

---

# Glossary

This glossary contains definitions of specific technical terms used in the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program. These terms are often used by public housing agencies (PHAs) and in guidance from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and may be useful when navigating through the HCV program.

If you are more familiar with HUD's Homeless Assistance programs, Continuum of Care (CoC) and Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG), note that there are many subtle yet significant differences between HCV and both of these other programs. These distinctions are highlighted throughout the guidebook and are summarized in Appendix A on [page 123](#).

If there is any confusion, the 'final word' on HCV program regulations is found in Part 24 of the U.S. Code of Federal Regulations (24 CFR). Updates to these regulations are published from time to time in the Federal Register. HUD also occasionally issues Notices or other guidance related to specific programmatic issues. **Section 8 Made Simple – Special Edition** has attempted to simplify these regulations. However, it is important to refer to the federal documents whenever more information is needed.

**ABSORPTION** – The point at which a PHA receiving a household that has moved into its area stops billing the initial PHA for assistance on behalf of the household. After absorption, the receiving PHA uses funds available under its own Annual Contributions Contract.

**ADMINISTRATIVE FEE** – Payment made by HUD to a public housing agency for administration of the HCV program.

**ADJUSTED INCOME** – A household's annual income minus a number of mandatory deductions. The mandatory deductions include amounts for: dependents, status as an elderly or disabled household, unreimbursed childcare expenses, unreimbursed medical expenses (for elderly/disabled households only), and unreimbursed disability assistance expenses.

**ADMISSION** – the effective date of the first housing assistance payment contract for a household (the first day of the initial lease term). This is the point when the household becomes a participant in the HCV program.

**ANNUAL CONTRIBUTIONS CONTRACT (ACC)** – A written contract between HUD and a PHA. Under the contract HUD agrees to provide funding for operation of the program, and the PHA agrees to comply with HUD requirements for the program.

**ANNUAL GROSS INCOME** – The anticipated total income from sources received by the head of household, their spouse (even if temporarily absent), and each additional member of the household. This includes all net income derived from assets for the 12-month period following the effective date of certification or review of income, but excludes income that is temporary, nonrecurring, or sporadic.

**APPLICABLE PAYMENT STANDARD** – The payment standard that applies to a given household, based on its size and composition.

**APPLICANT (APPLICANT HOUSEHOLD)** – A household that has applied for admission to the HCV program, but is not yet a participant in the program.

**CHILDCARE EXPENSES** – Amounts paid by the household for the care of children 12 years of age and under, where such care is necessary to enable a household member to be gainfully employed or to further their education, and only to the extent that such amounts are not otherwise reimbursed. The amount deducted must reflect reasonable charges for childcare, and, in the case of childcare necessary to permit employment, the amount deducted cannot exceed the amount of income received from the employment.

**CODE OF FEDERAL REGULATIONS (CFR)** – The codification of the general and permanent federal regulations published by the Office of the Federal Register and the Government Publishing Office. The Housing Choice Voucher regulations are found in 24 CFR.

**CONTRACT RENT** – The amount of rent actually paid to a unit’s owner, which may be less than the gross rent if the tenant is responsible for paying utilities.

**DEPENDENT** – A member of a household (excluding foster children) other than the head of household or their spouse who is under 18 years of age, a person with a disability, or a full-time student.

**DISABILITY ASSISTANCE EXPENSES** – Reasonable expenses for attendant care and auxiliary apparatus for a handicapped or disabled household member that are necessary to enable a household member (including the handicapped or disabled member) to be employed.

**DISABLED FAMILY OR HOUSEHOLD** – In the HCV program, a disabled family or household is defined as:

- A single adult with a disability living alone;
- One or more unrelated disabled adults living with one or more live-in aides;
- A related family in which the head of household or their spouse is a disabled adult;
- Two or more related adults with disabilities living together; or
- Two or more unrelated adults with disabilities living together.

**DISABLED PERSON** – See Person with a Disability

**DRUG-RELATED CRIMINAL ACTIVITY** – This term means:

- Drug-trafficking; or
- Illegal use, or possession for personal use, of a controlled substance (as defined in Section 102 of the Controlled Substances Act [21 U.S.C. 802]).

**DRUG-TRAFFICKING** – The illegal manufacture, sale, or distribution — or the possession with intent to manufacture, sell ,or distribute — of a controlled substance (as defined in Section 102 of the Controlled Substances Act [21 U.S.C. 802]).

**EARNED INCOME** – Income from wages, tips, salaries, other employee compensation, and any earnings from self-employment.

**ELIGIBILITY** – The PHA may only admit eligible applicants to the HCV program. To be eligible, the applicant must be a family, must meet income requirements, and must be a U.S. citizen or a non-citizen who has eligible immigration status as determined in accordance with 24 CFR Part 5.

**EXTREMELY LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLD** – A household whose annual income does not exceed 30 percent of the median income for the area as determined by HUD, with adjustments for smaller and larger families.

**FAIR MARKET RENT (FMR)** – The rent, including the cost of utilities (except telephone) that would be required to obtain privately owned, existing, decent, safe, and sanitary rental housing of a modest (non-luxury) nature with suitable amenities in a given area. Fair market rents for existing housing are established by HUD for units of varying sizes (number of bedrooms), and are published in the Federal Register in accordance with 24 CFR part 888.

**FAMILY** –

- A single-person family such as:
  - » An elderly person;
  - » A person with a disability; or
  - » Any other single person.
- Two or more unrelated elderly or disabled people living together (see 'unrelated disabled household'), or one or more elderly or disabled people living with one or more live-in aides.
- A 'family' with a child or children.
- See also disabled family.

**FAMILY UNIT SIZE** – The appropriate number of bedrooms for a household. Family unit size is determined by the PHA under its subsidy standards and outlined in its HCV Administrative Plan.

**FULL-TIME STUDENT** – A person who is carrying a subject load that is considered full-time for day students under the standards and practices of the educational institution attended. An educational institution includes a vocational school with a diploma or certificate program, as well as an institution offering a college degree.

**GROSS RENT** – The total housing costs for a unit, including the monthly rent charged by the owner plus the cost of any tenant-paid utilities or utility allowance.

**HOUSING ASSISTANCE PAYMENT (HAP)** – The monthly assistance payment by a PHA to an owner.

**HOUSING ASSISTANCE PAYMENT CONTRACT (HAP CONTRACT)** – A written contract between a PHA and an owner, in the form prescribed by HUD, in which the PHA agrees to make housing assistance payments to the owner on behalf of an eligible household.

**HOUSING QUALITY STANDARDS (HQS)** – The HUD minimum quality standards for housing assisted under its tenant-based programs. See 24 CFR 982.401 for specifics.

**HOUSEHOLD** – Household members and others who live under the same roof.

**HUD REQUIREMENTS** – HUD requirements for the HCV program, issued by HUD headquarters as regulations, Federal Register notices, or other binding program directives.

**INITIAL CONTRACT RENT** – The contract rent at the beginning of a household's initial lease term.

**INITIAL PHA** – In portability, this is the PHA that originally selected a household that subsequently decides to move to a different PHA's jurisdiction.

**INITIAL LEASE TERM** – The initial term of the assisted lease.

**INITIAL RENT TO OWNER** – The rent paid to a unit's owner at the beginning of the initial lease term.

**INTERIM EXAMINATION/CERTIFICATION** – Re-certifying a household's eligibility for the HCV program before the annual re-certification. Interim exams occur when there is a change in the household's income, household composition, or other critical factors that could influence the total tenant payment or a participant's eligibility.

**JURISDICTION** – The area in which a PHA has authority under applicable state and local law to administer the HCV program.

**LANDLORD** – see Owner.

**LEASE** – A written agreement between an owner and a tenant for the leasing of a dwelling unit. The lease establishes the conditions for occupancy of the dwelling unit by a household.

**LIVE-IN AIDE** – A person who resides with an elderly person or a person with a disability and who:

- Is considered essential to the care and well-being of the person(s);
- Is not obligated for the support of the person(s); and
- Would not be living in the unit except to provide the necessary supportive services.

HUD regulations currently do not specifically address residential supportive services staff who may be needed for the overnight care of a person with disabilities. However, as a reasonable accommodation, it may be possible to ask for a larger voucher size to allow for an extra bedroom for rotating caregivers.

**LOCAL PREFERENCES** – HCV waiting list preferences established by a PHA.

**MEDIAN INCOME** – The dollar amount that divides the local population into two equal parts: those with incomes higher than that amount and those with incomes lower than that amount. The income limits for the HCV program published by HUD each year depend on the median income levels for each housing market area in the country.

**OWNER** – Any person or entity with the legal right to lease or sublease a unit to a household.

**PARTICIPANT (PARTICIPANT FAMILY OR HOUSEHOLD)** – A household that has been admitted to the HCV program and is currently assisted in the program. The household becomes a participant on the effective date of the first HAP contract executed by the PHA for the household (the first day of the initial lease term).

**PAYMENT STANDARD** – The amount used by a PHA to calculate the housing assistance payment for a family. The PHA adopts a payment standard for each unit size and for each Fair Market Rent area in its jurisdiction. The payment standard for a household is the maximum monthly subsidy payment.

**PERSON WITH A DISABILITY** – An individual who:

- Has a disability as defined in Section 223 of the Social Security Act; or
- Has a developmental disability as defined in Section 102 of the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act; or
- Has a physical or emotional impairment that is expected to be of long-continued and indefinite duration and that
  - » Substantially impedes their ability to live independently; and
  - » Is of such a nature that such ability could be improved by more suitable housing conditions.

**PORTABILITY** – Renting a dwelling unit with HCV tenant-based assistance outside the jurisdiction of the initial PHA.

**PROJECT-BASED** – Rental assistance that is attached to a structure or unit.

**PUBLIC HOUSING AGENCY (PHA)** – An organization that enters into a contract directly with HUD to administer the HCV program.

**PUBLIC HOUSING AUTHORITY** – A state, county, municipality, or other governmental entity or public body (or agency or instrumentality thereof) authorized to engage in or assist in the development or operation of low-income housing, including an Indian public housing authority.

**REASONABLE RENT** – A rent that does not exceed:

- The amount charged for comparable units in the private unassisted market; or
- The rent charged by the same owner for a comparable assisted or unassisted unit in the building or premises.

**RECEIVING PHA** – In portability, a PHA that receives a household selected for participation in the tenant-based program of another PHA. The receiving PHA issues a voucher, and provides program assistance to the household.

**RE-CERTIFICATION/RE-EXAMINATION** – Re-certifying that a household is still eligible for the HCV program — including a review of income, household composition, and other applicable changes — and making changes in the total tenant payment and housing assistance payment when necessary. This is done on at least an annual basis, with interim exams conducted when necessary due to changes.

**RENT BURDENED** – Spending more than 30 to 40 percent of household income on rent.

**RENT TO OWNER** – The monthly rent payable to the owner under the lease. Rent to owner includes payment for any services, maintenance, and utilities to be provided by the owner in accordance with the lease.

**SHARED HOUSING** – A housing unit occupied by two or more unrelated individuals or families, with common space for shared use by the occupants of the unit and a separate private space for each assisted family.

**SUBSIDY STANDARDS** – Standards established by a PHA to determine the appropriate number of bedrooms and amounts of subsidy for households of different sizes and compositions. See also Family Unit Size.

**SUSPENSION** – Stopping the clock on the term of a household's search time when the household submits a request for lease approval, until the PHA approves or denies the request.

**TENANT** – The person or people (other than a live-in aide) who execute the lease as lessee of the dwelling unit.

**TENANT-BASED** – Rental assistance that is not attached to a specific structure.

**THIRD PARTY VERIFICATION** – Documentation from a person or agency other than the HCV program applicant (such as an employer, public agency, or physician).

**TOTAL TENANT PAYMENT** – The portion of the gross rent payable by an eligible household participating in the HCV program.

**TRANSITIONAL HOUSING** – Temporary (generally up to 24 months) housing programs for homeless families and individuals.

**UNRELATED DISABLED HOUSEHOLD** – A group of people consisting of two or more unrelated people with disabilities, or one or more unrelated disabled person (people) with disabilities living with one or more live-in aide(s) on the same lease.

**UTILITY ALLOWANCE** – An allowance provided to Housing Choice Voucher holders to offset the costs of any tenant-paid utilities. This allowance is an estimate of utility costs based on the type and location of the unit and the type of utilities, and is subtracted from the total tenant payment.

**VERY LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLD** – A household whose annual income does not exceed 50 percent of the median income for the area, as determined by HUD, with adjustments for smaller and larger families.

**VIOLENT CRIMINAL ACTIVITY** – Any illegal criminal activity that has as one of its elements the use, attempted use, or threatened use of physical force against the person or property of another.

**VOUCHER HOLDER** – A household holding a voucher with unexpired housing search time.

**WAITING LIST** – The majority of PHAs do not have enough Housing Choice Vouchers to meet the housing needs of everyone in the community. In this situation, the PHA must establish and maintain an HCV waiting list.

**WAITING LIST PREFERENCE** – PHAs are allowed to establish local preferences for administering their HCV waiting list to reflect the needs of their particular community. Applicants who qualify for these preferences may be able to move ahead of other households on the waiting list.