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Emergency Housing Vouchers: Guidance for Victim Service Providers

As part of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), which was enacted into law in March 2021, Congress appropriated \$5 billion for Emergency Housing Vouchers (EHVs) intended to assist individuals and families who are homeless or facing housing instability, as well as individuals and families who are fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, stalking, or human trafficking. This document provides:

- An overview of the allocation and distribution process for EHVs; and
- Recommended steps that victim service providers (VSPs), including culturally specific victim service organizations, serving domestic, sexual assault, and human trafficking survivors, can take to advocate for gender and racially equitable survivor access to these new resources.

Overview

EHVs are administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). On May 5, 2021, HUD released a notice ([EHV Notice](#)) outlining the operations requirements for EHVs. In the EHV Notice, HUD announced that it would allocate approximately 70,000 EHVs to Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) nationwide for local distribution. Not all PHAs were offered EHVs. For a list of the specific PHAs in each state that were allocated EHVs, see the EHV Award List on the [HUD EHV website](#). Each PHA had the option of declining their EHV award in whole or in part. The deadline for accepting the award was May 24, 2021. An updated list of PHAs that accepted their awards should be available shortly on the HUD EHV website. HUD will reallocate any EHVs within the respective states that become available because PHAs declined their initial EHV allocation.

What is an EHV?

EHVs are a form of **tenant-based rental assistance** similar to the Housing Choice Voucher program. Individuals/families who are provided an EHV by a PHA are responsible for finding a private landlord who will accept the EHV for a rental property on the private market. Once the rental property is secured, the EHV covers a portion of the rent, and the tenant pays for any remaining balance of rent owed beyond what the EHV subsidy covers.

Like Housing Choice Vouchers, EHVs are mobile housing subsidies that are tied to the voucher holder(s), not the property. Therefore, individuals/families can keep their EHV if they move and use the rental assistance for a new rental unit, even if the new unit is in an area that is not covered by the PHA that originally issued their voucher.

Who is Eligible to Receive EHV's?

To be eligible for an EHV, an individual/family must fall under one of the following categories as defined by HUD:

- Homeless;
- At risk of homelessness;
- **Fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or human trafficking (sex and labor trafficking);¹ OR**
- Recently homeless and providing the voucher would prevent the individual's or family's homelessness or having a high risk of housing instability.

HUD is using the definitions of "domestic violence," "dating violence," "sexual assault," and "stalking" as provided by the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and the definition of "human trafficking" under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act.

Those four categories define the universe of individuals that, based on the American Rescue Plan Act, can be eligible for EHV's. However, **each PHA has the discretion to more narrowly target their EHV allotment to specific groups or subgroups within those categories that they view as most in need of prioritization.**

To be eligible for an EHV, applicants must also meet certain income qualifications.

Additionally, EHV's have certain restrictions related to immigration status. At least one U.S. citizen or individual with "eligible immigrant status"² must live in the household in order for the household to qualify for an EHV. Mixed-status families can utilize EHV's, but, since only members of the household who have "eligible immigration status" can receive benefits, the voucher subsidy will be prorated (or reduced) to take into account the household members who are not eligible for the assistance.

Which Services Must PHAs Provide for Individuals and Families Receiving EHV's?

PHAs are required to provide housing search assistance to individuals/families who receive an EHV. A "Services Fee" of \$3,500 comes with each EHV that is provided to an individual/family. The Services Fee is intended to support housing search-related services for EHV holders, but can also be used to fund other eligible supports, if the PHA chooses. A summary of the eligible uses for the Services Fees are below.³ The PHA can provide these services directly or can contract with a Continuum of Care (CoC), VSP, including culturally specific victim service organizations, or other entities to deliver these services.

- **Housing Search Assistance (required)**: This is a broad category that is intended to cover the services that EHV holders may need to successfully navigate the initial housing search process. It can include, among other things, helping individuals/families to identify available and accessible units, assisting with transportation relating to the housing search, assisting with rental applications and PHA forms, and help with the leasing process. EHV recipients are not guaranteed ongoing support services beyond the leasing-up period. However, PHAs are

¹ For definitions of these categories for purposes of the EHV program, see the [EHV Notice](#) at pages 19-21.

² Those considered to have eligible immigrant status for the purposes of the EHV program include: (1) U.S. citizens and nationals; (2) lawful permanent residents; (3) VAWA self-petitioners; (4) asylees and refugees; (5) parolees; (6) persons granted withholding of removal/deportation; (7) victims of trafficking; (8) individuals residing in U.S. under compacts of free association with Marshall Islands, Micronesia & Palau; and (9) immigrants admitted for lawful temporary residence under the Immigration Reform & Control Act of 1986.

³ For more detailed information on the categories of eligible services, see the [EHV Notice](#) at page 10-14.

encouraged to coordinate with CoCs and other stakeholders in the community wherever possible to identify those longer-term supports and ideally provide them to EHV holders through outside partnerships or supplemental funding sources.

- **Deposits and Fees (optional)**: This category includes financial assistance with items such as security deposits, holding fees, utility deposits, utility arrears payments, application fees, non-refundable administration or processing fees, and other similar leasing-up costs.
- **Owner-Related Uses (optional)**: This category includes owner recruitment and outreach work, as well as financial support for owner incentives or retention payments.
- **Other Eligible Uses (optional)**: This category includes items such as moving expenses, provision of tenant readiness services (where PHAs can create customized plans to address barriers to renting, such as bad credit or lack of credit, bad rental or utility history), purchase of essential household items, and renters insurance.

How are EHV's Distributed? What Roles Can State DV/SA Coalitions and VSPs, Including Culturally Specific Victim Service Organizations, Play?

PHAs are the entities that have been designated to receive and administer EHV's at the local level. However, collaboration is not only highly encouraged by HUD, **it is mandated in several instances, particularly in regards to working with CoCs and VSPs, including culturally specific victim service organizations.** HUD is requiring that PHAs enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with their CoCs, VSPs, including culturally specific victim service organizations, and other service providers to establish a partnership for the administration of the EHV program. The primary role of CoCs, VSPs, and other service providers under the MOU is to make direct referrals of EHV-eligible individuals/families to the PHAs.

Direct referrals from the CoC must come through the Coordinated Entry (CE) system, except in certain situations discussed below. The CoC must use the CE system to identify individuals/families who appear EHV-eligible. The CoC must then provide documentation to the PHA verifying the individual's/family's EHV eligibility.

Many VSPs (particularly culturally specific victim service organizations and anti-trafficking and sexual assault service providers) do not participate directly in their area's CE system. In those instances, PHAs and CoCs must work directly with those organizations to accept referrals.

The PHA must provide EHV's to individuals/families outside of the CE system when:

1. The CE system does not have a sufficient number of eligible families to refer to the PHA.
2. The PHA makes an EHV available to facilitate VAWA emergency transfer as outlined in the PHA's Emergency Transfer Plan.
3. The CE system does not identify families that may be EHV eligible based on the fact that they are fleeing or attempting to flee, domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, stalking, or human trafficking. In these instances, the PHA must partner directly with a VSP to be a direct referral agency instead of the CoC.

When a VSP, including a culturally specific victim service organization, agrees to act as a direct referring agency for EHV, the partnership must be recorded in an MOU. The VSP can create a separate MOU with the PHA or can be included in the MOU that the PHA has established with the CoC. Also, when a VSP agrees to act as a direct referring agency, the VSP must provide eligibility verification for the individuals/families that are referred by the VSP.

To ensure safety and low-barrier access to the program, and to align with trauma-informed best practices, third-party documentation and/or invasive questioning should not be required for this verification. A documented crime of domestic violence, sexual assault, or human trafficking from law enforcement is not required. Requiring a restraining order or other criminal justice involvement is not needed either. Rather, a simple verification sheet from the VSP, including a culturally specific victim service organization, based on a self-attestation from the survivor is sufficient.

Forthcoming is a certification form that VSPs can use to certify the eligibility of survivors who are applying for EHV and are being referred to PHAs. The completed form can be provided to PHAs for eligibility verification purposes.

HUD has made it very clear that PHAs should work closely with CoCs, VSPs, including culturally specific victim service organizations, other community stakeholders, and individuals with lived experience to:

1. Determine how distribution of EHV will be prioritized among the categories of eligible applicants;
2. Collaborate regarding community-wide service provision to support EHV holders; and
3. Identify gaps in the system that must be remedied in order to properly assist EHV holders.

These are all areas where domestic and sexual violence (DV/SA) state coalitions and VSPs, including culturally specific victim service organizations, can be essential stakeholders in the process of designing their local EHV distribution process. DV/SA state coalitions and VSPs, including culturally specific victim service organizations, best understand the unique housing barriers that survivors face and understand why prioritization of this group is vital. As organized stakeholders, they are uniquely aware of the service gaps that exist for survivors in mainstream housing systems and can raise awareness about those unmet needs. Also, VSPs, particularly culturally specific victim service organizations, are the best-situated groups to provide trauma-informed, racially equitable, and safe services that will lead to successful housing identification and stability for survivors. For these reasons, it is essential that VSPs, including culturally specific victim service organizations, collaborate with PHAs and CoCs during the planning phase of the EHV program.

Beyond partnering with the PHA as a direct referral agency, there may also be opportunities for VSPs, including culturally specific victim service organizations, to partner with the PHAs to provide services to EHV holders. PHAs that distribute EHV receive Services Fees to provide initial housing search assistance. As noted previously, the PHA can choose to use that funding to contract with partners like VSPs, including culturally specific victim service organizations, to carry out those services on their behalf.

Also, there may be opportunities for these stakeholders to partner, formally or informally, with PHAs to provide ongoing support services for survivors who utilize EHV and other rental subsidies. The Services Fees that the PHA is allocated through the EHV program do not cover longer-term housing stabilization services. However, HUD heavily encourages PHAs and CoCs to identify community partners who can provide these supports. Where VSPs, including culturally specific victim services organizations, already have funding to support this type of service provision, collaboration with the PHA to provide such services to EHV holders could be greatly beneficial. Where additional funding would be needed to provide such services, HUD encourages PHAs and CoCs to work with community partners like VSPs,

including culturally specific victim service organizations, to identify alternative funding opportunities through CoC, ESG, or other funding streams.

Where Can I Find More Information?

[The HUD EHV website](#) is a web page specifically dedicated to EHV-related information and resources. The webpage contains HUD guidance and materials related to EHV, an EHV FAQ document, registration links for upcoming HUD EHV webinars, and recordings and materials from previously held HUD EHV webinars.

Next Steps & Advocacy Guidance

The best advocacy steps for survivor stakeholder organizations in regards to EHV will be different depending on the unique circumstances of each community and their CoC region (i.e. policies, practices, and the involvement of DV/SA state coalitions and VSPs, including culturally specific victim service organizations). Below are some general advocacy suggestions that programs can utilize if they make sense in the context of your community.

- ★ **Get Connected ASAP:** If you haven't already, get in touch right away with the PHA in your area that has been awarded EHV to make clear that your organization wants to be a part of the coordinated community discussions around EHV distribution. As noted above, you can access a list of the PHAs that received EHV on the [HUD EHV website](#) in the "List of EHV Awardees" Excel Sheet. If you need contact information for a particular PHA, [click here](#). It may also be helpful to reach out to your local CoC, to make sure VSPs, including culturally specific victim service organizations, and survivors are included in any working groups or discussions that are being held regarding EHV.

If you are experiencing challenges with your PHA or CoC, such as connecting with them or getting them to partner with your organization on EHV implementation, you can reach out to contacts at your local HUD office, to seek their support and possible intervention. If you do not have a contact at HUD, your local DV/SA state coalition or local legal aid housing attorneys may have HUD contacts that they can share with you. Involving HUD will be critical to getting PHAs and CoCs on board to follow the guidance in the EHV Notice and partner with VSPs, including culturally specific victim service organizations.

- ★ **Prioritization of Survivors for EHV:** Advocate for individuals and families fleeing and attempting to flee domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, stalking, and human trafficking to be prioritized for EHV. Many PHAs and CoCs may not be aware of the unique barriers to housing that survivors face, and VSPs, including culturally specific victim service organizations, can help raise awareness of those issues. There is also some concern that PHAs may choose to focus any prioritization of EHV for survivors specifically on VAWA Emergency Transfers. Although emergency transfers are important, it is also critical that PHAs understand the need to provide resources to survivors who are not currently in the voucher system. An additional concern relating to focusing resources solely on emergency transfers is that survivors of human trafficking are not covered under emergency transfer provisions. Therefore, if emergency transfers are the single focus of EHV prioritization for survivors, victims of trafficking will be excluded.
- ★ **Direct Referral Partnerships with VSPs, Including Culturally Specific Victim Services Organizations:** VSPs, including culturally specific victim service organizations, can act as direct referral partners outside of the CE system. In most areas, survivors are consistently

underrepresented in the CE system. Even in systems where survivors are considered fully integrated into the CE system, many barriers around confidentiality and trauma-informed care lead to survivors not being fully or properly identified or prioritized by the CE system. Historically, culturally specific organizations for and by communities of color and human trafficking organizations have not been equal stakeholders within their local CoC. If that is the case in your community, we highly advise advocating for your organization or other VSPs, including culturally specific victim service organizations, to be direct referral agencies. Additionally, if your PHA or CoC states that it cannot take direct referrals from outside of the CE system, and you believe that this approach will be detrimental to survivors in your community, it is important to advocate that the PHA or CoC change their policy. If you want further guidance on how to advocate in this area, please contact us for assistance.

These issues are most acute for BIPOC, sexual assault, trafficking, and other historically disenfranchised survivors. Culturally specific, sexual assault, and anti-trafficking programs and the survivors who they work with are rarely properly represented in the CE system. It is critical that PHAs understand the importance of reaching out to, and partnering with culturally specific, sexual assault, and anti-trafficking programs, as direct referral agencies wherever possible.

- ★ **Confidentiality and Trauma-Informed Practices:** As the EHV program is being designed in your area, make sure that documentation requirements are designed to be low-barrier (i.e. verification is limited to a simple verification form from a VSP or self-attestation from a survivor). **Please use the attached certification template for VSP referral agencies.** Referral systems must be designed in a way that respects confidentiality. For example, all information provided to the VSP concerning the incidents of violence must be confidential and not entered into a shared database. PHA employees must also not have access to these details, unless: (1) the survivor has consented to the disclosure in writing in a time-limited release; (2) the disclosure is required for an eviction proceeding or hearing regarding termination of assistance; or (3) the disclosure is otherwise required by law (like a court order). Finally, VSPs who partner and/or contract with PHAs as part of the EHV program should make sure that any related grant reporting associated with those partnerships does not require the VSP to share personal identifying information for a survivor or require the VSP to utilize HMIS.

- ★ **Identify Service Gaps & Create Partnerships to Fill Them:** An important role for VSPs, including culturally specific victim service organizations, is to help the PHA and CoC identify gaps in services that survivors utilizing EHV's may face - both related to initial housing search assistance as well as ongoing stabilization services.

For initial housing search assistance (i.e. navigation services, landlord outreach, or security deposit assistance), if your organization has pre-existing resources that help survivors who utilize EHV's, those services should be linked into the coordinated community planning around EHV's. Where no resources exist to provide trauma-informed, survivor-centered, and/or culturally specific housing search assistance to survivors who utilize EHV's, encourage the PHA to contract with your organization or another VSP in your area to provide services using EHV Services Fees funding.

For ongoing stabilization services, if your VSP has pre-existing resources that can help survivors who utilize EHV's, those services should be linked into the coordinated community planning around EHV's. Where no resources exist to fill housing stability services for survivors, encourage

your PHA and CoC to formalize a partnership with your organization to fill those gaps for EHV holders and help you identify available funding streams to support the work.

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Visit [SafeHousingPartnerships.org](https://www.SafeHousingPartnerships.org) to access a comprehensive collection of online resources and to request technical assistance.

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