

Mainstream Vouchers: Frequently Asked Questions*

1. What is a Mainstream voucher?

These are special purpose federally funded vouchers offered through the NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Section 8 program. A Mainstream voucher is a type of rental assistance for families with an adult member age 18-61 who has a disability, and who is homeless, living in an institution such as a hospital or a nursing home, or at risk of being homeless or institutionalized. HPD has been allocated a limited number of Mainstream vouchers. Mainstream vouchers assist households that locate housing of their choice and that pay a portion of the monthly rent to the owner. The household will typically pay 30% of their household income towards rent and HPD pays the difference.

2. Who is eligible for a Mainstream voucher?

For your household to be eligible for a Mainstream voucher, your family must include a member who is age 18 to 61 years old, has a disability, and must document that they meet one of the following criteria:

- **Currently homeless:** living in a shelter, a public space like a park or car, or in immediate danger of losing your home, including due to domestic violence or other life-threatening situation; OR
- **At risk of becoming homeless:** living in an unstable housing situation where your inability to pay rent, or the lack of support from family or friends, will lead to homelessness; OR
- **Currently living in an institution:** living in a hospital, nursing home or adult home where privacy and independence are limited; OR
- **At risk of being institutionalized:** at risk of being institutionalized in a nursing or adult home due to the absence of supportive community services.

Documentation must be provided to verify the age, disability and housing status of the qualifying household member.

3. How does the Mainstream voucher program define disability?

In order to be considered disabled for purposes of Mainstream voucher eligibility, the adult age 18-61 in your household must meet one of the following federal requirements:

- Receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) as a result of their disability.
- Is unable to be employed for 12 months or more as a result of a physical or mental condition that is medically documented;
- Has a physical, mental, or emotional condition:
 - that is expected to be long-term or last indefinitely;
 - that substantially interferes with their ability to live independently, and
 - where their ability to live independently could be improved by better housing conditions.

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- Has a severe, chronic disability that:
 - is related to one or a combination of mental or physical conditions;
 - is likely to continue throughout their life;
 - results in major limitations in three or more of the following areas: self-care, communication, learning, ability to move freely, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency; and
 - results in an individual's need for lifelong, individualized support.

4. Does the eligible person in my household have to be the head of household?

For the Mainstream voucher program, the qualifying household member is not required to be the head of household. However, if the qualifying member of the household leaves the household before the family is admitted to the program and there is no other qualifying member of the household, the household will no longer be eligible for assistance through the Mainstream program. Being admitted into the Mainstream program means that you have located housing, HPD has approved the unit, you have signed a lease with the owner and HPD has sent you written notice that you are admitted to the Mainstream program.

5. I believe I am eligible for a Mainstream voucher. How do I apply?

If you believe your household may be eligible for a Mainstream voucher, you may:

- Contact the Center for Independence of the Disabled, NY (CIDNY) directly for assistance with eligibility and application assistance. CIDNY is a non-profit organization that helps New Yorkers with disabilities access services for independent living, including housing, through the New York Connects Program. CIDNY's New York Connects Program serves all five boroughs of New York City. You may contact CIDNY's New York Connects directly by:
 - Visiting a New York Connects Program's borough office in person:
 - Bronx: 4419 Third Avenue, Suite 2C, Bronx, NY (within the offices of Bronx Independent Living Services)
 - Brooklyn: 27 Smith Street, Floor 3, Brooklyn, NY (within the offices of the Brooklyn Center for Independence of the Disabled)
 - Manhattan: 841 Broadway #301, New York, NY
 - Queens: 80-02 Kew Gardens Rd, Suite 400, Kew Gardens, NY
 - Staten Island: 56 Bay Street, Floor 3, Staten Island, NY (within the offices of Community Health Action of Staten Island)
 - Phone: Call 844-862-7930 and follow the prompts for your preferred borough office.
 - Email: housinghelp@cidny.org.
- Request a *Mainstream Voucher Program Interest Form* from HPD. HPD has a limited number of Mainstream vouchers. Once these vouchers have all been issued to qualifying families, HPD will not accept further applications. If HPD is accepting applications for vouchers, HPD will mail you a *Mainstream Voucher Program Interest Form*. You may contact HPD by:

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- Phone: HPD's Client Services office at 917-286-4300.
- In person: HPD's Client Services office at 100 Gold Street, Room 1-0, New York, NY 10038 between the hours of 9am and 4pm.
- Email: HPD at MainstreamVouchers@hpd.nyc.gov.

HPD has partnered with the Center for Independence of the Disabled, NY (CIDNY) for assistance with Mainstream eligibility and application assistance. HPD has a limited number of vouchers available. Pending voucher availability, completed *Mainstream Voucher Program Interest Forms* will be shared with CIDNY, and CIDNY will reach out to families directly to provide application assistance and additional resources and services for families with disabilities.

As soon as Mainstream vouchers become available, CIDNY's New York Connects program will help families complete a Mainstream voucher application, including required documentation, and help you send copies of your documentation with your voucher application.

- HPD works directly with partner organizations, such as the NYC Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities, the NYC Department of Homeless Services, and social service providers to identify potentially eligible households and complete applications.

6. What happens after I submit a completed *Mainstream Voucher Program Interest Form* to HPD?

HPD works with the Center for Independence of the Disabled (CIDNY) to help screen applicants for eligibility for the Mainstream voucher program. After you submit your *Mainstream Voucher Program Interest Form* to HPD, and pending voucher availability, you will be contacted by CIDNY within 15 business days to screen your family for eligibility for the Mainstream program. For families who may be eligible, CIDNY will help you fill out an application. For households that may not be eligible for the Mainstream voucher program, CIDNY may be able to discuss additional resources available for your family.

7. What documentation will I be asked for as part of the application process?

To receive a Mainstream voucher, you will be asked to provide documentation to verify your family's eligibility. These may include:

- 1) A Verification of Disability form (Form 3 in your application packet) or a letter from the Social Security Disability (SSD) Program;
- 2) A letter indicating your qualifying member's housing status:
 - *Homeless* or *at risk of homelessness*: CARES report from DHS, EPU report from HASA, an HMIS record, or a Street outreach letter
 - *Institutionalized* or *at risk of institutionalization*: letter from a government agency, healthcare provider or social service provider
- 3) Documentation of all income and assets for all members of the household.

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8. I'm going to turn 62 soon. Am I still eligible for this voucher?

The qualifying family member of the household (which may be yourself) must be age 18 to 61 at the time your household is formally admitted into the Mainstream voucher program. If you turn 62 after being admitted, your family will remain eligible for the Mainstream voucher program as long as you continue to comply with program requirements. You are formally admitted to the program after:

- you have located an apartment;
- you have submitted a completed HPD Landlord Package for the identified apartment;
- you have received a move-in letter indicating HPD approval of the rent and the apartment;
- the owner of the unit has signed a Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) contract with HPD for the subsidy; and
- you have signed a lease for the apartment.

HAP is the subsidy, or the amount that HPD pays your landlord towards your rent each month. Generally, it may take approximately six to eighteen months to be formally admitted to the program once your application for Mainstream assistance has been submitted. If you turn 62 at any point in this process prior to formal program admission, and there is no other qualifying member in your household, you will be unable to receive subsidy through the Mainstream voucher program. **Note: If you are 61 years old and applying for a Mainstream voucher, be aware that your application may be denied due to lack of adequate processing time prior to turning 62.**

9. What happens if the qualifying family member for the Mainstream Voucher Program leaves the household?

If the qualifying member leaves the household prior to being formally admitted to the Mainstream voucher program, and there is no other qualifying member of the household, the family will no longer be eligible. If the qualifying member leaves the household after being formally admitted to the Mainstream voucher program, the household may continue to be subsidized.

10. What happens after my application is submitted?

After completing an application with the assistance of an HPD partner agency, including CIDNY, your application will be submitted to HPD for you. HPD will review your application for completeness and eligibility. HPD may contact you to request more documentation. If you are determined eligible for the Mainstream voucher program, HPD will contact you to schedule a tenant briefing. You will be required to bring updated income documentation to this appointment. If your application is denied, you will receive a notice in the mail from HPD.

If HPD has received all required documentation at the briefing, you will be issued a voucher and Landlord Package.

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11. I am being told there are no more vouchers available. Why?

HPD has been allocated a limited number of Mainstream vouchers by the federal government. Once these vouchers have been issued to qualifying families, HPD will not accept further applications. If a member of your family is disabled and you are interested in additional resources, you may reach out directly to CIDNY. You may also access affordable housing lotteries on the NYC Housing Connect website: <https://a806-housingconnect.nyc.gov/nyclottery/lottery.html>.

12. I have received a Mainstream voucher. What do I do now?

Once you receive a Mainstream voucher, you must find an apartment to rent. There are a variety of resources available to you:

- **NYC Housing Connect** is an online resource that contains information on affordable housing opportunities in New York City. It can be accessed at: <https://a806-housingconnect.nyc.gov/nyclottery/lottery.html>.
 - **Housing Ambassadors:** HPD partners with community-based service providers in New York City to provide information about Housing Connect's affordable housing lotteries and assistance with the Housing Connect application process. Information about Housing Ambassadors can be found at: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/hpd/renters/housing-ambassadors.page>.
- You may consider applying for a unit in one of HPD's **Project-Based Voucher (PBV) buildings or developments**, in which the Project-Based voucher subsidy is attached to a designated unit. Tenant-based Section 8 applicants, or voucher holders, may be eligible to apply for a project-based voucher while looking for an apartment with your voucher. If you receive a PBV, you will have to forfeit your Mainstream voucher. However, after one year of residence in a project-based unit you may be eligible either to move or receive a tenant-based voucher, depending on voucher availability. Information about these projects, including how to apply can be found at: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/hpd/section-8/project-based-voucher.page>.
- **www.GoSection8.com**: Owners interested in participating in HPD's rental subsidy programs register available apartments through this website. Voucher holders are encouraged to check these listings often. You may view information on available apartments at: <https://www.gosection8.com/logreg.aspx?user=tenant>
- **HRA emergency assistance:** New York City's Human Resources Administration (HRA) has limited funds available to help with moving expenses, security deposits, broker's fees, and temporary storage for furniture and personal belongings. Information and eligibility requirements can be found at: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/hra/help/cash-assistance.page>, or by calling HRA's Infoline at 718-557-1399.

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13. How long does my Mainstream voucher last?

The initial term of the voucher is listed on the voucher as 120 days. If you are close to the end of your voucher term and you have not yet located housing, you may submit a request for an extension within 30 days of your voucher's expiration date. The extension request form is available on HPD's website, at <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/hpd/downloads/pdf/voucher-extension-request-form.pdf>. If you do not use the voucher within the approved term, the voucher will expire and you will not receive rental assistance. If the qualifying member of your household turns 62 at the time of voucher expiration, and there is no other qualifying member in your household, you will not be eligible for a voucher extension.

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