

Get the Facts: HOPWA and COVID-19 Response



HABITABILITY/HQS VIRTUAL INSPECTIONS

Guide to Plan for and Implement HOPWA Habitability/Housing Quality Standards Virtual Inspections

HOPWA grantees utilizing the Property Standards waiver flexibilities may conduct initial lease up inspections virtually, via live streaming, pre-recorded video, or photographs. Grantees who have notified HUD of their intention to adopt this flexibility must also update current HOPWA program policies and procedures to reflect use of this waiver flexibility by describing their virtual inspection policy and related procedures for carrying out those inspections.

But don't panic! There is no requirement to update your entire HOPWA Policy and Procedure Manual or Operations Guide, so you may simply develop and include an addendum in your current manual detailing changes to your inspection policy and procedures. To assist you in thinking broadly about policy and procedures changes that may be needed, the following topic areas (and guiding questions) will help you determine the updates needed to plan for and implement virtual inspection procedures.

Virtual Inspection Policy and Procedure Manual Topics and Guiding Questions

Include a description of the policy change itself and preferred order of virtual inspection methods

- What is driving this policy change?
- What are the applicable effective dates of this change?
- Will pre-recorded videos be used if live streaming is not feasible? Will photographs be used for inspections, but only in situations where no other virtual method is feasible? Who will decide the acceptable methods?

Describe how initial and annual inspections will occur

- Will all initial inspections be conducted virtually or are there exceptions, such as for vacant units?
- Will annual inspections be postponed, or will annual inspection be conducted remotely? If postponed, how will HOPWA program staff check-in with households to ensure units are free from any safety issues?

Describe the role of HOPWA program staff, landlords and households pertaining to conducting inspections

- Will the same staff who conducted in-person inspections also conduct remote inspections? Do staff need any special equipment or training?
- How will program staff pre-plan for virtual inspections with the landlords or households?
- Is the expectation that landlords and HOPWA program staff will work together to conduct the majority of virtual inspections or will there be exceptions, such as allowing the household to assist in the inspection process?

Include detail about required/preferred inspection documentation

- During a live streaming inspection will program staff document what they view on current inspection forms or will different documentation be required?
- Will live-video virtual inspections be recorded and saved? Will pre-recorded videos and photographs need to be saved? For how long will any materials need to be saved?

Include detail about allowable inspection costs (hardware, software, and program staff)

- Will you have cell phones, tablets, or cameras available to conduct inspections? Do any of these devices need a data plan or Wi-Fi device? Will you allow a landlord or household to borrow those devices if needed, and how will those devices be provided and returned?
- What software programs will be used for live-video virtual inspections (Zoom, FaceTime, etc.)? How do landlords or households send pre-recorded videos or photographs when live-virtual inspections are not an option or to follow-up on a specific inspection question, issue, or concern (via email, Google Drive, Dropbox, etc.)?
- If devices, software, and other costs are used across multiple funding sources and different HOPWA activities, how will you allocate and document pro-rated costs?

Describe how and when follow up in-person onsite inspections will occur

- How will virtual inspection be tracked to ensure that all units are inspected in-person onsite after the waiver expires or when it is safe to do so?
- How will you prioritize and schedule in-person onsite inspection? Which HOPWA program staff will conduct those inspections?

Describe HOPWA Program confidentiality requirements pertaining to virtual inspections

- How will your program protect client confidentiality during any virtual inspection? Do live-virtual inspections need to be in password-protected rooms? Do Wi-Fi networks used need to be password protected?
- If emailing pre-recorded videos and photographs, does the email address meet confidentiality requirements?
- If saving inspection documentation, how and where will electronic files be saved to protect client confidentiality?
- What hardware and software requirements (and associated costs) are needed to ensure confidentiality?

Describe HOPWA program staff will communicate with landlords and households about policy and procedures changes due to adopting virtual inspection methods.

- How will Grantees and Project Sponsors communicate inspection policy and procedure changes to landlords, and households? Do landlord or household program information materials need to be updated?

Virtual Inspections - Quick Tips and Helpful Hints

Outline what landlords and households will need to know about any changes and the process regarding virtual inspection methods:

Pre-Inspection:

- Explain the type of virtual inspection that will be conducted the day of the inspection
- Provide information to the landlord about the use of required and/or preferred inspection forms or checklists, as applicable
- Inquire about and assess a landlord's and household's access to and fluency in using hardware and software needed to conduct inspections and access to password-protected Wi-Fi or data plans
- Identify if this will or will not change the type of virtual inspection planned
- Provide information about any type of inspection 'tools' needed, such as an outlet tester, flashlight, or stepstool
- Discuss with the landlord and household the amount of time that should be set aside for conducting live-video virtual remote inspections
- Inquire about who else will be present during the inspection
- Explain the program's responsibility to protect confidentiality and how information about the inspection will be shared
- If a lead-based paint visual assessment must be conducted, explain how that will occur at part of the virtual inspection
- Provide information about the documents needed from the landlord before the household moves into the unit (i.e., W-9, Lease, Housing Assistance Agreement)

Outline a recommended order of steps to take during the inspection, for example:

1. Starting outside the building, take a view of the following:

- Building address
- Siding, porches, railings
- Roof and foundation
- Front, back and side yards
- Street and immediate surroundings of the building
- Any trash facilities on the property

2. Inside the building, take a view of the following:

- Common hallways, stairs, laundry room, basement (as applicable)

3. Starting at door to the unit itself, first take a view of the unit number and condition of the entry door. Upon entering the unit, walk in the same direction, either clockwise or counterclockwise. If there is more than one floor in the unit, start on first floor.

While inside the unit, take a view of the following:

- All bedrooms – floor, walls, windows, outlets, light fixtures, ceiling
- Bathroom – floor, wall, windows, vent, outlets, light fixture, ceiling, sink, toilet, shower/tub
- Kitchen, floor, walls, windows, refrigerator, stove/oven, cabinets, sink, outlets, light fixtures
- Living and dining room – floors, walls, windows, outlets, light fixtures, ceiling
- Test all smoke alarms and identify where the smoke detectors are in the unit
- When applicable, conduct lead-paint visual assessment to identify if there are any surfaces outside and/inside the building and/or unit with deteriorated paint – paint that is peeling, chipping, or cracking

Post-Inspection:

- Complete the required inspection forms and add them to the household file
- Prepare and send a list of items that require follow up and indicate any required timeline and notification expectations
- Notify the landlord or household when an in-person inspection may occur
- Either save or dispose of inspection recordings, videos, or photographs

• Resources •

[April 1, 2020 - Availability of Waivers of CPD Grant Programs and Consolidated Plan Requirements to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19 and Mitigate Economic Impacts Caused by COVID-19](#)

[May 22, 2020 - Additional Waivers for CPD Grant Programs to Prevent COVID-19 Spread and Mitigate COVID-19 Economic Impacts](#)