

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the difference between a tenant-based Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) and Property Rental Assistance (PRA)?

Under the tenant-based HCV program, CHA issues a voucher to an eligible family and the family selects an available unit of its choice. If the family moves out of the unit, the contract with the owner ends and the family can move with continued assistance to another unit.

Under the PRA program, the rental assistance is attached to the unit. CHA enters into an assistance contract with the building owner for specified units and a specified term (5 to 30 years). CHA then refers families from its waiting lists to the property owner/developer to fill vacancies. If a lease-compliant family moves after two years the family may receive a tenant-based voucher if one is available.

2. Who screens the tenants for the assisted units?

Owners set their own property-specific tenant screening and selection criteria, which must apply to all the units at a property regardless of PRA assistance. The lease used for participating properties must comply with the Chicago Residential Landlord Tenant Ordinance. CHA will review the Tenant Selection Plan to ensure compliance with Fair Housing and the PRA program.

3. What are examples of typical screening criteria?

Typical screening criteria includes: payment history of rent and utility bills; criminal background checks/drug related criminal activity; home visits to assess housekeeping skills / ability to care for a unit.

Owners may also have a work/attending school preference (such as 20 hours per week) and may opt to conduct annual drug testing for all adults residing at the property.

4. How are tenants referred to PRA units?

CHA will refer prospective tenants to the owner to fill vacant units. 50% of these referrals will be from the Public Housing Program (current residents, Relocates and the general waiting list) and 50% will be from the Housing Choice Voucher Program waiting list, which may include geographic preferences based on the neighborhoods of current residence or employment.

5. Are units that are already occupied in Existing Buildings eligible for PRA?

Yes, if the families residing in the units are program and income eligible, the units may receive rental assistance. However, at turnover those units should be leased using CHA's referral process.

6. What happens if sufficient referrals are not made in a timely manner after a unit (s) has been selected for PRA assistance and is ready for occupancy?

CHA will pay 50% of the contract rent for the initial 60 day lease-up period. After that CHA may exercise an option to pay 100% of the contract rent to extend the initial lease-up period for an additional 30 days. Owners must provide a written explanation for rejecting referrals from CHA's waiting list within 5 business days. After 60-90 days, if sufficient tenant referrals have not been eligible, the owner may qualify and lease assisted units from a Site-Based waiting list. Owners must inform CHA in writing prior to qualifying families for a PRA unit from a Site-Based list.

7. When should marketing of the PRA units begin?

For new construction and rehab, owners should work with CHA to begin marketing the units 90-120 days in advance of lease-up. For vacant units in existing housing, marketing should begin as soon as the owner is notified of property selection.

8. How many units in a building can be assisted under PRA?

For Family Housing: Generally up to 25-40% of the units may be assisted.

For Senior Housing: Generally up to 50% of the units may be assisted.

For Supportive Housing: Up to 100% of the units may be assisted.

9. What are the owner/manager responsibilities?

The owner or property manager is responsible for managing all operational and financial aspects of the property, which includes: maintaining building code compliance, conducting annual inspections of the PRA units, verifying income and program eligibility of tenants, screening tenants, enforcing lease compliance, submitting annual building income and expense statements. It is expected that the owner or manager will use CHA's online Yardi system or pay a 1% fee to CHA to provide this reporting function.

10. What are CHA's responsibilities?

CHA's responsibilities are to ensure timely monthly payment of rental assistance, make timely referrals of prospective tenants to owners, review rent comparables to process annual rent increases and to perform Quality Control reviews and site visits.