

HOUSING AGENCY WAITING LISTS AND THE DEMAND FOR HOUSING ASSISTANCE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Cities, suburbs, and rural areas alike face unprecedented demand for affordable housing. However, without additional funding for the development of new public housing units or Housing Choice Vouchers (HCVs), many families are forced to wait for housing assistance. In 2012, the last time national waiting list data was collected, nearly all housing agencies surveyed had a waiting list. Only 4% of agencies administering public housing reported zero families waiting for a public housing unit and just 1% of agencies administering HCVs reported zero families waiting for an HCV. Nationally, there were approximately 1.64 million families waiting for public housing units and 2.76 million families waiting for HCVs with 80% of housing agencies reporting. However, approximately 48% of HCV waiting lists and 6% of public housing waiting lists were closed to new applicants due to overwhelming demand, artificially lowering this count.

Statistical models 'correcting' waiting list counts for such closures suggest that nearly three times as many families would be waiting per HCV and 6% more families would be waiting per public housing unit if a significant number of housing agency waiting lists were not closed. Based on these models, the true number of families waiting for rental assistance would be just over 2 million families waiting for public housing and approximately 9.5 million families waiting for HCVs. These totals do not include the 3.6 million families currently receiving assistance through these programs. [\[Click here to see waiting list counts in your area\]](#)

Despite providing a more accurate picture of the unmet demand for assistance, these figures do not capture families that need housing assistance but do not apply, a number that is far greater. It is estimated that 19 million households may qualify for assistance and that 7.7 million households currently do not receive assistance and are paying more than 50% of their annual income for housing and/or live in severely inadequate housing.

Based on the estimated number of families waiting for housing assistance in 2012 and an assumed 15% turnover rate, it would take 9.3 years, on average, to provide every waiting family with rental assistance if all families waiting were eligible for assistance. However, the average time a family spends on a waiting list varies significantly based on the housing agency's location as well as the demographics of the families the agency typically serves. Housing agencies with more vulnerable residents report longer average wait times for new admissions to both the public housing and HCV programs, likely due to the greater amount of time needed for these families to afford the high cost of housing on their own. Average wait times reported by new residents in some particularly expensive metropolitan areas are over 10 years. [\[Click here to see average wait times in your area\]](#)

The larger than thought, unmet demand for rental assistance and the further unmeasured need indicate the critical importance of making additional opportunities for rental assistance available to low income families.



Without waiting list closures, there would be 1.8 families waiting for each unit of public housing and 4 families waiting for every HCV, nationally.