



Expand and Improve the Housing Choice Voucher Program

The Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program makes housing affordable for more than [2.3 million households](#) nationwide. BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, people of color), older adults and people with disabilities make up the majority of people in the voucher program. HUD vouchers allow rent-burdened Americans to lease in the private rental market and frees up families’ budgets for other basic needs like medication, child care, and groceries.

Vouchers are a critical fair housing tool because they allow families to choose where they live. Vouchers can address historical segregation by making housing more affordable in well-resourced, less racially-concentrated neighborhoods with high-performing schools, quality jobs, and reliable public transportation. Research shows that where a family lives has a [lasting impact on their health](#) and [future economic advancement](#). This is especially true for children who have greater adult earnings and educational attainment when they move to high opportunity neighborhoods with a voucher. The HCV program provides tenants more housing choice and mobility options, and leads to better outcomes for tenants and families.

Despite the efficacy of the HCV program, [fewer than one quarter of households](#) who qualify for a voucher in the U.S. receive one. The demand is so high that families languish on long waitlists, prolonging their housing instability and homelessness. Recent studies suggest that [as few as 61% of families](#) who make it through the waitlist process and receive a voucher are actually able to use it before their voucher search time expires, a period that is often as little as 60 days. Families who are unable to “lease up” within the search time lose the rental assistance, and can choose to join the waitlist again – this time at the bottom.

To house every family in need, the next administration should work with Congress to dramatically expand and improve the HCV program. Congress should increase funding so that every eligible family receives a voucher, ensure that vouchers are competitive in the private rental market, eliminate harmful discrimination against voucher tenants, enhance programs that provide neighborhood choice and mobility for voucher holders, and strengthen tenants’ rights in the HVC program so families can stay in their homes after successfully leasing up.

Recommendations

Adequately fund HUD's Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) programs and the services that make vouchers successful.

- **Fully fund and expand the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program.** The incoming president's first budget request should include funding for all eligible families to receive HCVs.
- **Fund mobility counseling and other services for all Public Housing Authorities.** Mobility counseling is an evidence-based approach to improve

families' chances of finding housing in the private rental market and in areas of opportunity. Mobility programs provide counseling and housing search assistance to help families secure quality housing in high-opportunity communities, connect families with landlords, and provide continued support to HCV families after they move.

Increase opportunities for families with vouchers to lease up in the private market.

- **Publish data on voucher success rates and increase oversight of Public Housing Authorities with low success rates.** Voucher success rates measure the ability of tenants to successfully lease-up using their voucher. The success rates among new voucher holders attempting to rent a unit average around 60% for Public Housing Authorities nationwide. This highlights the difficulty tenants face using a voucher in the private market, especially when they do not have assistance from their housing authority. Despite its importance, HUD has not published comprehensive success rate data in decades. Once the data is published, HUD should work with local Public Housing Authorities to improve low success rates.
- **Increase the minimum voucher search time to at least 180 days.** Many voucher recipients struggle to find and lease a unit that meets HCV program requirements within the current minimum search time of 60 days. In 2023, HUD's Office of Policy Development and Research found that [voucher success rates were 30% higher in Public Housing Authorities with search times of at least 180 days](#) compared to those with a 60-day minimum. HUD should work with Congress to increase the minimum search time to 180 days.
- **Collect and publish data on voucher inspection wait times and work with Public Housing Authorities to reduce wait periods.** Even after receiving a voucher, many families experience lengthy inspection wait times and may lose their chosen home during the delay. Inspection wait times are also a factor in low Public Housing Authority success rates. HUD should identify strategies for reducing local inspection wait times and require Public Housing Authorities to adopt policies to improve them, such as key *Housing Opportunity Through Modernization Act* (HOTMA) provisions that provide for alternative inspections.
- **Encourage Public Housing Authorities to adopt Emergency Housing Voucher (EHV) waivers within the HCV program.** Congress authorized Emergency Housing Vouchers to address the immediate need for rental assistance during the pandemic. HUD allows Public Housing Authorities to expedite the lease-up process for EHV, particularly for those at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness or fleeing gender-based violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or human trafficking. Applying these waivers to the HCV program would make it easier for many families to find housing.

- **Congress should implement federal Source of Income (SOI) protections.** Over 40% of families live in areas where it is legal to discriminate against voucher tenants. [Even in areas where it is illegal, voucher discrimination remains pervasive.](#)
 - » In addition to working with Congress to pass federal SOI protections, HUD should continue to issue guidance recognizing that SOI discrimination occurs when landlords use minimum income requirements and credit scores to weed out voucher tenants. HUD should develop recommendations for Public Housing Authorities to reduce voucher discrimination.
 - » The Federal Housing Finance Agency should require SOI protections for all multifamily properties with federally-backed mortgages.
 - » The Treasury should identify Low-Income Housing Tax Credit owners that illegally refuse to accept vouchers and take enforcement action against them.
- **Congress should authorize Public Housing Authorities to use Housing Assistance Payments for security and utility deposits.** The incoming president’s budget request should ask Congress to allow this flexibility for all Public Housing Authorities.
- **Test Direct Rental Assistance.** The next administration should work with tenants to design a research pilot that would test providing cash to subsidy recipients in lieu of vouchers. The research should help identify policies that would remove barriers families face to using their voucher in the private rental market.
- **Collect and publish data on project-based voucher utilization.** HUD should identify how many Project-based units are currently being subsidized through the HCV program, and in which jurisdictions. In addition, Congress should condition any legislation that would lift the Project-based voucher cap on Public Housing Authorities’ abilities to demonstrate that they have employed all of HUD’s evidence-based methods to increase voucher success rates.

Deconcentrate voucher families and support moves to high opportunity neighborhoods.

- **Ensure that rental assistance is high enough so that families with vouchers can move to higher-resourced areas.** HUD currently requires Public Housing Authorities in designated metropolitan areas to set higher maximum voucher payment standards based on Small Area Fair Market Rent (SAFMR) calculations, which better reflect local markets. HUD should incentivize Public Housing Authorities in non-mandatory areas to adopt SAFMRs. HUD should also allow the use of private data sources when calculating Fair Market Rents and SAFMRs so that rents in the HCV program more accurately reflect the private market.
- **Revise the scoring system for the Section 8 Management Assessment program (SEMAP).** HUD should amend SEMAP so that it awards additional points for locational outcomes and deconcentration efforts, and includes additional measures that would further incentivize moves to higher-resourced areas.
- **Revise the rent reasonableness analysis.** Individual Public Housing Authorities currently conduct rent reasonableness analyses in vastly different ways and in many cases, the methodology limits families’ searches to high-poverty, low-rent neighborhoods. HUD should reform its rent reasonableness analysis so that Public Housing Authorities are using comparable rent data that more accurately reflects the market.



- **Require regional collaboration among Public Housing Authorities to alleviate portability concerns and other barriers to moving.** HUD should improve and modernize voucher administration by requiring Public Housing Authorities to administer the program through a regional model. Fundamental to the HCV program is a family’s right to relocate with their rental assistance. A network of thousands of Public Housing Authorities, some with overlapping jurisdictions, administer local voucher programs. The lack of

coordination among Public Housing Authorities makes it more difficult for families with vouchers to move within different communities and without interrupting their assistance.

- **Finalize Section 504 regulations to ensure equal housing access for people with disabilities.** Section 504 provides important rights and protections to voucher tenants with disabilities and yet the current regulations have not been updated in decades. HUD should publish revised regulations.

Strengthen tenants’ rights in the HCV program.

- **Implement Sections 102 and 104 of HOTMA.** Eight years after HOTMA became law, many families in the voucher program are still denied the right to apply new rules that will make their rent more affordable. Sections 102 and 104 of HOTMA would streamline income review and asset limitations for tenants. HUD should require Public Housing Authorities to immediately implement these HOTMA regulations that were finalized in 2023.
- **HUD should rescind 24 C.F.R.982.552(b)(2) because it is not authorized by statute.** This regulation mandates termination of an HCV tenant’s assistance if they are evicted from their current home

for a serious lease violation. The application of this regulation has been irregular and undefined, leading to housing instability and unlawful evictions for voucher families.

- **Improve emergency transfers under the *Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)* and ensure Public Housing Authorities are fully implementing VAWA in partnership with survivors and their advocates.** HUD, along with other federal agencies, needs to overhaul the emergency transfer and family break-up processes to center survivors and their safety and to ensure that they have a meaningful and timely opportunity to make a safe move.

Photo Credits:

Page 1 - Goh Rhy Yan on Unsplash

Page 4 - Brandon Jacoby on Unsplash; Vitaly Gariev on Unsplash