

Housing Resources and Strategies

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Introduction

In addition to knowing your rights under Fair Housing Laws, it is important to know how to try to solve housing problems when litigation or exercising rights may not be the only or best solution. When a family or a person experiences a permanent disability and has access to decent, safe and affordable housing their opportunities and contributions to a community are enhanced. This chapter broadly describes some of the resources and programs that someone with a disability may be eligible to apply for to help mitigate different types of housing dilemmas. It will also direct you to other sources for additional information and detail.

Local administration and variability

Since housing funds are often managed at the local level (city and county), you will find significant variation in eligibility, housing priorities, type and level of funds, loan conditions, and timelines. Eligibility requirements and the actual availability of programs/funds also often change annually. The majority of these resources have upper income eligibility limits and many have a cap of 80% of county median income, which is adjusted for the size of your family.



It is important to develop a working and positive relationship with your local housing resource agencies and organizations. Those partnerships foster the preservation and expansion of affordable housing for low and moderate-income households who have a member with a disability. Like all the human services we rely on, housing resources are equally as complicated. Learning and partnering will be important along the way to solving your housing difficulty.

High demand, low supply

Affordable Housing Resources, Programs and Systems

Resources for addressing the ever increasing cost of housing and loss of existing affordable units is disproportionate to the demand for low income households, including households who have members who experience disability. In particular, people with disabilities receiving SSI or other public benefit programs, find it hard to afford to rent, buy or maintain decent housing in today's market. Additionally, many households who have low wage earners and experience disability cannot reach, find or keep housing. Individuals or families with both a disability and very low to moderate incomes may need financial assistance and resources to fill the gap between what housing costs and what they can afford.

As stated previously, most federal and state resources are income based, generally requiring a person to earn less than 80% of county median income (**CMI**). These resources, often in the form of a loan with good terms, can be used to help people pay a portion of their rent; help with downpayment for a home/condo; help modify structures for health, safety and accessibility; assist in rehabilitation and repair; make weatherization improvements; remove lead paint; assist with well and septic replacement, etc. In addition to public resources, there are private resources for loans through your local lenders, the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority, Rural Development (formerly call Farmers Home Administration) and others throughout the state.

Rental Assistance Programs and Resources

Section 8

Income guidelines

www.hud.gov

The federal housing subsidy program typically known as “Section 8” was created in 1974. Through the Section 8 Program, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (**HUD**) pays a portion of the shelter costs incurred by eligible households. The basic guidelines for the program are that Section 8 benefits are reserved for lower income families, that is, families whose annual incomes fall below 80% of the median income for the county of residence. The vast majority of Section 8 benefits are reserved for very low-income families, those with annual incomes below 50% of county median. To locate your county median income adjusted by family size go to HUD’s web site, which is listed in the left hand column. These income limits are adjusted each year and are published by HUD.

Definition of family and contribution

Under Section 8 the definition of “family” applies to single individuals. For example, people with disabilities and single individuals over 62 years of age can be treated as “a family” for Section 8 purposes. Calculating the family income is complicated and includes adjustments to account for certain expenses. The calculations are made when you apply locally for Section 8. A family eligible for Section 8 subsidy is expected to pay 30% of their adjusted income for shelter, which is defined as rent plus utilities. Because income calculations are reviewed and updated each year, your portion of the rent could go up or down.

Fair market rates

Housing units eligible for Section 8 assistance payments can be owned by public or private entities including nonprofit corporations and certain kinds of cooperatives. All units must be in “decent and safe condition” and must meet minimum quality and safety standards for the area in which the housing is located. HUD calculates the “fair market rents” each year and housing units that are eligible for Section 8 must meet their requirements for determining rents that can be charged to a family.

The Section 8 program is administered by a local public housing authority or agency (**PHA**), which receives annual allocations on the

www.hud.gov or
www.wheda.com

basis of area of need. In Wisconsin the State's housing authority, the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (**WHEDA**), runs Section 8 programs in the areas of the state where there is no local PHA. To locate the PHA or administering agency in your area use either of the web sites listed.

The actual flow of HUD subsidies to property owners is handled through administrative contracts between HUD, private owners, and local PHAs or state housing finance agencies. Each of the agencies contracting to administer Section 8 must prepare an Administrative Plan, which specifies many things including application procedures and rules for waiting list management. No administering agency can deny anyone admission to the Section 8 program on the basis of disability, family status, source of income, race, color, sex, religion or national origin.

Tenant Based Section 8

Waiting list policy

Tenant Based Section 8 subsidy is the Housing Choice Voucher Program. This is attached to an individual, family or household rather than to a building. A PHA receives an annual allocation for the Section 8 voucher program. Families found to be eligible for assistance are placed on a waiting list and usually receive vouchers, as they become available. However, local PHAs have the discretion, subject to approval by HUD, to establish waiting list preferences to reflect the needs of their particular communities. For example, preferences can be given to people who are homeless, people with disabilities, those living in substandard housing, those who are paying more than 50% of their income for housing, or those who currently reside within a particular geographic location. Households that qualify for these preferences may be able to move ahead of other households on the waiting list.

Voucher

The subsidy, or "voucher" as it is called, can be used by a family to secure housing of its choice within the area served by the PHA. However, the subsidy will only be based on the size of the family. Families can choose to get a unit and have the Section 8 subsidy paid to the landlord even though the family will have to pay more than 30% of its income for shelter. However, if the family's initial monthly shelter cost in the unit will exceed 40% of income, the Section 8 program cannot subsidize the family unless the subsidy is necessary as a reasonable accommodation for an individual with a disability.

However, as stated above, the "voucher" is attached to a particular family. If the family decides to move, the property owner ceases to receive the subsidy. **Provided that certain conditions are met, the family can carry the subsidy to its next housing unit.**

The Section 8 program has many rules, regulations and exceptions. The brief overview provided here is not intended to be exhaustive. For more specifics contact your local PHA.

Home Ownership, Maintenance, Rehabilitation and Accessibility Programs and Resources

This section contains housing resource information available for Wisconsin low and moderate income households, including households that have a member with a permanent disability. These funds and resource programs include most publicly funded programs for home purchases, owner-occupied rehabilitation and improvements. Eligibility requirements and actual availability for programs and resources are subject to change each year and are shaped largely by planning decisions made at the local government level (e.g., city, county, etc.).

Eligibility Additionally, many local administering agencies have separate eligibility requirements and restrictions for programs and these may vary greatly by county or locality. The vast majority of program resources have upper income eligibility limits. Like the rental subsidies mentioned in the previous section, most federal and state resources/programs have a ceiling of 80% of the county median income adjusted for the size of the family.

Funding Most of the public funds available are administered by your local city government and/or by a local not-for-profit agency in your area. The type of funding and level of funds available at any particular time will vary. Most often, the resources available are in the form of a no-interest or very low interest loan and can help you with a down payment to purchase a home or help you maintain, repair or make accessibility improvements to a home you already own.

Getting assistance If you are at the initial stages of considering the purchase of a home, sometimes a local community or not-for-profit housing agency and their lender partners can assist you in examining whether or not to purchase, how much you can afford and what you might want to consider before you make that decision.

Additionally, knowing what the funding gap is between what you can afford to pay for housing and what it is likely to cost is absolutely critical to making an informed decision and determining a reasonable time frame to achieve your goal.



Securing a mortgage to purchase a home is often very exciting, time consuming and highly complicated. If you are someone who does not have all the resources needed to make a purchase and you will be relying on the assistance of public funds either through your local community or a non profit, or both, it will be extremely important to work very closely with them. They can assist you through the entire process with your local lender as well as securing their loan funds. Many of the staff in these housing entities have assisted others and can be very helpful to you if you work with them as your partner.

Your local financial institutions will have numerous options for a loan. Most people need some help in figuring out what is the best match for them, and what they can afford to pay over the long haul. Many of these lenders and local housing staff have knowledge and experience in helping people learn about the entire array of first mortgage products along with other down payment and closing cost assistance programs. For more information about particular mortgage products such as WHEDA or Rural Development Loans, see their websites listed below.

Repair and rehabilitation

If you are looking at a home that needs repair or rehabilitation before you purchase it, a local government entity or housing organization should be consulted to help you determine if that particular home is a good purchase and how you might go about making repairs as part of the overall purchase process.



Most down payment assistance programs will require a thorough property inspection to make sure the condition of the home you are considering is thoroughly understood. This is a good requirement. Looking at what you can afford for housing, including repairs, and what other obligations you have in your monthly budget is a very important part of the process of exploring home ownership.

If you already own a home and need weatherization improvements, more accessibility, or repairs and rehabilitation in general, your local municipality or city government would be a place to learn about what loans may be available. Additionally, a local nonprofit housing organization may have loan funds or the capacity to help you in locating someone to do the work. Since doing repairs and major rehabilitation can be time consuming, risky, expensive and complex, it is suggested that you contact someone at a local housing counseling agency and ask for their assistance and advice, not just their money.

The following web sites can be useful as you explore solving housing problems and improving your housing situation. Each site also lists relevant publications you might find helpful.

www.hud.gov
www.doa.state.wi.us/dhir/
www.rurdev.usda.gov
www.wheda.com
www.c-c-d.org
www.dhfs.state.wi.us

www.wiscap.org
www.wphd.org
www.wcdd.org

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
 Department of Administration – Division of Housing
 Rural Development (formerly Farmers Home Administration)
 Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority
 Opening Doors
 Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services - Division of
 Supported Living
 WISCAP
 Wisconsin Partnership for Housing Development
 Wisconsin Council on Development Disabilities