

Chapter 4

APPLICATIONS, ESTABLISHING PREFERENCES, MAINTAINING THE WAITING LIST & TENANT SELECTION

[24 CFR Part 5, Subpart D; 982.54(d)(1); 982.204, 982.205, 982.206]

INTRODUCTION

When a family wishes to receive Section 8 HCV assistance, the family must submit an application that provides the PHA with the information needed to determine the family's eligibility. HUD requires the PHA to place all families that apply for assistance on a waiting list. When HCV assistance becomes available, the PHA must select families from the waiting list in accordance with HUD requirements and PHA policies as stated in the administrative plan and the annual plan.

The PHA is required to adopt a clear approach to accepting applications, placing families on the waiting list, selecting families from the waiting list and must follow this approach consistently. The actual order in which families are selected from the waiting list can be affected if a family has certain characteristics designated by HUD or the PHA to receive preferential treatment. Funding earmarked exclusively for families with particular characteristics may also alter the order in which families are served.

HUD regulations require that all families have an equal opportunity to apply for and receive housing assistance, and that the PHA affirmatively further fair housing goals in the administration of the program [24 CFR 982.53, HCV GB p. 4-1]. Adherence to the selection policies described in this chapter ensures that the PHA will be in compliance with all relevant fair housing requirements, as described in Chapter 2.

This chapter describes HUD and PHA policies for taking applications, managing the waiting list and selecting families for HCV assistance.

PART I: THE APPLICATION PROCESS

4-I.A. OVERVIEW

This part describes the policies that guide the PHA's efforts to distribute and accept applications, and to make preliminary determinations of applicant family eligibility that affect placement of the family on the waiting list. This part also describes the PHA's obligation to ensure the accessibility of the application process to elderly persons, people with disabilities, and people with limited English proficiency (LEP).

4-I.B. APPLYING FOR ASSISTANCE [HCV GB, pp. 4-11 – 4-16, Notice PIH 2009-36]

Any family that wishes to receive HCV assistance must apply for admission to the program. HUD permits the PHA to determine the format and content of HCV applications, as well how such applications will be made available to interested families and how applications will be accepted by the PHA.

PHA Policy

Depending upon the length of time that applicants may need to wait to receive assistance, the PHA may use a one- or two-step application process.

A one-step process will be used when it is expected that a family will be selected from the waiting list within 60 days of the date of application. At application, the family must provide all of the information necessary to establish family eligibility and level of assistance.

A two-step process will be used when it is expected that a family will not be selected from the waiting list for at least 60 days from the date of application. Under the two-step application process, the PHA initially will require families to provide only the information needed to make an initial assessment of the family's eligibility, and to determine the family's placement on the waiting list. The family will be required to provide all of the information necessary to establish family eligibility and level of assistance when the family is selected from the waiting list.

Families will be encouraged to apply on-line; however, the family may obtain application forms from the PHA's office during normal business hours. Families may also request – by telephone or by mail – that a form be sent to the family via first class mail.

Completed applications must be returned to the PHA by mail, by fax, or submitted in person during normal business hours. Applications must be complete in order to be accepted by the PHA for processing. If an application is incomplete, the PHA will notify the family of the additional information required.

4-I.C. ACCESSIBILITY OF THE APPLICATION PROCESS

Elderly and Disabled Populations [24 CFR 8 and HCV GB, pp. 4-11 – 4-13]

The PHA must take a variety of steps to ensure that the application process is accessible to those people who might have difficulty complying with the normal, standard PHA application process. This could include people with disabilities, certain elderly individuals, as well as persons with limited English proficiency (LEP). The PHA must provide reasonable accommodation to the needs of individuals with disabilities. The application-taking facility and the application process must be fully accessible, or the PHA must provide an alternate approach that provides full access to the application process. Chapter 2 provides a full discussion of the PHA's policies related to providing reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities.

Limited English Proficiency

PHAs are required to take reasonable steps to ensure meaningful access to their programs and activities by persons with limited English proficiency [24 CFR 1]. Chapter 2 provides a full discussion on the PHA's policies related to ensuring access to people with limited English proficiency (LEP).

4-I.D. PLACEMENT ON THE WAITING LIST

The PHA must review each complete application received and make a preliminary assessment of the family's eligibility. The PHA must accept applications from families for whom the list is open unless there is good cause for not accepting the application (such as denial of assistance) for the grounds stated in the regulations [24 CFR 982.206(b)(2)]. Where the family is determined to be ineligible, the PHA must notify the family in writing [24 CFR 982.201(f)]. Where the family is not determined to be ineligible, the family will be placed on a waiting list of applicants.

No applicant has a right or entitlement to be listed on the waiting list, or to any particular position on the waiting list [24 CFR 982.202(c)].

Ineligible for Placement on the Waiting List

PHA Policy

If the PHA can determine from the information provided that a family is ineligible, the family will not be placed on the waiting list. Where a family is determined to be ineligible, the PHA will promptly send written notification of the ineligibility determination. The notice will specify the reasons for ineligibility, and will inform the family of its right to request an informal review and explain the process for doing so (see Chapter 16).

Eligible for Placement on the Waiting List

PHA Policy

The PHA will promptly send written notification of the preliminary eligibility determination.

Placement on the waiting list does not indicate that the family is, in fact, eligible for assistance. A final determination of eligibility will be made when the family is selected from the waiting list.

Applicants will be placed on the waiting list according to any preference(s) for which they qualify, and the date and time their complete application is received by the PHA.

PART II: MANAGING THE WAITING LIST

4-II.A. OVERVIEW

The PHA must have policies regarding various aspects of organizing and managing the waiting list of applicant families. This includes opening the list to new applicants, closing the list to new applicants, notifying the public of waiting list openings and closings, updating waiting list information, purging the list of families that are no longer interested in or eligible for assistance, as well as conducting outreach to ensure a sufficient number of applicants.

In addition, HUD imposes requirements on how a PHA may structure its waiting list and how families must be treated if they apply for assistance from a PHA that administers more than one assisted housing program.

4-II.B. ORGANIZATION OF THE WAITING LIST [24 CFR 982.204 and 205]

The PHA's HCV waiting list must be organized in such a manner to allow the PHA to accurately identify and select families for assistance in the proper order, according to the admissions policies described in this plan.

The waiting list must contain the following information for each applicant listed:

- Applicant name;
- Family unit size;
- Date and time of application;
- Qualification for any local preference;
- Racial or ethnic designation of the head of household.

HUD requires the PHA to maintain a single waiting list for the HCV program unless it serves more than one county or municipality. Such PHAs are permitted, but not required, to maintain a separate waiting list for each county or municipality served.

PHA Policy

The PHA will maintain a single waiting list for the HCV program.

HUD directs that a family that applies for assistance from the HCV program must be offered the opportunity to be placed on the waiting list for any, project-based voucher or moderate rehabilitation program the PHA operates if 1) the other programs' waiting lists are open, and 2) the family is qualified for the other programs.

HUD permits, but does not require, that PHAs maintain a single merged waiting list for their public housing, Section 8, and other subsidized housing programs.

A family's decision to apply for, receive, or refuse other housing assistance must not affect the family's placement on the HCV waiting list, or any preferences for which the family may qualify.

PHA Policy

The PHA will not merge the HCV waiting list with the waiting list for any other programs the PHA operate (i.e. project-based voucher and moderate rehabilitation).

4-II.C. OPENING AND CLOSING THE WAITING LIST [24 CFR 982.206]

Closing the Waiting List

A PHA is permitted to close the waiting list if it has an adequate pool of families to use its available HCV assistance. Alternatively, the PHA may elect to continue to accept applications only from certain categories of families that meet particular preferences or funding criteria.

PHA Policy

The PHA will close the waiting list when the estimated waiting period for housing assistance for applicants on the list reaches 24 months for the most current applicants. Where the PHA has particular preferences or funding criteria that require a specific category of family, the PHA may elect to continue to accept applications from these applicants while closing the waiting list to others.

Reopening the Waiting List

If the waiting list has been closed, it cannot be reopened until the PHA publishes a notice in local newspapers of general circulation, minority media, and other suitable media outlets. The notice must comply with HUD fair housing requirements and must specify who may apply, and where and when applications will be received.

PHA Policy

The PHA will announce the reopening of the waiting list at least 10 business days prior to the date applications will first be accepted. If the list is only being reopened for certain categories of families, this information will be contained in the notice.

The PHA will give public notice by publishing the relevant information in suitable media outlets including, but not limited to:

- *Newspapers;*
- *Direct contact via email to industry partners/groups, including Vermont Legal Aid, the Affordable Housing Coalition, community action offices, and other social services agencies;*
- *VSHA's Website – Notices Page - @ www.vsha.org.*

4-II.D. FAMILY OUTREACH [HCV GB, pp. 4-2 to 4-4]

The PHA must conduct outreach as necessary to ensure that the PHA has a sufficient number of applicants on the waiting list to use the HCV resources it has been allotted.

Because HUD requires the PHA to serve a specified percentage of extremely low income families, the PHA may need to conduct special outreach to ensure that an adequate number of such families apply for assistance [HCV GB, p. 4-20 to 4-21].

PHA outreach efforts must comply with fair housing requirements. This includes:

- Analyzing the housing market area and the populations currently being served to identify underserved populations
- Ensuring that outreach efforts are targeted to media outlets that reach eligible populations that are underrepresented in the program
- Avoiding outreach efforts that prefer or exclude people who are members of a protected class

PHA outreach efforts must be designed to inform qualified families about the availability of assistance under the program. These efforts may include, as needed, any of the following activities:

- Submitting press releases to local newspapers, including minority newspapers
- Developing informational materials and flyers to distribute to other agencies
- Providing application forms to other public and private agencies that serve the low income population
 - Developing partnerships with other organizations that serve similar populations, including agencies that provide services for persons with disabilities.

PHA Policy

The PHA will monitor the characteristics of the population being served and the characteristics of the population as a whole in the PHA's jurisdiction. Targeted outreach efforts will be undertaken if a comparison suggests that certain populations are being underserved.

4-II.E. REPORTING CHANGES IN FAMILY CIRCUMSTANCES

PHA Policy

While the family is on the waiting list, the family must immediately inform the PHA of changes in contact information, including current residence, mailing address, and phone number. The changes must be submitted in writing.

4-II.F. UPDATING THE WAITING LIST [24 CFR 982.204]

HUD requires the PHA to establish policies to use when removing applicant names from the waiting list.

Purging the Waiting List

The decision to withdraw an applicant family that includes a person with disabilities from the waiting list is subject to reasonable accommodation. If the applicant did not respond to a PHA request for information or updates because of the family member's disability, the PHA must reinstate the applicant family to their former position on the waiting list [24 CFR 982.204(c)(2)].

PHA Policy

The waiting list will be updated as necessary to ensure that all applicants and applicant information is current and timely.

To update the waiting list, the PHA will send an update request via first class mail to each family on the waiting list to determine whether the family continues to be interested in, and to qualify for, the program. This update request will be sent to the last address that the PHA has on record for the family. The update request will provide a deadline by which the family must respond and will state that failure to respond will result in the applicant's name being removed from the waiting list.

The family's response must be in writing and may be delivered in person, by mail, or by fax. Responses should be postmarked or received by the PHA not later than 15 business days from the date of the PHA letter.

If the family fails to respond within 15 business days, the family will be removed from the waiting list without further notice.

If the notice is returned by the post office with no forwarding address, the applicant will be removed from the waiting list without further notice.

If the notice is returned by the post office with a forwarding address, the notice will be re-sent to the address indicated. The family will have 15 business days to respond from the date the letter was re-sent.

If a family is removed from the waiting list for failure to respond, the Program Supervisor/Director may reinstate the family if s/he determines the lack of response was due to PHA error, or to circumstances beyond the family's control.

Removal from the Waiting List

PHA Policy

If at any time an applicant family is on the waiting list, the PHA determines that the family is not eligible for assistance (**see Chapter 3**), the family will be removed from the waiting list.

If a family is removed from the waiting list because the PHA has determined the family is not eligible for assistance, a notice will be sent to the family's address of record as well as to any alternate address provided on the initial application. The notice will state the reasons the family was removed from the waiting list and will inform the family how to request an **informal review regarding the PHA's decision (see Chapter 16)** [24 CFR 982.201(f)].

PART III: SELECTION FOR HCV ASSISTANCE

4-III.A. OVERVIEW

As vouchers become available, families on the waiting list must be selected for assistance in accordance with the policies described in this part.

The order in which families receive assistance from the waiting list depends on the selection method chosen by the PHA and is impacted in part by any selection preferences that the family qualifies for. The source of HCV funding also may affect the order in which families are selected from the waiting list.

The PHA must maintain a clear record of all information required to verify that the family is selected from the waiting list according to the PHA's selection policies [24 CFR 982.204(b) and 982.207(e)].

4-III.B. SELECTION AND HCV FUNDING SOURCES

Special Admissions [24 CFR 982.203]

HUD may award funding for specifically-named families living in specified types of units (e.g., a family that is displaced by demolition of public housing; a non-purchasing family residing in a HOPE 1 or 2 projects). In these cases, the PHA may admit families that are not on the waiting list, or without considering the family's position on the waiting list. The PHA must maintain records showing that such families were admitted with special program funding.

Targeted Funding [24 CFR 982.204(e)]

HUD may award a PHA funding for a specified category of families on the waiting list. The PHA must use this funding only to assist the families within the specified category. Within this category of families, the order in which such families are assisted is determined according to the policies provided in Section 4-III.C.

PHA Policy

The PHA administers the following types of targeted funding:

- Family Unification;
- Housing Vouchers for Non-Elderly Persons with Disabilities;
- Mainstream Housing Vouchers;
- Veteran's Supportive Housing Program (VASH);
- Housing Opportunities for Persons With Aids (HOPWA);
- Shelter plus Care.

Regular HCV Funding: Regular HCV funding may be used to assist any eligible family on the waiting list. Families are selected from the waiting list according to the policies provided in Section 4-III.C.

4-III.C. SELECTION METHOD

PHAs must describe the method for selecting applicant families from the waiting list, including the system of admission preferences that the PHA will use [24 CFR 982.202(d)].

Local Preferences [24 CFR 982.207; HCV p. 4-16]

PHAs are permitted to establish local preferences, and to give priority to serving families that meet those criteria. HUD specifically authorizes and places restrictions on certain types of local preferences. HUD also permits the PHA to establish other local preferences, at its discretion. Any local preferences established must be consistent with the PHA plan and the consolidated plan, and must be based on local housing needs and priorities that can be documented by generally accepted data sources.

PHA Policy

VSHA will offer public notice when changing its preference system. The notice will be publicized using the same guidelines as those followed for amending the agency's PHA plan or opening and closing the waiting list, depending on when the change is planned to occur.

VSHA uses the following local preference system:

Disaster Preference: This preference is available to families who are displaced due to fire, flood, natural disaster, or condemnation by a local, State, or Federal Agency.

Transitional Housing Preference: This preference is available to individuals and families who are Transitioning from one of the following programs administered by the Vermont State Housing Authority:

- HUD's Family Unification program for Youth In Transition;
- The Vermont Rental Subsidy Program (a 12 month rapid rehousing initiative administered by the Vermont Agency of Human Services). *Applications for this preference will be accepted **only after** 9 months of participation in VRS.*
- Individuals/families transitioning from a Domestic Violence Transitional Housing Program (currently on or eligible to be on the Continuum of Care Homeless Inventory Chart for homeless beds).
- *HUD's Continuum of Care Programs administered by VSHA (Shelter plus Care and Rapid Rehousing);

To be considered for this preference, applicants **must** meet the following additional criteria:

1. Actively participating in a case-management plan – which includes an exit plan with an appropriate organization providing these services; **and**
2. Be in compliance with any lease agreement (verbal or written). Families must be current in their rent and any other conditions of tenancy. Families cannot be subject to an eviction action. VSHA will require Certification from the applicant’s current landlord stating they are *in good standing and in compliance with their lease agreement*.

**Applicants transitioning from HUD’s/VSHA’s Shelter plus Care program MUST provide certification from the (Shelter plus Care) Sponsoring Organization that the applicant has participated in the Shelter plus Care program for no less than 36 months and has met the goals of their case management plan.*

Preference for Homeless Families with Case Management Support:

Preference will be limited to no more than 100 applicants / fiscal year (10/1 – 9/30).

Preference will be provided to families who are homeless as defined by HUD’s Category 1 definition of homelessness¹ **and** who will be receiving regular on-site case management support from a local homeless services, social services or mental health agency for at least one year after moving into a voucher-assisted unit. Status will be verified through the agency providing case management.

INCOME TARGETING

Income Targeting 1(b)(2)]

HUD requires that extremely low-income (ELI) families make up at least 75% of the families admitted to the HCV program during the PHA’s fiscal year. ELI families are those with annual

¹ Category 1: An individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, meaning: a. An individual or family with a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a car, park abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, or camping ground; or b. An individual or family living in a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangements (including congregate shelters, transitional housing, and hotels and motels paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state, or local government programs for low-income individuals); or c. An individual who is exiting an institution where he or she resided for 90 days or less and who resided in an emergency shelter or place not meant for human habitation immediately before entering that institution”.

incomes at or below 30% of the area median income. To ensure this requirement is met, a PHA may skip non-ELI families on the waiting list in order to select an ELI family.

Low income families admitted to the program that are “continuously assisted” under the 1937 Housing Act [24 CFR 982.4(b)], as well as low-income or moderate-income families admitted to the program that are displaced as a result of the prepayment of the mortgage or voluntary termination of an insurance contract on eligible low-income housing, are not counted for income targeting purposes [24 CFR 982.201(b)(2)(v)].

PHA Policy

The PHA will monitor progress in meeting the ELI requirement throughout the fiscal year. Extremely low-income families will be selected ahead of other eligible families on an as-needed basis to ensure the income targeting requirement is met.

Order of Selection

The PHA system of preferences may select families either according to the date and time of application, or by a random selection process [24 CFR 982.207(c)]. When selecting families from the waiting list PHAs are required to use targeted funding to assist only those families who meet the specified criteria, and PHAs are not permitted to skip down the waiting list to a family that it can afford to subsidize when there are not sufficient funds to subsidize the family at the top of the waiting list [24 CFR 982.204(d) and (e)].

PHA Policy

Families will be selected from the waiting list based on the targeted funding or selection (or local) preference(s) for which they qualify, and in accordance with the PHA’s hierarchy of preferences, if applicable. Within each targeted funding or preference category, families will be selected on a first-come, first-served basis according to the date and time their complete application is received by the PHA. Documentation will be maintained by the PHA as to whether families on the list qualify for and are interested in targeted funding. If a higher placed family on the waiting list is not qualified or not interested in targeted funding, there will be a notation maintained so that the PHA does not have to ask higher placed families each time targeted selections are made.

Local Preferences

Local preferences will be used to select families from the waiting list.

The VSHA has selected the following system to apply local preferences:

- The Disaster Preference will be ranked the highest of all local preferences.

- The Transitional Housing Preference for **Youth transitioning from VSHA Family Unification program** will have the greatest weight among all local preferences. Applicants qualifying for this preference will be served before any other preference category.
- All other local preferences will be treated equally.

Among Applicants with Equal Preference Status

Among applicants with equal preference status, the waiting list will be organized by **date and time**. Applicants with local preference status will be served before families without local preference status.

4-III.D. NOTIFICATION OF SELECTION

Families will be notified in writing when their application has been selected from the waiting list.

4-III.E. THE APPLICATION INTERVIEW

VSHA does not interview applicants.

4-III.F. COMPLETING THE APPLICATION PROCESS

The PHA must verify all information provided by the family (**see Chapter 7**). Based on verified information, the PHA must make a final determination of **eligibility** (**see Chapter 3**) and must confirm that the family qualified for any special admission, targeted admission, or selection preference that affected the order in which the family was selected from the waiting list.

PHA Policy

If the PHA determines that the family is ineligible, the PHA will send written notification of the ineligibility determination within 10 business days of the determination. The notice will specify the reasons for ineligibility, and will inform the family of its right to request an **informal review** (**Chapter 16**).

If a family fails to qualify for any criteria that affected the order in which it was selected from the waiting list (e.g. targeted funding, extremely low-income), the family will be returned to its original position on the waiting list. The PHA will notify the family in writing that it has been returned to the waiting list, and will specify the reasons for it.

If the PHA determines that the family is eligible to receive assistance, the PHA will invite the family to attend a briefing in accordance with the policies in Chapter 5.

