http://www.pahousingsearch.com/> or Affordable Housing www.AffordableHousing.com.

The BCHA will not maintain a separate listing of apartments/houses. Landlords may also publish an ad in the local newspaper noting "Will accept Section 8". Please feel free to visit the Landlords & Managers section of our website, for additional information/resources.

If you decide to participate in the program, be prepared to furnish proof of legal ownership of any unit(s) that you offer under the program. This is one of HUD's requirements for participation.

In addition, the unit(s) must be located in the BCHA's jurisdiction, which is Berks County, **outside the city of Reading**. The HCV program in the city of Reading is administered by the Reading Housing Authority.

We look forward to working closely with you to promote safe, decent, and affordable housing for Berks County families.

Gwendolyn F. Didden, MHS
Executive Director
gdidden@berksha.org

Carolina Hernandez
HCV/Sec. 8 Coordinator
chernandez@berksha.org

