

SECTION 8 HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER PROGRAM

The Housing Choice Voucher Program (Section 8) is funded through the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and provides housing subsidies for eligible low income households. The program is administered under an annual contract with local housing agencies (in Santa Barbara: The SB City Housing Authority and the SB County Housing Authority). The central goal of the program is to provide assistance to ensure that low-income families have affordable, decent, safe and sanitary housing. Recipients of Section 8 assistance receive a voucher that may be used to rent housing on the private market. Eligibility for the voucher is based upon the household income. Local housing agencies may also establish specific priorities to address particular local needs. The housing voucher will cover a portion of the rent and the tenant is responsible for paying the balance (generally 30-40% of the monthly adjusted gross income for rent and utilities). The voucher will specify a certain number of bedrooms, based on individual needs/family size (e.g. a person with a disability who needs a live-in aide would be approved for a 2 bedroom unit). HUD establishes maximum rent levels for units from a studio to 5 bedrooms.

When a voucher is awarded, the individual/family usually has 60 days to find housing on the open market. An extension may be granted if an active effort to locate housing is not successful in this time. The individual/family must find a rental unit with a rent below the maximum rent level for the number of bedrooms approved, and with a landlord who will agree to participate in the program. The Housing Agency will inspect the rental property to ensure that it meets minimum housing quality standards for the program. When a unit is approved, the tenant signs a rental agreement with the landlord, and the landlord signs a contract with the Housing Agency. The housing subsidy is paid directly to the landlord by the Housing Agency and the tenant pays the balance.

Section 8 vouchers are available to approved low-income applicants. In addition, Aftercare vouchers are available specifically for individuals who have low income and are disabled. These vouchers are generally portable and may be used for other qualifying housing when the individual/family moves, as long as they comply with the terms of their rental agreement and the program requirements. Another type of voucher is affixed to particular rental units; and tenants receive housing assistance while residing in these units, but the voucher remains with the unit when the tenant moves.

Section 8 applications are available through each Housing Agency. There are often long waiting lists and the agency may periodically close the list. It is generally advisable to complete any form the Housing Agency may provide and to apply for all housing programs for which the individual/family may qualify. It is essential to meet any deadlines established, provide all information requested and respond to any correspondence received. Applicants who meet certain federal preferences and/or local priorities can receive assistance more quickly. Qualification for the Aftercare voucher program may help expedite the process. The local regional center should be able to provide assistance in applying for the Aftercare voucher program.

