

## **Landlord Frequently Asked Questions:**

### **What do I have to do to qualify as a HCVP landlord?**

The landlord has to be willing to participate in the HCV program and have a unit that can pass inspection. Owners further qualify by attesting they are not related to the assisted family, that they have not been debarred by HUD and that they are the rightful owner of the property. This does not occur until the landlord selects a HCVP tenant. There is nothing an owner must do to pre-qualify or register as a landlord.

### **I want to list my unit for rent. How do I do that?**

Landlords can list units free on the PA Housing Search website at [www.PAHousingSearch.com](http://www.PAHousingSearch.com). or [GoSection8.com](http://GoSection8.com).

### **I have a tenant to rent my unit. Now what?**

When a family finds a unit, they ask the owner/landlord if they will accept the voucher holder as a tenant and if they are willing to accept the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) from ACHA.

The owner and family sign a Request for Tenancy Approval (RFTA) and submit with it verification of paid taxes (Allegheny County, school and municipal) for the previous year.

If the owner's request for rent amount is acceptable and affordable for the family, the ACHA Inspector will conduct a Housing Quality Standards (HQS) inspection. Inspections are scheduled approximately ten days after the RFTA and all taxes are received.

### **Can I charge a security deposit?**

Yes. However, the amount cannot be higher than you would charge an unassisted tenant. It is recommended that you put the return policy in writing should the tenant not rent your unit.

### **How much can I rent my unit for?**

ACHA has established payment standards by bedroom size and location within Allegheny County that are guidelines for determining the maximum subsidy we can pay for a family. This payment standard is generally a gauge of the current rental market. However, each unit is evaluated by the Inspector on a case-by-case basis. Each unit's rent must be reasonable and comparable to unassisted private market rental units of similar size, location, amenities, quality, unit type, maintenance, utilities and services. In no case can the rent be more than comparable available unassisted units. Current payment standards can be accessed from the ACHA website.

### **Does the family pay for utilities?**

Yes, unless the landlord includes utilities in the rent. The landlord decides which utilities they will provide as a part of the rent and which utilities the family will be responsible to pay. Utility service, including water, must be on at the time of the initial inspection. Utilities that the HCV participant pays for cannot be master metered or shared with another unit or common area and must be billed directly by the utility service provider. If the family is responsible for paying a utility, ACHA generally will credit the family with a utility allowance that lowers their tenant rental share portion and leaves them with the necessary money to assist with the utility cost.

**Can a voucher be used to rent from a relative?**

Housing Choice Voucher holders cannot rent from their immediate relatives. This includes the participant's mother; father, brother, sister, grandparents, grandchildren, step-family, in-laws or any member of his or her household. A family can rent a unit from a relative as a reasonable accommodation only if the head of household or a member of the household is a person with a disability. The family must show that renting the unit provides a reasonable accommodation. ACHA must approve the accommodation in writing.

**What types of housing can someone rent with a voucher?**

Housing Choice Vouchers can be used to rent houses, duplexes, triplexes, apartments, condominiums and townhouses. Other housing types, such as group homes and shared rentals are only available as a reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities.

**What are Housing Quality Standards?**

Housing Quality Standards (HQS) are the HUD minimum quality standards for housing assisted under the rental assistance program. HQS have been developed for program use nationwide and help to ensure your home will be safe, decent and sanitary. These standards are applied by the Housing Inspector during the inspection. Please note: if the borough your unit is located in requires an occupancy permit, your unit will not pass without a copy of the passed occupancy permit. The occupancy permit only pertains to the initial inspection. It does not need to be updated every year the tenant resides in that unit.

**Are inspections required?**

Yes. Inspections will be completed prior to the unit being placed under Housing Assistance Payment contract and annually. A special inspection may be requested by tenants under different circumstances.

**How can I help my unit to pass the inspection the first time?**

See our Administrative Plan, Section 12.0 Housing Quality Standards (HQS) 24 CFR 982.401.

**Does the owner have to be present when the inspection occurs?**

No. There must be a responsible adult (age 18 or over) present to let the inspector into the unit. We advise that landlords be present for inspections. This is an opportunity for you to find out first hand why the unit did not pass inspection.

**I'm not satisfied with the rental amount ACHA is offering. Can the tenant pay extra rent to make up the amount I want?**

No. The ACHA determines the tenant's portion of the rent. The owner, cannot under any circumstances, charge or accept additional payments from the family for their share of the rent that has not been approved by ACHA.

**When will I receive my money?**

If it is a new contract, you will be paid on the next scheduled check run after we have received both signed copies of the contract and the lease certification that matches the occupancy dates on the contract. ACHA will not pay subsidy before the contract terms have been agreed upon. If the owner permits the tenant to move into the unit before the contract begins, the tenant will be responsible for the full amount of the rent and ACHA will not pay the back amount retroactively.



Contracts begin on the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup> of each month. Your contract will begin on the 1<sup>st</sup> or the 15<sup>th</sup> dependent upon the HQS pass date.

**Will you send me a check?**

No. All landlords are required to have direct deposit or receive their money on a debit card. The ACHA will not mail checks to landlords. The direct deposit form can be found on our website.

**My tenant is on the program, but I didn't get a rent check this month.**

There are various reasons you may not have gotten a check. The main reason is for HQS failure. Rent is abated (stopped) when the repairs are not completed by the re-inspection deadline date. The unit will be taken out of abatement if it passes inspection and payments will resume the day after the unit passes inspection. You will not be back paid when the unit is under failure.

Any time your rent payment is stopped, you will receive a letter (or copy of a termination notice) that advises the rent will not be paid until such time the infraction has been corrected.

Your rent payment may be held if your tenant has not completed the annual recertification as required. This is because the ACHA does not know what to pay you as the rent is based upon the tenant's income.

If you are not sure why your rent check was stopped, please check your Partner Portal account. It will give you the reason your money was stopped. If you are still not sure, please send an email to [landlords@achsng.com](mailto:landlords@achsng.com).

**My tenant was not home for the bi-annual HQS inspection.**

If the first inspection is missed, the unit will automatically be rescheduled for a second inspection within the next 30 days. If a second appointment is missed, the family will be recommended for termination of assistance. In addition, the HAP and utility allowance (UAP), if received, will be placed on hold and the check will not be released until an inspection is done.

If possible, it is recommended you are present at the inspection so you can learn first-hand any repairs need to be made.

**I sold my unit. How do I notify the Housing Authority?**

As soon as you know that you are closing with the new landlord, either use Partner Portal or [landlords@achsng.com](mailto:landlords@achsng.com) that ownership will change. We can then stop payment to you and issue the rent payment to the new owner. Once the rent payment has gone to you, and you no longer own this unit, you will need to forward the funds to the new owner. Please complete the ownership packet that is located on our website and send to us promptly.

**I bought a unit with a Section 8 tenant in place. What now?**

If you choose to continue occupancy with the tenant, ACHA will need to have a copy of the sales agreement, a w9 for the IRS and a direct deposit form with a voided check for your Housing Assistance Payments.

If you do not wish to continue occupancy with the tenant, please ask the previous owner to advise ACHA as far in advance as to the sale so the tenant may receive a voucher to move.

**When can I ask for a rent increase?**

ACHA must receive, at a minimum of sixty (60) days **prior** to your tenant's re-examination date, the request for a rent increase. This request will be sent to the Housing Counselor responsible for your tenant. Every rent increase will be reviewed to ensure it is rent reasonable. If your request places your rental amount above the payment standard, please note that the tenant will be responsible for the entire amount above the payment standard. For this reason, you will need to have the tenant's approval to raise the rent. If approved, your rent will increase on the effective date of your tenant's recertification date. You may only request a rent increase once per year. Please see Partner Portal to request a rent increase.

### **What are my rights and responsibilities as a landlord?**

Landlords have the same rights and responsibilities in the Housing Choice Voucher Program as they have with any open market renter, including:

- Maintain your property in good condition
- Complete all necessary repairs within a reasonable amount of time upon request by the Housing Authority or tenant, including all 24 hour emergency items. The amount of time that is considered reasonable depends upon the nature of the problem.
- Set reasonable rules about the use of the unit and common areas
- Collect appropriate security deposit as directed under the program and use it only in accordance with state and local law
- Comply with equal housing opportunity requirements
- Enforce tenant obligations under the terms of your lease
- Take action through the court system to evict a tenant when they violate the lease

### **What should I expect from Housing Choice Voucher tenants?**

- Pay their portion of the rent on time
- Keep the unit clean
- Maintain exterior of residence and yard
- Avoid illegal activities by household members and guests
- Allow ACHA Inspectors access to the unit to conduct HQS inspections
- Permit landlord and designated repairmen access to the unit for repairs
- Avoid damage to the property by household members and guests
- Refrain from disturbing neighbors
- Allow only those occupants on the lease to reside in the unit
- Comply with terms and conditions of the dwelling lease and tenancy addendum

### **Who do I call if I have a questions or problem with my tenant?**

The ACHA is not a party to the lease. Generally, the role of the Housing Counselor is to handle any matters concerning the family's income, household composition changes and all matters concerning the unit and payments. To find out who your tenant's staff representative is, please email [landlords@achsng.com](mailto:landlords@achsng.com).

### **How long can I rent to a Housing Choice Voucher Participant?**

The initial lease is for one year. After the initial term, the contract continues on a month-to-month basis indefinitely as long as there are available funds and the unit, family and landlord are in compliance with program requirements, including family income.

**Can I cancel the ACHA contract if I'm not satisfied?**

No. Only ACHA can cancel the Housing Assistance Payments (HAP) contract. A landlord is free to terminate a lease agreement pursuant to state and local laws. Once a lease agreement ends, the HAP contract terminates automatically.

**I have a specific question that isn't answered here. Where do I get the answer?**

If your question isn't answered in this list, please email your question(s) to: [Landlords@achsng.com](mailto:Landlords@achsng.com). You will receive an answer via email.