

# Vermont Department for Children and Families

## CARES Housing Voucher Project

### Statewide Policies & Procedures

The CARES Housing Voucher Project is a rapid re-housing assistance program through the Homeless Continuum of Care to provide medium-term rental assistance to Vermont households who are experiencing homelessness. The CARES Housing Voucher is intended to provide rental assistance and housing support for up to 12 months while the household is actively working to increase their income or secure other forms of longer-term affordable housing. The CARES Housing Voucher Project has limited funding and will operate from October 2020 – March 2022. Applications can be submitted beginning September 1. Twelve-month rental assistance vouchers will be issued from October 2020 through January 2021. Vouchers will have an option to extend in increments of three months through March 2022.

The CARES Housing Voucher Project is supported with Vermont's allocation to the HUD Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) Program through the CARES Act. Unless otherwise established in this document, the CARES Housing Voucher Project will follow all [Housing Opportunity Grant Program standards](#). The CARES Housing Voucher Project will meet all requirements as established in 24 CFR Part 576.

Housing secured under this program is subject to state and federal fair housing law, which prohibits against discrimination based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex, disability, family status, age, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, being a victim of domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking, and receipt of public assistance.

#### Who is eligible for a CARES Housing Voucher?

- 1) The household meets the AHS/HUD definition of homeless in 24 CFR 576.2 and the recordkeeping requirements in 24 CFR 576.500(b), (c), (d), and (e), specifically:

Program participant eligibility for the CARES Housing Voucher Project (a rapid re-housing activity) is limited to families and individuals who meet the criteria under paragraph (1) of the HUD Definition of Homelessness (Appendix A), or who meet the criteria under paragraph (4) and live in an emergency shelter or other place described in paragraph (1) of the definition.

[https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/HomelessDefinition\\_RecordkeepingRequirementsandCriteria.pdf](https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/HomelessDefinition_RecordkeepingRequirementsandCriteria.pdf)

- 2) The household does not receive rental assistance through any other subsidized housing program; and
- 3) The household's **net** monthly income (income minus expenses) cannot be less than 30% of total monthly income, as the household will be required to pay 30% of income towards housing costs.

### **STEP 1: REFERRED for a CARES Housing Voucher**

Households are identified and referred through the local Coordinated Entry Process. Households must have completed a Coordinated Entry assessment and be on the local Master List.

Vouchers will be allocated to each local Homeless Continuum of Care. From time to time, the Office of Economic Opportunity may re-evaluate voucher utilization, remaining funds and needs, and reallocate any remaining vouchers among the local Continuums of Care.

When there is an open CARES Housing Voucher, the local Continuum of Care may make a referral to a designated local CARES Housing Support Agency. All referrals must follow the prioritization policy of the Chittenden Homeless Alliance or Vermont Coalition to End Homelessness.

All CARES Housing Voucher participants must enroll with the local CARES Housing Support Agency, even if their primary service provider is different.

### **STEP 2: APPLY for a CARES Housing Voucher**

Once identified by the local Homeless Continuum of Care, an application must be fully completed and signed by the applicant household and the local CARES Housing Support Agency.

Applications are submitted to the statewide CARES Voucher Rental Assistance Administrator:

Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity (CVOEO)

All applications must be accompanied by:

- A local Coordinated Entry letter verifying the referral.
- Documentation of eligibility.
- Documentation of income.

CVOEO will verify eligibility and, if needed, request additional information. Incomplete or unsigned applications will be denied but can be resubmitted once corrected.

### **STEP 3: TENTATIVE APPROVAL for a CARES Housing Voucher**

Applicants who meet the eligibility criteria and are referred through the Coordinated Entry process will be tentatively approved by CVOEO for a CARES Housing Voucher.

The tentative approval notice will include:

- The portion of rent the applicant is responsible for each month.
- The rental unit size.
- The maximum allowable rent plus utilities.

- The maximum allowable security deposit (up to twice the value of one month's rent).
- The county in which the rental unit must be located.
- Next steps, including additional unit requirements, that must be verified.

See Appendices for additional information on these requirements.

Applicants must locate a rental unit within 60 days from the date of tentative approval notice. The rental unit must meet the criteria for size and maximum allowable rent, pass a housing inspection, and be located within the county indicated in the tentative approval notice. CVOEO will deny the application if the applicant has not located a rental unit meeting these criteria within 60 days of the date of the tentative approval notice; however a fifteen day extension will be granted when a unit has been identified but a lease has not yet been executed.

#### **STEP 4: FINAL APPROVAL for a CARES Housing Voucher**

In order to obtain final approval for a CARES Housing Voucher, an applicant must submit the following documentation to CVOEO within 15 days of notifying CVOEO that a rental unit has been located:

- Notice that the unit has passed the housing inspection.
- Executed lease agreement with completed CARES Housing Voucher lease addendum.

CVOEO shall deny the application if the above documentation is not accurately completed and received within 15 days of receiving notification that a rental unit has been located.

CVOEO will sign the CARES Housing Voucher lease addendum and return it to the landlord, the client and the housing support worker.

#### **STEP 5: Work on Long-term Housing Plans**

Clients are required to meet with a housing support worker not less than once per month to develop and implement a plan to assist the client in ensuring long-term housing stability.

Together, the client and housing support worker will develop a plan to assist the participant in retaining permanent housing after the CARES Housing Voucher ends, taking into account participant's current and expected household budget, additional sources of assistance, and affordability of area housing.

The housing support worker will help the client connect to mainstream benefits and services which may support the client, including employment training and support programs, financial capability education, and resources on tenant rights and responsibilities.

The client will apply for a longer-term affordable housing with housing authorities and local affordable housing providers.

## Ongoing Eligibility Requirements

### 1) CARES Housing Voucher shall continue for 12 months unless the client:

- Receives another housing subsidy or voucher (e.g., Housing Choice Voucher, Family Unification Voucher, Shelter + Care);
- Is evicted (excluding no cause or sold property evictions);
- Is not meeting with the housing support worker; and
- Has not paid their portion of the rent for three or more months.

### 2) Re-evaluation of income and client portion of rent.

Prior to twelve months, income and client portion of rent will only be re-evaluated at the request of the client. For example, a client whose income has decreased may request a recalculation of the tenant portion of rent.

If requested, CVOEO will review current income documentation and recalculate the tenant portion of rent based on current income. CVOEO will notify the landlord, housing support worker and client of any changes and when they will take effect.

### 3) At 12 months, the CARES Housing Vouchers may be extended in increments of up to three months.

For each extension requested, the household will submit an updated CARES Housing Voucher Review Form, signed by the client and the housing support worker. The review form must be received by CVOEO no later than the first day of the last approved payment month. The Review Form must include:

- Client's current housing status and progress on long-term housing plans.
- Documentation of current household income and resources.

So long as the review form is submitted on time, and so long as funding is available, a three-month extension will be approved if:

- The client is a tenant in good standing.
- The client is in the process of securing a longer-term housing subsidy (e.g., have already applied to housing authorities and affordable housing providers), or has been working to increase income.
- The client and housing support worker commit to continue working together and an outline of service plan goals for the three months requested.
- The client does not have annual income that exceeds 30% of median family income.
- The client lacks sufficient resources and support networks necessary to retain housing without a CARES Housing Voucher.

## **APPENDICES**

- A. Definition of Homelessness & Documentation Requirements
- B. Income Verification & Client Portion of Rent
- C. Fair Market Rent & Rent Reasonableness
- D. Determining Unit Size
- E. Housing Inspections
- F. Coordinated Entry Prioritization & Verification
- G. CARES Housing Voucher Application
- H. CARES Housing Voucher Annual Review Form – To Be Developed
- I. VAWA Requirements
- J. Client Notice of Rights
- K. Lease Addendum
- L. VAWA Property Owner Rights Notice
- M. VAWA Self Certifications of Domestic Violence
- N. Emergency Transfer Request
- O. VAWA Release
- P. Self-Declaration of Housing Status