

Using SSVF Emergency Housing Assistance with Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV): Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

This document provides answers to frequently asked questions on using Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) Emergency Housing Assistance (EHA) for Veterans who have obtained a HCV. This resource is available to any homeless Veteran obtaining an HCV, not just Veterans participating in the Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program.

Background

With many housing markets becoming increasingly competitive, landlords are often unwilling to hold a unit vacant while the processes necessary to approve the unit for a HCV occur. A recent policy change by SSVF allows these units to be occupied, housing the Veteran household while ensuring rent is paid.

The most recent SSVF Notice of Fund Availability (NOFA) further clarified the allowable uses of SSVF EHA. Specifically, the NOFA clarified that EHA may be provided by SSVF programs to allow a Veteran household to transition in place, after having obtained a HCV (i.e. HUD-VASH or regular HCV) and having identified both a suitable housing unit and a landlord willing to participate in the HCV program. SSVF can provide temporary financial assistance under the EHA category to landlords for up to 45 days, to secure the identified housing unit, when a pending housing quality inspection and administrative processes necessary for leasing are delaying immediate access to the PHA housing assistance payments. SSVF EHA payments may not exceed what would otherwise be paid to the landlord when the HCV is utilized (this includes both the value of the HCV and the tenant's portion of the rent), and assistance cannot be provided for more than 45 days. In the SSVF EHA program, Veterans do not sign a long-term lease during the period of time that EHA payments are being made. If the landlord requires an agreement or lease during the time that the EHA is provided, the interim agreement or lease needs to be limited to 45 days.

Who is eligible for SSVF Emergency Housing Assistance?

A homeless Veteran with a HCV who has already identified a permanent housing unit and a landlord who is willing to participate in the HCV program is eligible for SSVF EHA to transition in place.

What are some of the challenges in housing Veterans using EHA?

SSVF EHA is limited to 45 days. Since rental payments from the public housing authority do not begin until the housing unit passes a housing quality standards inspection (HQS), delays may occur if the identified housing unit does not pass the HQS. Furthermore, this may result in denials of housing assistance payments by the Public Housing Authority (PHA). When using SSVF EHA to transition in place, it is recommended that Veterans be placed in units that are likely to pass inspection and with landlords

who are familiar with the PHA process. SSVF EHA funds should not be used for the Grant and Per Diem transition in place program, as the Veteran would have been living in their unit for an extended period of time through transitional housing. SSVF providers should be familiar with the PHA HQS and must conduct their own initial inspection of the housing unit prior to providing EHA.

Additionally, HCVs are typically required to be utilized for units that meet the HUD Fair Market Rents (FMR) and Rent Reasonableness standards. When using EHA to transition in place, providers should only assist in placing Veterans into units that meet these FMR and Rent Reasonableness standards.

What options are available when an identified unit fails HQS inspection?

If a unit fails inspection, the landlord may be able to make repairs to satisfy the HQS and request re-inspection of the unit. If the landlord is not willing to make repairs or the unit does not pass re-inspection then the HCV could not be used for that unit and the Veteran would have to pay the full portion of rent or find a different unit to use the HCV. As the Veteran is being placed through EHA, a lease will not be signed and a security deposit will not be paid until the unit has been approved for HCV use. This allows SSVF to work with HUD-VASH or the local PHA to provide move-in assistance for another unit if necessary. SSVF may be able to assist Veterans with moving cost temporary financial assistance (TFA) to assist with relocation to a new unit.

How much EHA can be made available to a Veteran in an unsuccessful transition in place?

The availability of EHA TFA will be reduced by the number of days used to support the unsuccessful transition in place. EHA is limited to a total of 45 days for the household and not per housing unit.

How do providers and landlords access and utilize EHA for Veterans with permanent housing HCVs?

Prior to considering the use of SSVF EHA, a Veteran will have received an HCV from a PHA. A housing search will be completed and the Veteran will identify a rental unit that will likely pass HQS and meet FMR standards. If the landlord agrees to participate in the HCV program then the landlord will issue paperwork, including the *Request for Tenancy Approval* form, to the PHA to initiate the HQS. The landlord and Veteran both agree that the Veteran can move in the unit prior to the HQS inspection passing, without signing a long-term lease (the landlord may require a short-term weekly or monthly lease agreement), and both confirm understanding with SSVF provider that SSVF will pay the housing assistance portion of rent directly to the landlord until the unit passes HQS for up to 45 days. After that period passes, if the HCV is still not available the Veteran will either need to pay the housing cost or be re-housed.

When does the Veteran sign the lease?

When EHA is provided to allow the Veteran to transition in place, the household should not sign a long-term lease with the landlord until the HQS inspection passes and the PHA has entered into the contract with the landlord to provide housing assistance payments on the Veteran's behalf. If the landlord requires an agreement or lease during the time that the Emergency Housing Assistance is provided, the

interim agreement or lease needs to be limited to 45 days since that is the limit of available emergency housing assistance from SSVF.

How is an SSVF transition in place path to housing different from a progressive engagement approach to housing?

When Veterans are enrolled in SSVF for rapid rehousing services, it is assumed that this intervention will result in permanent housing placement. Veterans maintain their homeless status while participating in rapid rehousing programs and, therefore, remain eligible for other housing programs, such as HUD-VASH, that require literal homelessness as a condition of admission. If a Veteran is housed using a SSVF rapid rehousing intervention and, upon further assessment, it is discovered that the Veteran would be more appropriately suited for permanent supportive housing, the SSVF provider may refer the Veteran to the HUD-VASH team for participation in the HUD-VASH program. The SSVF provider will note that, through progressive engagement, permanent supportive housing is better suited than the SSVF rapid rehousing intervention. When a Veteran will utilize EHA to transition in place, the Veteran is already appropriately matched to the permanent housing intervention and is in need of short-term EHA while the HQS and other administrative leasing processes are completed.

How does VA efficiently manage resources when a Veteran is co-enrolled in SSVF and the HUD-VASH programs?

While SSVF and HUD-VASH are designed to be stand-alone programs, there are unique situations in which Veteran households may require assistance from both SSVF and HUD-VASH. Effective utilization of resources from both programs requires coordination among VAMC HUD-VASH staff, SSVF providers, and local PHAs to ensure smooth transitions for Veteran households and to prevent duplication of services. When Veterans are identified as requiring assistance from both SSVF and HUD-VASH, such as using SSVF EHA to transition in place, providers must document the justification for accessing both resources and are required to ensure that all parties, including the Veteran and landlord, are informed of the process for receiving services and when services may be terminated.