

Housing Choice Voucher Program

The Prince William County Office of Housing and Community Development (OHCD) is a public housing authority (PHA) that administers the federally funded Housing Choice Voucher Program through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The program is designed to provide affordable, safe, decent and sanitary rental housing for low-and moderate-income families. As vouchers become available, eligible families are called from the waiting list which opens periodically. Vouchers can be used anywhere in the United States, including the U. S. Virgin Islands, Guam and Puerto Rico.

The Housing Choice Voucher Program enables families to locate housing in the private rental market where landlords are willing to participate and where the rents are comparable to similar unassisted units and falls within the program's guidelines. When families begin renting assisted units, they must pay a minimum of 30%,

not to exceed 40%, of their monthly adjusted income towards rent and utilities. This calculation of assistance is done by a Housing Specialist.



Screening Procedures

OHCD screens families for participation in the program using income and household size. Landlords are screened to prove ownership of the property, and suitability for the program. There are HUD restrictions on owners who are related to household participants. The owner is responsible to screen potential tenants using the same procedures used for unassisted tenants. Any screening of tenants is subject to Fair Housing laws. For a brochure on Fair Housing laws, please call 703.792.7530.



Security Deposit

It is the responsibility of the tenant to pay the security deposit. The amount should be the same charged to non-program participants given the same circumstances (i.e. credit). Virginia State Law limits the security deposit amount to no more than two months' contract rent. Contract rent in the Housing Choice Voucher program is subject to PHA approval.



Does Any Lease Qualify?

Any approved lease may be used as long as the HUD Tenancy Addendum is used in conjunction with the lease. Leases are submitted to the tenant's assigned Housing Specialist for approval prior to executing the lease. A basic lease is available upon request. The initial lease term is for any assisted unit is one year. Upon renewal, owners and tenants can opt to renew for an additional year, alternate terms (i.e. 6 months) or month to month which is the legal default renewal lease term where no other term is specified.

Rent Payments

Rental payments to owners are the combination of both a tenant's portion and/or the portion designated to be paid by the PHA. Any breakdown or allocation of payment must be processed by the PHA. Payments are scheduled to reach owners by the first of each month. Payments for new leases may be delayed by approximately one month due to an initial processing time. Tenants must pay the amount of rent designated by their Housing Specialist, within the timeframe required by their lease. Active tenants cannot be held legally responsible for unpaid portions of rent due from the PHA to the owner. Owners can never collect additional monthly rent amounts from tenants more than the PHA designated monthly rent for the assisted unit.



Who Pays for Utilities?



The tenant must pay for any utilities designated by the lease. Utility deposits are also the responsibility of the tenant. It is both the tenant and landlord's responsibility to ensure that the utilities are put in the tenant's name. Failure to maintain working utilities for periods longer than 24 hours in an assisted unit is considered a violation of the Housing Choice Voucher program rules and regulations and grounds for termination of assistance.

Housing Quality Standards (HQS)

Federal regulations define basic Housing Quality Standards (HQS), which all assisted housing must meet before it can be rented with assistance from the Housing Choice Voucher program. These standards help protect families by assuring a basic level of acceptable housing. The property must be inspected before a lease can be entered into and will be inspected at least once a year to continue eligibility. Annual inspections are often scheduled in conjunction with the tenant's recertification schedule. When necessary, the Housing Specialist can request a re-inspection due to complaints or any other concerns. These standards must be maintained for the duration of participation in the Housing Choice Voucher program. If at any point a unit fails inspection, the landlord and/or tenant is given proper notice to correct the deficiency. If the problems are not corrected, the tenant must move.

Eviction

A family participating in the program can be evicted for the same reasons an unassisted tenant can be evicted through the local courts. The Code of Federal Regulations requires that both tenant and owner notify the housing authority when a notice to vacate, or eviction has been issued. Housing assistance is terminated in cases of eviction.



How Can I Participate in the Housing Choice Voucher Program?

As an assisted family...

Families are assisted as vouchers become available, and are called from a waiting list based on date and time of application. Please call 703.792.7530 to find out if the waiting list is open, or information on how to apply if it is open.



As a port-in from another jurisdiction...



OHCD abides by the portability guidelines of the Housing Choice Voucher program. Portability briefings occur twice per month. If you reside in another jurisdiction and desire to move to Prince William County, please contact your assigned housing specialist, or the

portability coordinator for your local PHA, and request information on how to transfer your case to Prince William County.

As a landlord...

OHCD hosts a monthly landlord briefing during which attendees are fully educated on the process and procedures of the Housing Choice Voucher program. Please call 703.792.7530 to obtain the next seminar date, time and location. New and existing owners are highly encouraged to attend. Properties are listed on a rental referral list that is given upon request to program participants.



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Visit our web site at
www.pwcgov.org/housing
or
call at 703.792.7530



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