

Housing Choice Program

Building A Brighter Philadelphia



Philadelphia Housing Authority
Building Beyond Expectations





Message from Carl Greene

-Executive Director

Welcome to the new Housing Choice program. It's the program most of you have known as Section 8. But we've made so many improvements that we thought we ought to improve the name too.

I'm sending you this publication to tell you about some of the changes and to explain how the program works. My hope is that once you've looked at our presentation, you'll agree Housing Choice doesn't have to detract from Philadelphia's neighborhoods.

I like to call Housing Choice the working person's program. That's because in Philadelphia, our goal is to target 50% of all Housing Choice vouchers for low-income working families. Another 25% of the vouchers go to the elderly and disabled. And we're adding a special short-term voucher program for laid-off workers.

The Philadelphia Housing Authority wants to be responsive to your concerns. The Section 8 program was badly abused for many years. In some cases, criminals and drug users were issued vouchers, and neighborhoods suffered. Well, those days are gone. All applicants now undergo criminal background checks. And once they're approved they receive training in what's expected of a good neighbor.

Most Housing Choice voucher recipients blend into the community, but when there is a reported problem, our investigators respond. There are too many deserving families waiting for housing to allow abusers to remain in the program.

To ensure that the community has input into how the Housing Choice program is managed, I formed a citizens advisory committee. These Philadelphia residents are volunteering their time so that they can directly represent you with ideas and opinions.

The Philadelphia Housing Authority is on a mission. We've been demolishing the old public housing projects and building modern developments in their place. We've converted run-down decaying areas into clean, safe neighborhoods. Now, we're bringing that same level of commitment to our Housing Choice program.

I urge you to take a few minutes to read how the program works.

Together, we can make sure that only those families who need and deserve vouchers get them.

That way we can reach our goal – making Housing Choice a program that benefits all Philadelphians.

Homes in the Housing Choice Program come in all shapes and sizes, and blend into the neighborhood.



What is Housing Choice?

Housing Choice is a government program that provides vouchers that low-income families can use toward their rent – or in some cases toward a mortgage. The federal government created the program in 1974 with the idea of allowing private landlords to provide apartments and houses for rent to eligible low income families. Until that time, the government had built and operated all public housing.

PHA still owns and operates public housing developments throughout the city, but the majority of our tenants now live in privately owned homes.

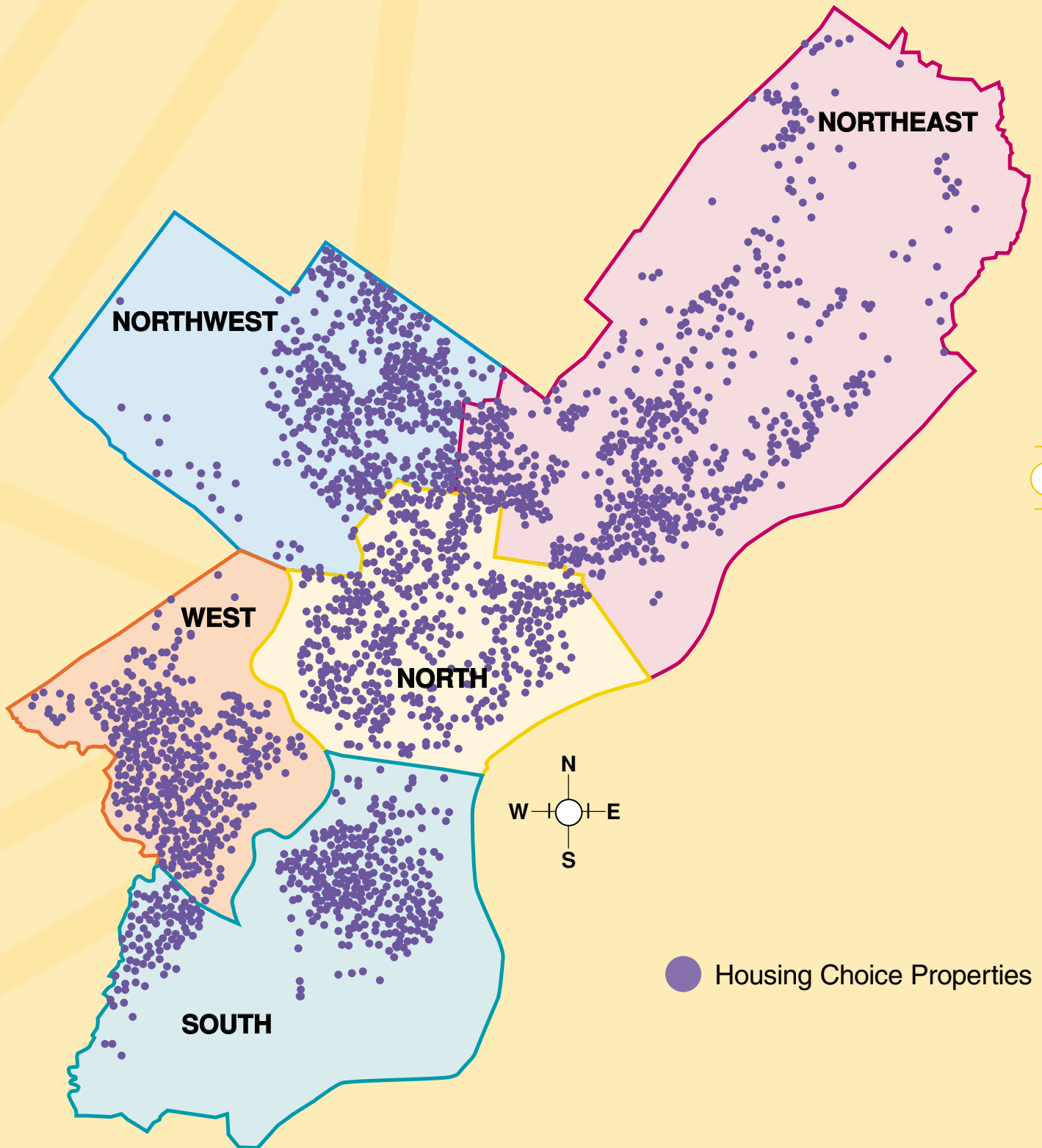
The goal of the Housing Choice program is to help low-income families strive for the same things most of us want in life, a rewarding job, a clean, safe neighborhood and independence. That's why we encourage and require participants to take advantage of the educational and job-training opportunities we offer. As their incomes rise, PHA reduces the portion we pay toward the rent.

We don't want recipients to stay on the program for life. In fact, we no longer allow it. PHA is the first major housing authority in the nation to impose a seven-year limit for able-bodied recipients to stay on the program.

The average Housing Choice participant in Philadelphia remains on the program for about three and a half years. Most understand that Housing Choice is meant to be a transitional program.

They also understand that being on the program is a privilege and that they must adhere to community standards for the way they behave and upkeep their property.

Properties are located throughout Philadelphia



Moving to Work

PHA is among the first large housing authorities in the nation designated a Moving To Work (MTW) agency by the federal government. That designation gives us much greater flexibility in how we manage all of our programs, but most notably Housing Choice. That's how we are able to develop and enact the series of changes you'll see detailed in this booklet. MTW also makes it possible for us to shift money to areas of importance to the community, such as tenant and landlord rule enforcement.

Under MTW, we can be more creative in looking for ways to move tenants more quickly back into the workforce and toward homeownership. Also as part of MTW, we are moving to a two-year lease instead of the current one-year lease. We want to encourage families to become part of their neighborhood instead of moving to a different house or apartment every year.

Tenants who take part in the Housing Choice program have to qualify for it. They must prove that they are U.S. citizens or legal aliens. They must disclose their employment, income, Social Security numbers, and other pertinent financial data.



Housing Choice Properties & Tenants

How A Property Qualifies for Housing Choice

The Housing Choice program uses the private rental market to supply subsidized housing to PHA clients. These homes are typically apartments in apartment buildings, duplexes, triplexes, or they can be individual row houses.

The owners of these apartments and houses apply to PHA to include their properties in the Housing Choice program.

Before a property can be offered, it must pass inspection based on federal Housing Quality Standards. The inspections take place after the landlord completes a federal lease approval form. Both the landlord and tenant must sign this form.

Once the property passes the inspection, it can be used in the Housing Choice program.

How A Person Becomes a Housing Choice Tenant

Tenants who take part in the Housing Choice program have to qualify for it.

They must prove that they are U.S. citizens or legal aliens. They must disclose their employment, income, Social Security numbers, and other pertinent financial data. PHA conducts a criminal background check of all Housing Choice applicants.

An applicant who successfully completes these requirements can be accepted into the Housing Choice program. He or she must then attend a PHA Tenant Responsibility Training Workshop. They receive a voucher and have 60 days to find a housing unit that takes part in the program.

Landlords screen prospective Housing Choice tenants the same way they screen any tenant in keeping with fair housing requirements. After a landlord selects a tenant, both parties complete a lease approval form for PHA. The housing authority will approve a lease for a minimum of one year if the housing unit passes inspection. PHA determines the rent for the unit and the voucher payments are made directly to the landlord on a monthly basis. The tenant pays his or her share to the landlord as well.

Resident Training & Expectations

Once a person is accepted as a tenant in PHA's Housing Choice program, they must attend a Tenant Responsibility Training Workshop. The training ensures that Housing Choice participants are fully aware of all program requirements, including the maintenance of their homes and city law.

An investigator from the PHA Police Department also attends this briefing to explain the don'ts of the program. Don't cause a nuisance to the community, don't allow unauthorized people to live in your home, don't sublease your apartment and don't put your trash out on the wrong day. In short, don't behave in a way that would cause your neighbors to complain. The tenant receives a voucher only after completing the workshop.

As part of PHA's goal of making Housing Choice the working persons' program, we encourage the heads of Housing Choice households to join our Economic Self-Sufficiency (ESS) program. It offers assistance with child-care, transportation, education, career counseling, and job training and placement. Once an ESS participant gets a job, PHA instructs that person on how to establish and maintain credit. The entire process has one objective; helping participants move up and out.

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Speedier Hearings

Once PHA has determined that a tenant should be removed from the program, we promptly hold a hearing. A committee — comprised of a PHA lawyer, investigator and a manager — reviews the facts and determines within five days whether to terminate the participant.

We have imposed this expedited hearing process because until now it has simply taken too long to resolve these cases, and neighborhoods have suffered for it. Thousands of people are on the Housing Choice waiting list. We will not condone behavior that tears down the quality of a neighborhood when so many deserving people are waiting for a home.

Housing Choice Investigative Strike Force

PHA will not tolerate antisocial behavior from our Housing Choice tenants. Our police department has created a force of inspectors, investigators and detectives who immediately respond to reports of problems. We begin by checking our records to make sure the property in question is a part of Housing Choice. (Many calls we get turn out to be for properties that are not part of the program.) Then we look at Philadelphia police records to see whether there have been previous complaints about the property. Next, we interview the tenant, landlord and the person or persons who reported the problem. If we find that the tenant is not abiding by our rules we begin the process of terminating them from the program.

One important note - we do not evict Housing Choice tenants. We remove them from the program and discontinue their rent subsidy. It is up to the landlord to evict the tenant. That's why we train landlords to thoroughly screen applicants. Landlords are better served spending the time up front to prevent a problem later.



Landlord Training

PHA expects properties in the Housing Choice program to be kept up at least as well as the other properties in the neighborhood. Landlords are responsible for providing decent, safe and sanitary housing at rents comparable to similar homes.

PHA requires landlords who want to include their properties in the Housing Choice program to take a training course. The Institute of Real Estate Management, the nation's leading real estate management organization, conducts these sessions. The classes help prospective landlords by teaching them the requirements of the Housing Choice program.

All properties in the Housing Choice program must pass a Housing Quality Standards inspection. A lot of time is spent at the training session telling landlords what to look for and fix before a mandatory inspection takes place.

We conduct random inspections of Housing Choice properties in addition to the annual inspection required by HUD. We also inspect properties when we receive a complaint.

PHA emphasizes the importance of landlord responsibility at its training sessions, that is, not being an absentee landlord. Landlords cannot respond to their tenants or PHA if they are not around to manage the properties. PHA's random inspection schedule is designed to discourage landlord absenteeism.

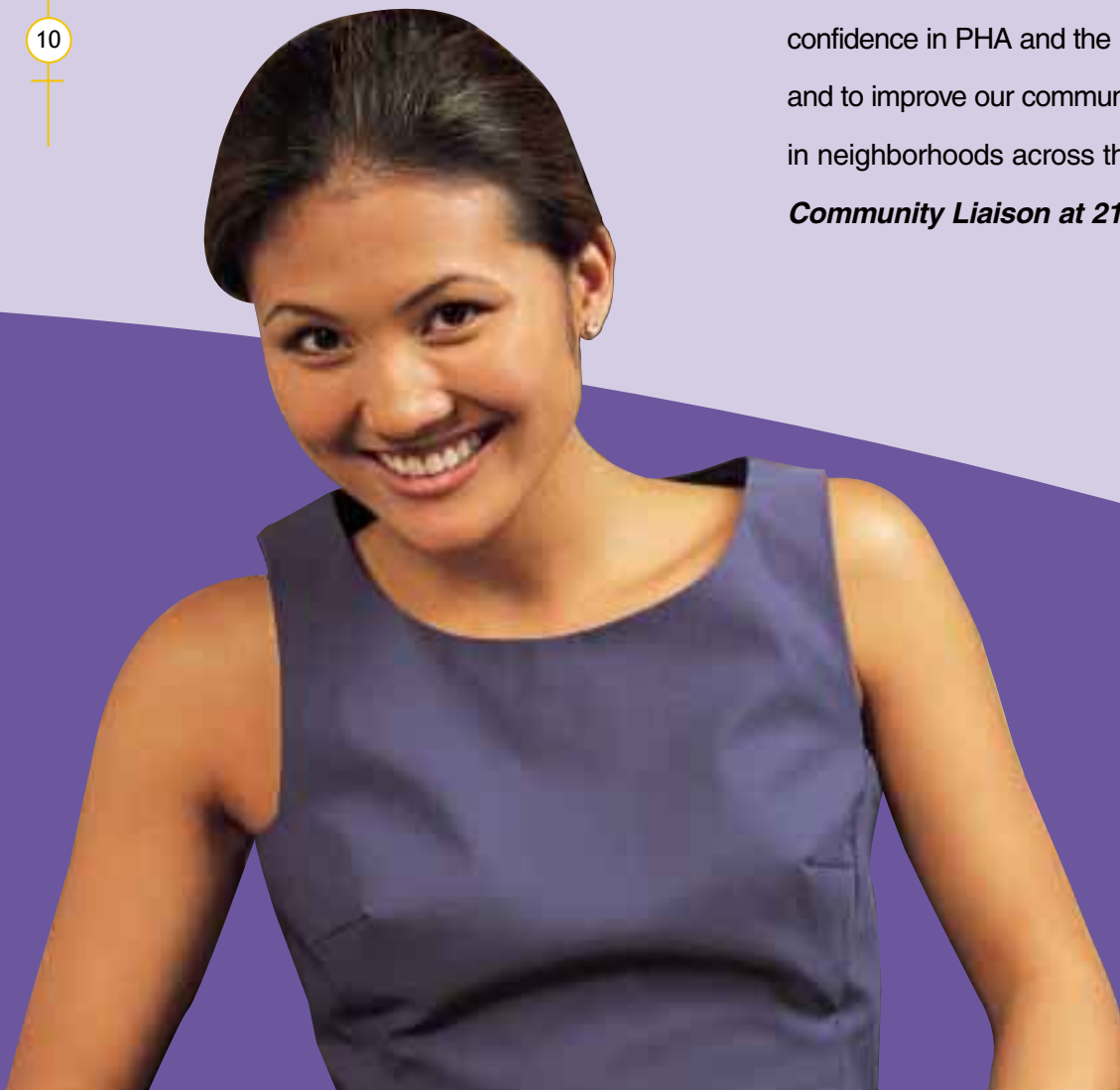
Community Liaison

PHA has a Community Liaison who engages the community and pays special attention to problems reported by neighborhood residents.

This person has one focus — the stability of neighborhoods — and works hand in hand with the special investigative unit of the Housing Choice program.

The Community Liaison also answers inquiries from participants in the Housing Choice program or those who would like to enroll in it.

The goal of the Community Liaison is to build confidence in PHA and the Housing Choice program, and to improve our communication and relationships in neighborhoods across the city. ***You can call the Community Liaison at 215-684-1130.***



Homebuyers in the Housing Choice program must hold a full-time job for at least one year to become eligible. They must qualify for a mortgage based on their current income and credit.

Homeownership & Housing Choice

The Philadelphia Housing Authority encourages its clients to become homeowners. People who own their homes typically take better care of the property and the neighborhood is stronger for it. One of our primary goals at PHA is the revitalization of the city's neighborhoods.

Homeownership is a relatively new aspect of the Housing Choice program. People who buy homes through Housing Choice can take out a conventional, 30-year mortgage, but the subsidy would run no more than 15 years.

The term limit on subsidies DOES NOT APPLY to ELDERLY or DISABLED families.

Who Qualifies

The Housing Choice homeownership program is targeted at first-time homebuyers.

Families or individuals must have income of at least \$10,300 a year. PHA requires them to show that they have enough money to cover homeownership and other family expenses.

Homebuyers in the Housing Choice program must hold a full-time job for at least one year to become eligible. They must qualify for a mortgage based on their current income and credit.

Once a person qualifies to take part in Housing Choice Homeownership:

They must take part in a homeownership training program to learn about the costs of owning a home.

Then, they go into a counseling program where they learn how to get a mortgage and about its costs.

A homebuyer in the Housing Choice program must find a lender in the private market the same as any other buyer.

After a homebuyer completes the purchase, they must go back to the counseling program to receive advice and help on maintaining the loan and their good credit.

For more information about this program call 215.684.8015 or 215.684.8018.

What PHA Expects from the Community

If PHA is to hold Housing Choice participants to community standards, we need your help. In most cases, you won't even realize your new neighbors are on the program. They live and go to work or school just as you do. But if you do learn that your neighbors are in the program, don't hold it against them. Welcome them and give them the opportunity to show you they can be good citizens.


At the same time, if you see a property in the program that is not being cared for like the other houses on the block, call us. Housing Choice is about helping people, but not at the expense of the neighborhood.

Housing Choice Program

**Hotline Number
215.684.4330**



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215.684.4330

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