

## **Chapter 13**

### **The Housing Choice Voucher Program**

#### **Background**

The Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program (formerly known as Section 8) is a rental assistance program funded by the federal government. To qualify for a voucher, renters must meet strict income standards.

The HCV Program gives renters the resources they need to rent in the private market (the private market includes all housing that is not considered ‘public housing’). HCV renters may use their voucher in any neighborhood, city or state in the country.

HCV renters pay between 30 and 40 percent of their total income for rent and utilities, such as gas or electricity. The local housing agency pays the landlord the difference between the rental unit’s *actual rent* and what the tenant pays to the landlord and / or utility companies.

In Chicago CHAC is the agency that manages the HCV Program and works with tenants to find apartments, talk to landlords, and learn to use the voucher correctly. CHAC is not an acronym. CHAC is a private company hired by the Chicago Housing Authority to manage the HCV Program.

#### **Steps for using a Housing Choice Voucher**

1. Renter applies for a Housing Choice Voucher through a local agency or representative of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). In Chicago, renters apply to CHAC. There is generally a waiting list. Public housing residents apply to CHAC when directed to do so by the Chicago Housing Authority.
2. HCV renters must attend at least one interview and workshop at CHAC before receiving the voucher. The voucher will list the number of bedrooms for which the family is eligible, depending on family size.
3. Like all prospective renters, HCV renters need to look for an apartment or house to rent. HCV renters need to calculate how much they can afford to spend for rent, based on the amount of their voucher, identify neighborhoods where they would like to live, and should consider ‘Opportunity Neighborhoods’ and ‘Exception Rent Areas.’ Opportunity Neighborhoods are areas that have lower poverty rates (where less than one-fourth of people live below the poverty line, \$16,700 for a family of four). CHAC offers special incentives, such as interest-free security deposit loans, to HCV renters who choose to move to Opportunity Neighborhoods.

As of October 2001, six areas in Chicago were designated by HUD as Exception Rent Areas. Due to a low concentration of voucher tenants, this program will pay a higher monthly rent in those areas. Subject to annual review, the areas designated in October 2001 are Edison Park,

Forest Glen, Lincoln Park, Loop, Near North and O'Hare. Contact CHAC for current rent standards.

4. After the voucher holder finds a rental unit, CHAC sends a Housing Quality Inspector to determine if the rental unit meets government Housing Quality Standards (HQS). In addition to the Landlord Responsibilities listed in Chapter 4, the unit must have:
  - One carbon monoxide detector within 40 feet of all bedrooms and at the heating source;
  - One smoke detector for each living level with a habitable room or enclosed heating unit;
  - Handrails for flights of four or more stairs within a unit or that lead to a common area; and
  - Electrical fixtures, such as outlets or switches that work properly.
5. If the Housing Quality Inspector visits the rental unit and it passes inspection, CHAC and the landlord sign the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) Contract.

The HAP Contract is a written agreement between CHAC and the landlord that guarantees the landlord will receive rent money directly from CHAC and from the HCV Program renter every month for the length of the lease.

If the house or apartment does not pass CHAC's inspection, the landlord can make needed repairs and apply for re-inspection. HCV renters cannot sign a lease or move into a rental unit unless the unit passes inspection and CHAC has signed the HAP Contract.

### **Utilities and Moving Costs**

CHAC decides if the HCV renter pays for utilities. CHAC and / or the landlord may include utilities in the rent. In most cases, HCV renters are responsible for their own security deposit money and moving costs.

In addition to responsibilities listed in the Chicago Residential Landlord and Tenant Ordinance, HCV renters must complete the following items, or they will lose their voucher:

- Give CHAC all requested information and paperwork. HCV renters are notified each year approximately three or four months before their annual re-certification date.
- HCV renters must live in the CHAC-approved rental unit for one year. They cannot terminate their lease except in the case of a medical emergency.
- HCV renters must allow CHAC Housing Quality Inspectors to inspect the rental unit when given prior notification.
- HCV renters must notify the owner and CHAC in writing at least 30 days before moving out of the unit.

- HCV renters must use the rental unit as their principal residence.
- HCV Program renters cannot give or transfer a lease to someone else. HCV Program renters cannot ‘sublet’ their rental unit.

**HCV renters will lose the Housing Choice Voucher and may be evicted if:**

- The renter or their family commits fraud in connection with the HCV Program.
- The renter or their family is involved in any drug-related or violent criminal activity or illegally possess weapons.
- The renter or their family threaten, abuse, or are violent toward any CHAC personnel.
- The renter or their family or guests damage the unit or building’s common areas in any way that is more than normal wear and tear.
- The renter or their family commits serious or repeated violations of the lease.
- The renter does not pay utility bills in their name.
- The renter does not provide and maintain any appliances the owner is not required to provide under the lease.
- The renter receives assistance from any other rental assistance program.
- The renter or their family is absent from the unit for more than 90 days, unless someone in the family has a medical need.
- The renter or their family moves from the unit without giving written notice.
- The renter does not fix any life-threatening violation of Housing Quality Standards.

Like all rental tenants, the landlord can evict HCV renters. However, CHAC works with HCV renters to resolve conflicts and problems with their landlord. In order to evict HCV renters, the landlord must void the HAP Contract agreement with CHAC.

To learn more about the rights and responsibilities of HCV renters, please contact:

**CHAC**  
**1000 S. Wabash**  
**Chicago, IL 60605**  
**(312) 986-9400 phoneH**