

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT HOUSING ASSISTANCE.

1. What programs are offered and what is the difference between them?

There are 2 types of housing available through the Housing Authority of the City of Natchitoches.

Public Housing - These are duplexes and single family dwellings in subdivisions located in various places around Natchitoches. These units are owned by the Housing Authority. Once approved, applicants will be offered the first available unit that matches the family composition occupancy standard. If the applicant does not want that first unit, the applicant's name is placed back on the waiting list. The next available unit will be offered to them. Should the applicant refuse the second offered unit, the applicant's name will be removed from the waiting list and the application will be filed inactive.

Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) – The Housing Authority does not own any HCV property, vouchers are issued to allow the approved applicants to find their own suitable rental property held by private landlords/owners. The vouchers are good for a specified time period, and once expired will result in the application being filed inactive. There is more responsibility on the applicant to do the legwork and find a suitable unit, but the applicant has a greater choice about where they go and what type of unit they can choose.

2. How long will it be before I am assisted?

The application process can take up to 3 weeks before applications are approved, waiting for the Criminal Background Investigation, credit reports and previous tenancy histories to be completed. Once an application is approved, it is placed on the appropriate waiting list(s). There is no way to provide an accurate time estimate as to when an applicant might be assisted.

Public Housing applicants - A vacancy must occur in order to free up a unit. Only then will an applicant on the waiting list be sent a letter to come inspect the available unit. Any applicants on the waiting lists with a preference will be offered units first.

HCV applicants – Vouchers are issued as funds and open vouchers are available.

3. What will cause denial of my application?

Your application can be denied or disapproved for the following reasons;

If you provide false information or omit information,

If you fail to provide required information and/or documents,

If you fail the Criminal Background investigation,

If you owe money to any Housing Authority, or for Public Housing applicants, a poor credit report, or bad tenancy history,

If you have been banned from Housing property or terminated for fraud/drug or police action on premises.

4. What are preferences?

The Housing Authority recognizes the following preference categories and these families will be offered units/vouchers before non-preference families;

- a. Disabled – applicant must provide documentation, typically their SSI benefit letter
- b. Elderly single – age 62 and older
- c. Victim of domestic violence – must provide recent documentation (within last 2 months)
- d. Veteran – Must provide copy of DD214. (Public Housing only)

5. What bedroom size does my family qualify for?

There are differences in the rules regarding Public Housing and HCV Occupancy Standards.

The Public Housing Program has units from 1 bedroom to 4 bedrooms. A family generally qualifies for a separate bedroom for each member, up to a 4 bedroom. A single mother with 3 children = 4 bedroom. A married couple with 1 child = 2 bedroom.

The HCV Program has a more restrictive occupancy standard. It is 2 family members per sleeping area regardless of age or gender. A single mother with 2 boys = 2 bedroom voucher. A single mother with 1 boy & 1 girl = 2 bedroom voucher. A single mother with one child = 1 bedroom voucher. A married couple with 3 children = 3 bedroom voucher. This does not mean the applicant is “locked into” the voucher size, if the family has sufficient income to meet the financial obligations of a larger unit, they may be able to rent a unit with more bedrooms than the voucher size.

6. How much rent will I pay?

Rent is based on the family’s total gross income & allowable expenses. The housing manager will calculate the amount of rent a tenant will be required to pay before signing the housing contract. Applicants must have sufficient income to maintain utilities, pay their rent portion and living expenses.

7. What is considered income?

Income can be earned (employment) or unearned, which can include (but is not limited to): child support, pensions, VA benefits, Social Security/SSI benefits, alimony, Pell, GO & SEOG student grants, money given to the family or bills paid on behalf of the family, unemployment payments, insurance, etc.

Failure to fully report any & all income, earned or unearned that the family receives is considered by HUD to be fraud. Any determinations of fraud committed can result in termination or denial of assistance.

8. How much is my voucher worth?

The voucher is not assigned a dollar value – it is a measurement of family composition.

9. With my voucher can I rent a unit owned by a family member?

As a rule, no. HUD specifically prohibits assisting applicants in rental units owned by a family member; parents, children, siblings, cousins, grandparents, aunts/uncles, nieces/nephews. The only exception that HUD allows is in the instance where an applicant has a disability, and the unit in question was specifically modified to accommodate and address that specific disability. An example would be if the applicant is wheelchair bound, and the owner added ramps, widened doorways, installed handicapped toilets/tubs/sinks, etc.

10. What if I decide I don’t like where I moved into?

Public Housing tenants do not transfer unless the unit is damaged and poses a health and/or safety threat. HCV tenants must remain in a unit for the initial first year (365 days) before being eligible to transfer. If a tenant moves out of an assisted unit within the first year the tenant is ineligible to receive housing assistance for 1 year (Public Housing tenants) to 3 years (HCV tenants).

11. When eligible to move, what do I do?

Public Housing tenants must provide their housing manager with a notice of intent to move a full 30 days prior to the move out date (form available at the Housing office). Failure to provide this notice, or providing it with less than 30 days’ notice will result in the Security Deposit being forfeited and ineligibility for housing assistance for 1 year. Rent will be charged for each day the keys are not turned in after the last day of the 30 days’ notice.

HCV tenants must abide by the requirements of the lease that they signed with the landlord. Most landlords also require a 30 day written notice. HCV tenants who move out and are not in good standing (left without notice, owing money for rent, utilities or damages) will be ineligible for assistance for 3 years.

12. What would cause my eviction or termination from assistance?

Public Housing – any violations of the lease, HUD regulations and/or Housing Authority policies.

HCV – Eviction by a landlord, violations of the voucher obligations, HUD regulations and/or Housing Authority policies.

13. What is the best advice regarding housing assistance?

Follow all regulations, policies and obligations, and ask your housing manager before taking any action that may affect your assistance – don’t listen to “street corner experts!”