

Open Doors:

Resources for New Yorkers Facing Housing Instability

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NYC

Department of
Social Services



Resources for New Yorkers Facing Housing Instability

The hardest part of living in New York can be finding a place to live. Rents have risen dramatically in the past decades, while incomes have only risen moderately, leading to a housing crisis across the country, especially in cities where housing is already expensive.

But help is available—this guide lists the many resources that exist for New Yorkers looking for housing, such as rental assistance, public and low-income housing, and other programs. It will outline your rights as a renter and educate you about what landlords can and cannot ask you to do.

This guide can also help you if you are facing eviction, housing instability, or homelessness. If you are at risk of eviction or losing your housing, you can visit one of our Homebase or Housing Assistance Program (HAP) partner locations to seek help. There are 25 Homebase offices conveniently located across the five boroughs and two HAP offices. A list of their addresses can be found on page 37.

Free legal services may also be available to you if you are facing eviction in Housing Court. New York City is implementing universal access to counsel for tenants, starting with the highest-need neighborhoods. Services may include representation in housing court, negotiations with landlords, and preparation and filing of required agency and court papers.

Section Two of this guide provides a step by step overview of how to find and rent an apartment in New York City, from helping you navigate the search process to providing you with detailed information about your rights and tips on how to be successful in finding your next apartment.



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Section One

DSS Resources for Homelessness Prevention and Rental Assistance



Homebase

Homebase is a homelessness prevention network with 25 locations across the five boroughs of New York City which provides services to assist you in a housing crisis and help achieve stability. If you are facing eviction, visit the Homebase location nearest you. A list of Homebase locations is on page 37.

It is best to call 311 and schedule an appointment before visiting the Homebase office. If you walk in without an appointment, go EARLY in the day. Before noon is best.

Homebase services include:

- Eviction prevention
- Short-term emergency funding
- Assistance obtaining benefits
- Financial counseling
- Landlord and family mediation
- Employment services
- Linkages to community resources
- Aftercare for clients moving to permanent housing

You will need to provide some basic information when you meet with Homebase staff. Here is a list of documents to bring with you for your visit:

Personal/employment information:

- Identification for all adult household members
- Proof of income/employment for every working member of the household (recent paystubs dated within 30 days of HOMEBASE appointment)
- If you have an active Cash Assistance (CA) case, please bring a CA Budget Letter/WMS printout (dated within 30 days) which you can obtain through ACCESS HRA at nyc.gov/accesshra
- SSI/SSD Award Letter (dated within the last year)

Housing/legal information:

- Copy of lease, or written rental agreement
- Rental assistance referral/certificate/voucher or award letter
- Rent demand, landlord letter or court documents (eviction papers, marshal's notice, lease)
- Light, gas, telephone bill

**Call 311 to connect with a local Homebase office
or visit hra.nyc.gov/homebase**

Emergency Rental Assistance

You may be eligible for an emergency cash grant if it will meet certain special needs. For example:

- Back rent would prevent your eviction
- Payment is needed to maintain or restore utility service(s)
- If you must move, you may be eligible for help with moving expenses, security deposit voucher, broker's fees, or temporary storage for furniture and personal belongings

For more information, please contact HRA's Infoline at 718-557-1399.



Office of Civil Justice

In 2017, New York City became the first city in the United States to ensure that every tenant facing eviction in housing court or public housing administrative proceedings can have access to legal services. NYC's initiative to provide these legal services for tenants is called Universal Access and it is run by the Human Resources Administration's Office of Civil Justice (OCJ). OCJ provides anti-eviction legal services in the Housing Courts and in community offices through nonprofit law firms across the city.

If you are facing an eviction case, a lawyer can:

- Explain the details of your case and give you confidential advice
- Stand up in court for you and communicate for you with judges, lawyers and court staff
- Raise issues or concerns with the landlord's case against you
- Fight for necessary repairs in your apartment, even if you might owe unpaid rent
- Help ensure that your rent is calculated correctly and help you to get back rent paid
- Protect your rights as a tenant

Today, Universal Access is growing in phases by ZIP code, with new neighborhoods added every year. Full citywide implementation will be completed by 2022, when every tenant facing an eviction case will have access to free legal services. Today, tenants who are facing eviction in Housing Court can access free legal services through any of the following:

- **In the courthouse:** at OCJ offices in the Housing Court:
 - Bronx Housing Court – 1118 Grand Concourse, Room 1A
 - Brooklyn Housing Court – 141 Livingston Street, Room 201
 - Manhattan Housing Court – 111 Centre Street, Room 854
 - Queens Housing Court – 89-17 Sutphin Boulevard, Fourth Floor
 - Staten Island Housing Court – 927 Castleton Avenue, First Floor
- **In the community:** at nonprofit community legal offices across the city. Visit nyc.gov/civiljustice for more information
- **By phone:** call 311 and ask for "Universal Access" or "HRA Legal Services"
- **By email:** email civiljustice@hra.nyc.gov for more information



RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

CityFHEPS

CityFHEPS is a City rental assistance program that can help you find and keep affordable housing. It is currently available to New Yorkers facing eviction or eligible for shelter. Eligibility for CityFHEPS depends on your income, housing situation, and other criteria. If you are not living in shelter, go to your nearest Homebase or Housing Assistance Program (HAP) office to find out if you are eligible. If you are living in shelter, talk to your housing specialist about CityFHEPS.

To learn more go to nyc.gov/dsshousing

FHEPS

FHEPS is a State rent supplement for families with children who receive Cash Assistance and have been evicted or are facing eviction, who lost their housing due to a domestic violence situation, or who have lost their housing because of health or safety issues.

To learn more go to nyc.gov/dsshousing





HASA

HASA helps individuals with HIV or AIDS to live healthier, more independent lives. The program can help clients with individualized service plans to target necessary benefits and provide support that is specific to their medical situation and that will enhance their well-being. HASA clients receive ongoing case management and are assigned to a caseworker at one of our HASA centers, located in all 5 boroughs.

HASA services include intensive case management and assistance in applying for public benefits and services, including:

- Emergency transitional housing
- Non-emergency housing
- Medicaid
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits
- Cash Assistance
- Rental Assistance
- Home care and homemaking services
- Mental health and substance use screening and treatment referrals
- Employment and vocational services
- Transportation assistance
- SSI or SSD application and appeal

Applying for HASA

To establish eligibility, an applicant must have been diagnosed, at any time, with HIV or with AIDS as defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

ServiceLine is the single entry point for applications, information, and referrals for services. Applicants are typically referred by medical and service organizations, though applicants can also directly contact ServiceLine from Monday through Friday, 9 AM to 5 PM at 212-971-0626 or for TTY machine: 212-971-2731.



Source of Income Discrimination (SOI) Law

Source of income discrimination happens when a broker or landlord discourages or refuses to rent you an apartment because you receive government assistance to pay rent. The source of income discrimination (SOI) law protects you during your apartment search.

A landlord cannot refuse to rent you an apartment and a broker cannot refuse to work with you because you are paying your rent with government assistance, including rental assistance programs such as CityFHEPS, FHEPS, HASA, Section 8 or Cash Assistance.

This law makes it illegal for brokers and/or landlords to use your government assistance as a reason for denial.

Watch out for brokers and landlords who:



Insist on cash for a security deposit or someone else to guarantee the rent in addition to the security voucher



Insist on a minimum income or proof of employment if the voucher covers the full rental amount



Won't show you any apartments or fail to show all available units



Won't provide an application or insist on higher application fees than advertised

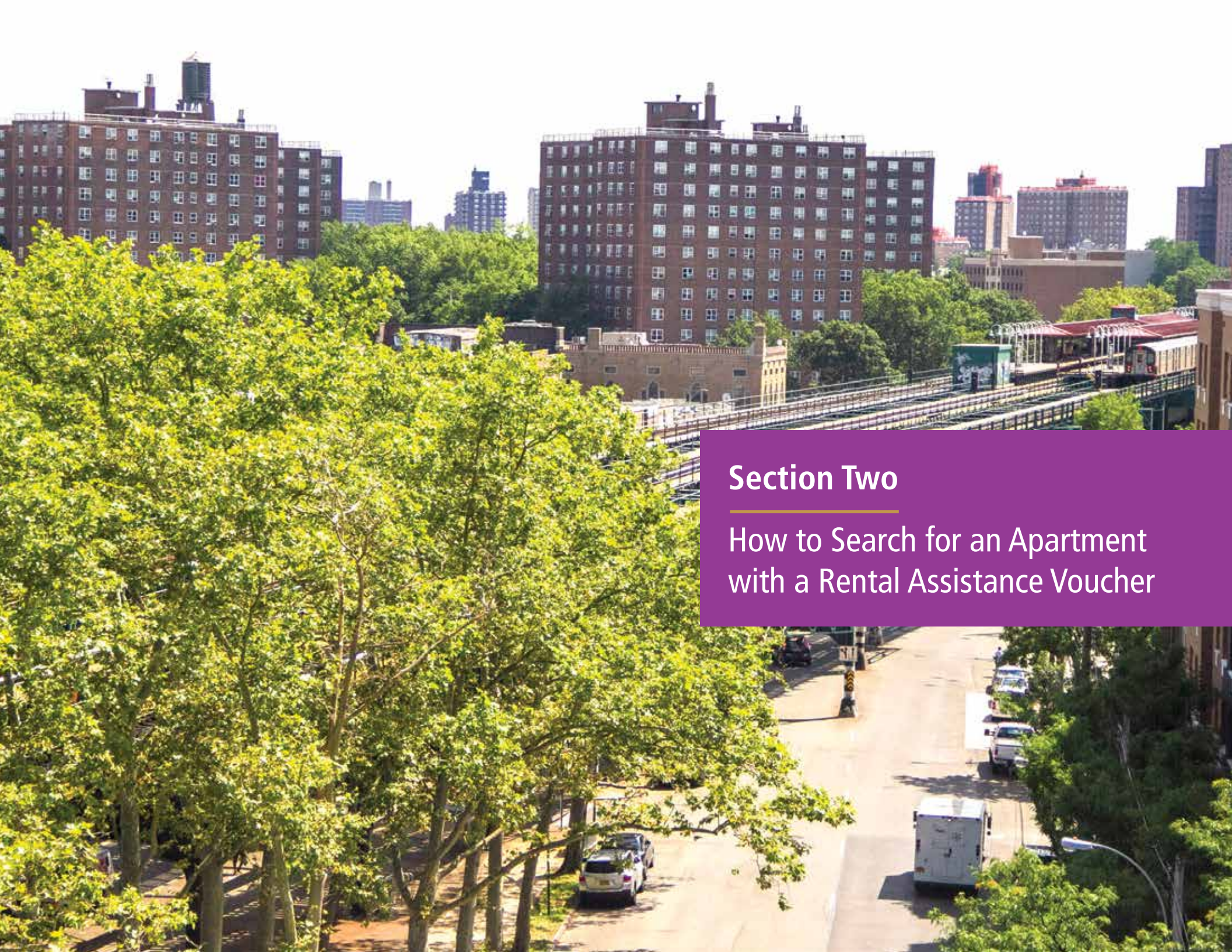


Insist on a particular credit score when the voucher covers the full rental amount



Require cash or a credit check in order to view or hold the apartment

To report Source of Income Discrimination call 929-221-6576 or email soi@dss.nyc.gov



Section Two

How to Search for an Apartment
with a Rental Assistance Voucher

How to search for an apartment with a rental assistance voucher

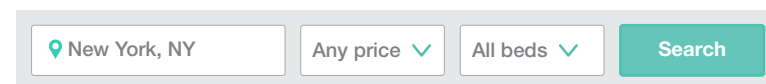
Once you have rental assistance, the internet is one place to search for an apartment and it often provides the most up-to-date information on apartment availability. The New York City housing market moves fast and desirable apartments will likely have many interested applicants. The following section of the guide will help you be ready to take action when you find a desirable apartment.



How to search for an apartment online

Search online using terms like “NYC apartments” or “NYC apartment search” or “NYC apartment listings” and choose a website that shares apartment listings.

Most apartment search sites allow you to enter information to help you find desirable apartments. You can expect to see a box similar to this:




Choose a price point. Remember that your rent must be within your voucher range. Example: If your voucher is for \$1303, you will only be approved for apartments that charge \$1303 or less each month.

Some sites will only allow you to enter a round number, but this shouldn't limit your choices. For example: A voucher is for \$1557. Enter \$1500 or \$1550 as your 'maximum rent' or 'price'.

*Just make sure that you don't enter a price higher than your voucher amount. You cannot pay more rent than the voucher will cover. Side deals are prohibited which means that brokers and landlords cannot ask or require you to pay extra money upfront or monthly (in the first year). If this happens, call the DSS SOI Unit at 929-221-6576 for assistance.

Number of bedrooms. You will see the most options for available apartments if you leave the number of bedrooms blank. Sometimes apartment descriptions are incorrect and searching by a specific number of bedrooms may leave off places that would work well for you. Layout and size are great things to consider as you look for apartments, more so than the number of bedrooms. You may miss out on opportunities when searching by number of bedrooms.

Apartment features. Most websites allow you to select from many different features for your desired apartment such as laundry, etc. The more features you select, the less apartments you'll be able to see. Compromising and deciding between 'must-haves,' like an elevator for someone with mobility limitations, and 'nice-to-haves,' like a dishwasher, are part of the unique NYC housing experience.

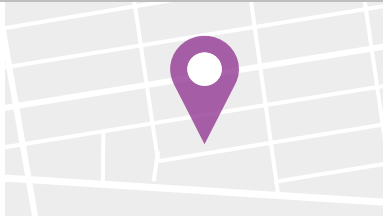


DO YOU KNOW WHAT INCOME DISCRIMINATION LOOKS LIKE?

GORGEOUS NEW 1 BR APT NOW AVAILABLE!

Property Details

Newly Renovated
Hardwood Floors
~~No Vouchers or Programs~~



This is source of income discrimination, and it's
against the law

If you have been deemed unqualified to rent an apartment by a landlord or broker because you are paying with government assistance, please report the incident by:



929-221-6576



soi@dss.nyc.gov

How to search through an ad

You will notice that many apartment listings offer not only a description of the apartment and features, but details about landlord rental requirements and selection criteria as well.

You may apply to any apartment within your voucher level that suits your household!

Do not be distracted by the rental requirements listed in ads, especially if your voucher will cover the rent in full each month.

Let's consider the rental requirements listed in this ad:

- "Tenant Screening or Application Fee" – It is legal for a broker or landlord to charge such fees.
- "Stable employment is a must have" – A landlord who must follow the SOI law must accept any lawful source of income. The landlord cannot require the tenant to be working or to maintain a certain type of employment. If you have rental assistance, you may apply even if you are unemployed.
- "Income 40x the rent" – You cannot be denied an application or an apartment based solely on a minimum income requirement.
- "Decent credit (640+)" – Landlords may not require a minimum credit score. Credit must be considered on a case by case basis.
- "No evictions or judgments allowed" – Landlords can only consider housing court history on a case by case basis. You cannot be denied an apartment or application based solely on your credit score.

Before you call or visit a broker or landlord

If the apartment listing provides the address of the apartment, look up the address with an online search engine. You may find a website for the building or the owner. Take a look at the website for more information about your desired apartment and neighborhood. You may find that you are able to apply directly through the building or landlord's website.



Be wary of websites or brokers that:

- Charge money to view available apartments
- Charge fees to connect you with apartments that accept vouchers
- Appear unprofessional. (Example: Blurry photos, photos that don't match the apartment description or misspelled words.)

Speaking with a broker or landlord

When you can, go to view apartments or meet with brokers in-person. Think of the experience like a job interview. Dress appropriately, have copies of your shopping letter and any supporting documents on hand (never give the rental assistance originals) and present the same professionalism that you will expect from the landlord.

Tips for connecting with brokers or landlords:

- When asked how much you're looking to spend on rent each month – speak in round numbers. For example, if your voucher is \$1246, simply say \$1200.
- Don't ask the broker or landlord "Are you taking programs?" "Will you take a voucher?" or "Do you have apartments available for programs?"
- If a landlord or broker asks where you currently live, you do not have to provide a precise street address or building number to view or inquire about an apartment. If you are asked, you may share a neighborhood or street name.
- If you hear, "we don't have anything available for programs right now" or "the landlord doesn't take programs." Call the DSS SOI Unit at 929-221-6576.
- If a landlord or broker refuses to offer you a viewing or an application, call the DSS SOI Unit to discuss whether the SOI law applies. When you know for sure, you can call the landlord back and say: "I know that for this building the landlord must allow me to view the apartment and apply."

If the broker or landlord still refuses you a viewing or application, call the DSS SOI Unit immediately at 929-221-6576. We take action when you call to correct broker and landlord actions that may violate the law.



General Advice

✓ Remind brokers and landlords about any bonuses and advance rent payments offered by the rental assistance program.

✓ Make sure you understand your rental assistance program.

✓ Remember that the security deposit is covered by a voucher.

Remember, the SOI law does not guarantee an apartment when shopping with rental assistance, but it requires you to be treated equally and have a fair opportunity. If you have a voucher and your rental application is denied, review the guidance provided here to consider whether the denial was fair. When in doubt, call the DSS SOI Unit at 929-221-6576 or email us at soi@dss.nyc.gov.



Section Three

Additional Resources



Section 8

Funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Housing Choice Voucher program, also known as Section 8, provides assistance to eligible low- and moderate-income families to rent housing in the private market. Eligibility for this program is based on a family's gross annual income and family size.

The program works as a rental subsidy that allows families to pay a reasonable amount of their income toward their rent. Eligible families will receive a voucher to begin searching for housing. Generally, families will pay no more than 40 percent of their adjusted monthly income toward their rent share. Section 8 pays the remaining amount to the owner on the family's behalf. This payment to the owner is known as the Housing Assistance Payment.

Section 8 participants must comply with all program requirements, including completing their annual certification, accommodating Housing Quality Standards inspections, allowing property owners to make any needed repairs, and adhering to the terms of their lease.

The federally-funded Section 8 voucher program is administered by several different government Agencies, including the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD), and New York State Homes and Community Renewal (HCR). To learn more about whether you qualify and how to apply, visit any of the following City or State resources:

www1.nyc.gov/site/nycha/section-8/about-section-8.page

www1.nyc.gov/site/hpd/section-8/about-section-8.page

hcr.ny.gov/section-8-housing-choice-voucher-hcv-program

New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA)

The New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) owns and operates nearly 200,000 apartments across the five boroughs, home to more than 400,000 New Yorkers citywide. These apartments, often known as "public housing," are primarily funded by the federal government, subsidized in particular by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. On average, residents are expected to pay 30 percent of their household's income for rent.

Learn more at nyc.gov/nycha



Housing Connect

Housing Preservation & Development (HPD) creates affordable rent-stabilized apartments for households at a wide range of income levels and sizes. NYC Housing Connect is your portal to find and apply for affordable housing opportunities in New York City.

Note: applicants with a housing voucher or rental subsidy may still qualify even if they make less than the minimum.

Learn more at nyc.gov/housingconnect

NYC Department of Consumer and Worker Protection (DCWP)

New Yorkers can get free, one-on-one financial counseling at the NYC Department of Consumer and Worker Protection's (DCWP) **NYC Financial Empowerment Centers**. The Centers' professional, financial counselors can help:

- Tackle debt
- Improve credit
- Create a budget
- Open a bank account
- Save and plan for the future
- Keep personal and business finances separate
- And much more

If you're struggling with debt, need help checking your credit, or saving for moving expenses, make an appointment for free, financial counseling online at nyc.gov/dca, by calling 311, or texting TalkMoney to 42033 (message and data rates may apply; check with your service provider).

DCWP also partners with a number of City agencies, such as NYC Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) with the **Ready to Rent** program to help New Yorkers prepare to apply for affordable housing and the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities with **EmpoweredNYC** to bring specialized and confidential one-on-one financial counseling to New Yorkers with disabilities.



HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH)

The HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program is a collaborative effort between the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and local public housing authorities. Under the HUD-VASH program, eligible low-income veterans receive a Section 8 rental voucher alongside case management and supportive services from the VA at VA medical centers (VAMCs) and community-based outreach clinics.

To learn more go to nyc.gov/dsshousing

Supportive Housing

Supportive housing is affordable housing with supportive social services in place for individuals and families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Supportive housing helps people with complex needs by providing on-site medical, mental health, and substance use services, as well as services that can help you fulfill personal goals like job training and placement. A health care or social services provider can help you determine if supportive housing is right for you, and help you complete an application.

Learn more at nyc.gov/hra

NYC Rent Freeze Program

In 1970, the City of New York began the Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE) program, offering qualifying senior citizens an exemption from future rent increases. In 2005, it was expanded to include qualifying tenants with disabilities under the Disability Rent Increase Exemption (DRIE) program. Together, SCRIE and DRIE are known as the NYC Rent Freeze Program. This program helps eligible senior citizens (aged 62 and over) and tenants with qualifying disabilities (aged 18 and over) stay in affordable housing by freezing their rent. Under this program, a property tax credit covers the difference between the actual rent amount and what you (the tenant) are responsible for paying at the frozen rate.

Learn more at nyc.gov/scrie



HOMEbase Locations

Borough	Provider	Neighborhood	Address
Brooklyn	CAMBA	Bedford-Stuyvesant	1958 Fulton St, 2nd Floor
		Crown Heights	1117 Eastern Parkway, 3rd Floor, side entrance
		East Flatbush	2244 Church Ave, 4th Floor
	Catholic Charities Neighborhood Services	Cypress Hills	3060 Fulton St
		East New York	560 Livonia Ave
	RiseBoro	Brownsville	145 E 98th St, 5th Floor
		Bushwick	90 Beaver St
		Bushwick	1475 Myrtle Ave
		Bushwick	1875 Broadway, 1st Floor
	The Bronx	BronxWorks	Woodstock
Concourse			1130 Grand Concourse, 3rd Floor
Catholic Charities Community Services		Unionport	2155 Blackrock Ave
		Hunts Point	890 Garrison Ave
		Williamsbridge	2901 White Plains Rd, 2nd Floor
		Wakefield	4377 Bronx Blvd, 3rd Floor
HELP USA		Mt. Hope	1780 Grand Concourse
		Van Nest	1860 East Tremont Ave
		University Heights	1981 Sedgwick Ave
		Williamsbridge	815 Burke Ave
Manhattan	SUS – Urgent Housing Programs, Inc.	Washington Heights	516 W 181st St, 4th Floor
		East Harlem	2322 3rd Ave, 3rd Floor
Queens	Catholic Charities Neighborhood Services	Jamaica	161-10 Jamaica Ave, 5th Floor
		Far Rockaway	1847 Mott Ave
Staten Island	CAMBA	St. George	120 Stuyvesant Place, 4th Floor, Ste 413
		Tompkinsville	208 Bay St

Note: Homebase locations may change or be added. For the latest information, go to nyc.gov/homebase, or call 311.

Housing Assistance Program Locations

Borough	Provider	Neighborhood	Address
The Bronx and Manhattan	BronxWorks	Woodstock	630 Jackson Ave, Bronx
Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island	RiseBoro	Bushwick	90 Beaver St, Brooklyn
		Brownsville	745 Ralph Ave, Brooklyn



Important phone numbers

Homebase – for an appointment call 311

HASA – 212-971-0626

DSS Infoline – 718-557-1399

HRA Legal Services – call 311 and ask for “HRA Legal Services”

DSS Source of Income Discrimination Unit – 929-221-6576

Domestic Violence Hotline – 1-800-621-HOPE

Rental Assistance Call Center – 929-221-0043

Housing-related legal services are also available at the City’s Family Justice Centers, which provide comprehensive civil legal, counseling and supportive services for survivors of domestic violence, elder abuse and sex trafficking.

NYC Family Justice Center | Brooklyn

350 Jay Street
718-250-5111

NYC Family Justice Center | Bronx

198 East 161st Street, 2nd Floor
718-508-1220

NYC Family Justice Center | Manhattan

80 Centre Street
212-602-2800

NYC Family Justice Center | Queens

126-02 82nd Avenue
718-575-4545

NYC Family Justice Center | Staten Island

126 Stuyvesant Place
718-697-4300



**Department of
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