



HUD MULTIFAMILY HOUSING NEWS

Supportive Housing and Opportunity



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Message from Deputy Assistant Secretary Priya Jayachandran

Welcome to the winter issue! We're continuing to structure our Office of Multifamily Housing newsletter around important policy themes and explore how our office prioritizes and addresses those issues. This edition focuses on topics of supportive housing and opportunity initiatives.

Over the past couple of years, we've launched several programs that address HUD's goals of strengthening communities, leveling the playing field for all Americans, and ending homelessness. Our supportive housing initiatives strive to address our residents' non-housing needs and improve quality of life. This is far-reaching work, and we can't achieve our goals alone; we're leveraging partnerships at every level to achieve these important goals.

In this issue, you'll learn about how Multifamily is:

- working with owners of HUD-assisted multifamily housing to set up and operate **Family Self-Sufficiency programs** to spur increases in family earned income and reduce dependence on public assistance programs.
- testing solutions for seniors to age in place through the **Supportive Services Demonstration**; this program offers three-year grants to eligible owners of HUD-assisted senior housing developments to cover the cost of a full-time enhanced service coordinator and a part-time wellness nurse.
- reducing homelessness by implementing a **homeless preference** for admission into multifamily developments and providing a **toolkit** and additional resources for guidance.
- **expanding** our partnership with AmeriCorps **VISTA** to build capacity of tenant organizations and provide technical assistance at **Rental Assistance Demonstration sites** converting to project-based rental assistance.
- closing the digital divide with programs like **ConnectHome** by improving Internet access for HUD assisted tenants.

This issue features some of our recent supportive housing and opportunity wins along with a discussion of what's coming up. As always, we welcome [your feedback](#) on what you've read here as well as ideas for future issues.

– *Priya Jayachandran*

Family Self-Sufficiency Program Expanded to Privately Owned Multifamily Properties

Owners of privately owned multifamily buildings with a Section 8 contract can now offer Family Self-Sufficiency programs. Established in 1990, HUD's FSS program was previously restricted to public housing and Section 8 housing choice voucher participants. HUD is now able to partner with private owners to offer FSS programs and will allow owners to use residual receipt accounts to hire service coordinators for their own [Family Self-Sufficiency program](#).

Family Self Sufficiency is a HUD program that provides incentives and support to families living in multifamily assisted housing to increase their earned income and reduce their dependence on public assistance programs.

"The Family Self-Sufficiency program promotes the development of local

strategies to coordinate the use of HUD rental assistance programs with public and private resources," said Danielle Garcia, Branch Chief. "It enables eligible families to make progress toward economic independence and self-sufficiency."

HUD launched a pilot version in October 2015 for privately owned project-based Section 8 housing and had success with graduates such as Xiomarys Mercado Diaz in Willimantic, Connecticut. By combining her savings through a non-profit FSS-like program with those through the Multifamily FSS pilot program, Mercado saved enough money to make a down payment on her own home while living at a Section 8 property. Mercado believed that wouldn't have been possible if she hadn't completed the program. "I improved my credit score, plus learned how to create a budget and strategies to stick to it," she said. "I also saved enough to cover my taxes that were due at closing," she added.

Residents who choose to participate in HUD's FSS program will be paired with service coordinators who will guide them in developing self-sufficiency goals within a 5-year period. These goals may include education,

specialized training, job readiness, placement, and career advancement activities.

In addition, service providers will help participating residents to establish an interest-bearing escrow account. Deposits to this account occur when the family's rent increases as a result of higher earned income during the contract period. Upon graduation from the program, the family may use the escrow funds for asset building purposes, such as a down payment on a home. During the first year of its expanded reach, the Family Self-Sufficiency program has the potential to impact thousands of families nationwide.

Owners looking for additional program funding are encouraged to contact their local or state government housing department. HUD provides Community Development Block Grant funds to states and localities for a variety of community development activities. Funding a program coordinator may be an eligible use of these funds in some areas. Owners are encouraged to inquire early as the allocation of CDBG funds is a grass-roots, community-based process.

“It enables eligible families to make progress toward economic independence and self-sufficiency.”

Applications Being Reviewed to Test New Model Helping Low-Income Seniors Age in Place

Applications are now being reviewed for owners of HUD-assisted senior housing developments who applied for grants to test a new housing and services model. The experimental model will allow low-income seniors to age in their own homes, and potentially delay or avoid the need for nursing home care.

In January, the Department announced that approximately \$15 million was available for the [Supportive Services Demonstration for Elderly Households in HUD-Assisted Multifamily Housing](#). This demonstration offers three-year grants to eligible owners of HUD-assisted senior housing developments to cover the cost of a full-time enhanced service coordinator and a part-time wellness nurse. The demonstration will test the effectiveness of



this enhanced supportive services model for elderly households and evaluate the value of enhanced service coordination paired with affordable housing for seniors. The demonstration will be evaluated independently to determine the impact of the enhanced supportive services model on:

- aging in place in HUD-assisted senior developments;
- avoiding early transitions to institutional care, and;
- preventing unnecessary and often costly health care events—such as some emergency room visits and hospitalizations—for residents in HUD-assisted senior developments.

The demonstration will add to a growing body of research

on the effectiveness of housing with services models for older Americans. It will be the largest demonstration of its kind to evaluate the impacts of place-based services on older residents living in affordable housing.

Each year, HUD serves approximately 5.4 million households through rental assistance programs administered by the Offices of Multifamily Housing and Public and Indian Housing. About 65 percent of these households are elderly and or disabled, and more than 75 percent of them earn less than 30 percent of area median income. Older persons living in HUD-assisted housing regularly access a variety of home and community-based services so that they are able to continue to live independently and age in place.



Paving the Path to End Homelessness

HUD is committed to ending homelessness by 2020 and is harnessing its wide array of programs to meet the goal. One little known opportunity is the potential for a homeless individual or family to move to the top of a HUD-assisted property's waiting list if the owner requests approval to implement a homeless preference for admission to their properties. This voluntary initiative invites owners to share HUD's mission and offers wide latitude in tailoring preferences in regard to who is served and what percentage of units or vacancies are available.

"This policy encourages collaboration among multifamily housing owners and homeless service providers to increase mainstream housing opportunities for people experiencing homelessness," said Program Analyst Carissa Janis. "Accessing and securing affordable housing resources are an integral part of national efforts to prevent and end homelessness."

In June 2010, HUD Secretary Julian Castro joined the Interagency Council on Homelessness and the heads of the Departments of Health and Human Services, Labor,



and Veterans Affairs to unveil *Opening Doors*, the federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness. The Office of Multifamily Housing is an active player in *Opening Doors* that lays out actions federal agencies, state and local partners can take to meet specific goals.

The Department issued a program [notice](#) in July 2013 that provides authority and direction to owners to adopt an admissions preference for individuals or families experiencing homelessness. Multifamily provided further guidance on implementation to owners and local partners by publishing [Opening Doors Through Multifamily Housing: Toolkit for Implementing a Homeless](#)

[Preference](#) in November 2015.

"The toolkit calls for unprecedented collaboration between housing owners, management agents, and homeless and supportive service providers to take action," said Janis. "This community-wide approach will help us appropriately address and end homelessness in our communities."

Visit the [Homelessness Assistance Resources for Multifamily Housing Owners](#) page for further guidance and resources for all multifamily housing landlords, both with and without rental assistance subsidy.

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VISTA Capacity Building Efforts Expand to Include Rental Assistance Demonstration Sites

This fall, new members from AmeriCorps Volunteers In Service To America (VISTA) program will join those already in place to build capacity at 100 HUD-assisted properties. VISTA is a national service program that sends more than 7,000 Americans annually to support community efforts to overcome poverty by serving on a year-long project at a nonprofit or public agency. VISTA is part of AmeriCorps, one of the programs of the Corporation for National and Community Service, a federal agency that helps more than five million Americans improve the lives of other citizens through service projects.

VISTA members will be assisting at two types of sites: Section 8 and Rental Assistance Demonstration sites converting to project-based rental assistance. Section 514 of the Multifamily Assisted Housing Reform and Affordability Act of 1997 permits funding to

build capacity of tenant organizations and support preservation of low-income housing.

“The VISTAs have been an incredibly useful resource for residents. They help residents advocate to preserve the affordability of their homes, safeguard resident rights and improve resident quality of life,” said Tom Davis, Director of the Office of Recapitalization.

The project with CNCS began in 2014 when HUD was authorized to use Section 8 appropriations for tenant capacity building at sites eligible for preservation. The original agreement between HUD and CNCS funded up to 100 AmeriCorps VISTA members to be placed at Section 8 preservation sites and who are currently:

- helping tenants form and sustain tenant organizations
- providing tenants and owners with contact mechanisms, such as hotlines and email

addresses, through which they can obtain assistance with housing preservation options

- planning and facilitating meetings where tenants are provided information about their rights, responsibilities, and housing options
- improving management and oversight in multifamily housing
- creating mechanisms for tenants to inform landlords and local authorities of quality of life issues
- developing community gardens
- conducting childcare, tutoring, and/or public safety programming
- helping tenants access benefit programs that may serve to build wealth and create self-sufficiency

In 2015 and 2016, HUD added a total of \$3 million to this effort. The additional resources allow an additional 150 AmeriCorps VISTA members to start working

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with tenants. Some will continue the work on Section 8 preservation sites and some of the new VISTA members will focus on RAD sites, with an emphasis on resident access to economic, educational and health opportunities and on other resident quality of life issues. The additional members will also aim to increase access and resources for residents with disabilities and senior citizens seeking an improved quality of life and greater integration in the life of their communities.

“We have seen the incredibly creative ways that public housing authorities have been using RAD,” said Davis. “HUD’s partnership with CNCS is another example of how RAD can be part of larger revitalization strategies.”

Public housing authorities have already been working with VISTA in various capacities. The expansion to Rental Assistance Demonstration sites will run for three years.

ConnectHome Update

Building on the Obama administration’s goal to expand high-speed broadband to all Americans, the President and Secretary Castro announced in July 2015 HUD’s ConnectHome initiative. ConnectHome was launched as a collaboration between Internet service providers, non-profits and the private sector to offer broadband access, technical training, digital literacy programs and devices for residents in assisted-housing units. The program is part of efforts to close the digital divide and expand access to opportunity. By equipping children with the technology skills they need, they will be prepared to thrive in today’s job market and become tomorrow’s leaders in cutting-edge industries. While nearly two-thirds of America’s lowest-income households own a computer, less than

half have a home Internet subscription. Currently 60 percent of HUD assisted units lack a high-speed Internet connection.

Over the course of just one year, most of the Internet service providers involved—including Comcast, Cox Communications, and AT&T—extended offers of high-speed Internet access for less than \$10/month to the original 28 pilot communities as well as to HUD-assisted households in more than 43 states.

ConnectHome stakeholder Comcast also announced the expansion of its low-cost Internet offer to not just households with school-age children, but to all HUD-assisted households, including elderly residents living in multifamily properties supported through the Section 202 Supportive Housing for the Elderly program.

