

Speaker 1: The Housing Choice Voucher Program, commonly known as HCV or Section 8 is the federal government's major program for assisting low-income families, which may include elderly individuals or people with disabilities to afford decent, safe, and sanitary housing in the private market. This video explains the basics of the HCV program, some benefits and how prospective landlords can participate.

Jose: Hey Beth.

Beth: Hi Jose. What are you up to?

Jose: Well, my tenants moved out after just a year with bills due. I need to find a stable tenant soon.

Beth: Ah, it's stressful finding a long-term tenant who pays on time. Luckily many of my tenants are participants in the Housing Choice Voucher Program. This has led to a lot of stability in my rental properties.

Jose: What's the Housing Choice Voucher Program?

Beth: Oh, it's so hot outside. Come on, let's get some lemonade at my place and I'll tell you about the HCV program.

Our local Public Housing Agency or PHA receives funding from the federal government to administer the HCV program locally and help low income families afford rent. Here, let me show you. Some PHAs offer a lot of information online. Others you'll need to speak with someone at the agency to learn more. With the HCV program, participants receive rental assistance from their PHA, but find housing units in the private market that meet their needs. In other words, the rental assistance is provided on behalf of the participant directly to the landlord. However, participants can choose their own neighborhood and type of housing.

Jose: So if this is a government program, how are you involved?

Beth: Well, I make sure I'm posting information about my units and places where people participating in the HCV program are likely to see it. I also mention that I welcome voucher participants in my ads. If a voucher participant applies for one of my units, I screen their rental application just as I would for any other applicant.

Jose: Well, that sounds similar to what I already do. Why do you work with a PHA to rent the voucher participants?

Beth: It's another opportunity to find prospective tenants and HCV tenants tend to be stable and long-term, plus it's a great way to help others.

Jose: So are these voucher tenants more problematic for landlords?

Beth: From what I've read about the program, voucher tenants stay in the same property for an average of eight to nine years. They also pay rent on time and take good care of their properties. This also aligns with my own experiences with voucher tenants.

Jose: Okay, so I am starting to understand why I may want to rent the voucher participants. Having long-term stable tenants is definitely appealing, but I don't understand what the PHA does. Can you explain that to me?

Beth: Let's call my friend Mercedes at the local PHA. She's incredibly helpful and can explain exactly what they do. Hey, Mercedes, it's Beth.

Mercedes: Hi Beth. How are you?

Beth: I'm great. I have my neighbor Jose over and he's interested in learning more about the HCV program and I thought you'd be the perfect person to explain it.

Mercedes: Of course. Hi there, Jose. I'd be happy to give you some information on what we do. I work for our local PHA and we receive funding from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, commonly known as HUD to administer the HCV program here within the town limits. Usually families who apply qualify and receive a voucher, pay 30% of their monthly income towards rent. The PHA covers the remaining portion of the rent through a housing assistance payment or HAP, and pays it directly to landlords every single month. The program provides low-income families a choice in where they rent with their voucher and helps them maintain decent, safe, and sanitary housing for their family.

Jose: I have a rental condo on Main Street nearby. Does that qualify?

Mercedes: Yes. HCV participants can rent any type of housing unit and can choose where they rent. But with some limitations. For example, the number of people in the household will impact the number of bedrooms the family qualifies for with their voucher. A single person household would likely not be able to rent a four bedroom house. The local PHA works with the participant to find out what they qualify for with their voucher. Landlords in a variety of properties can benefit from participating in the HCV program. This includes landlords with duplexes, triplexes, large apartment complexes, single-family homes, landlords with units in town, in the suburbs and in rural areas.

Jose: That makes sense. So what happens if the tenant loses their job and as a result, they can't pay their rent?

Mercedes: Their portion of the rent may be adjusted with the PHA so the landlord receives the same total rent payment.

Jose: Thanks, Mercedes. This has been very helpful.

Mercedes: It was my pleasure, Jose. Contact us at any time. We're here to make sure this process is clear and efficient for everybody. Have a great day.

Beth: So Jose, with all this information, can you see yourself renting to voucher participants?

Jose: I think I can, Beth. It sounds like an opportunity to connect with additional tenants, which is always great as a landlord. What's my next step?

Beth: You already know how to contact our local PHA, which is the first step. A helpful staff member like Mercedes can give you details on the local processes and may be able to give tips on how to advertise your unit, like which websites to use to market your vacant unit. The PHA may even maintain a listing of available units on their own website, although I'm not sure if RPHA has one currently.

Jose: So the PHA might be able to give me some tips on where to post a vacancy?

Beth: Yep. And when a potential tenant reaches out, you use your own selection criteria for the tenant screening process. Once you select the HCV tenant, you work with them to fill out a Request for Tenancy Approval form and send it to the local PHA. The PHA will compare your rent to similar housing units in the area to ensure your unit is priced fairly. A housing inspector will complete the required inspection by checking the unit to ensure it meets the minimum health and safety requirements. When the PHA approves your rental unit, you can sign the lease and the HAP contract. Then the HCV tenant can move in and you can start receiving your rent payments.

Jose: Can I still check my property's condition and maintain it?

Beth: Yes. When you're in a contract with the PHA, your property will receive periodic inspections which can assist you with spotting maintenance needs early on before problems snowball. In addition, a landlord can enter the unit for inspection as stated in the lease.

Jose: Ooh, I'm glad I ran into you today, Beth. I'm going to call Mercedes back to talk to her about marketing this unit to HCV participants. See you later.

Speaker 1: This webpage provides information on the HCV program, how to contact your PHA, steps to become an HCV landlord and places to list your rental unit among other important details for landlords.