
Updated May 14, 2015

How to Use the Housing Choice Voucher Data

At our [housing fact sheet page](#), the following Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program data are available for every state and local housing agency:

- Number of families using vouchers (calendar year and quarterly), beginning in 2004;
- Authorized vouchers, beginning in 2004;
- Percent of authorized vouchers in use (calendar year);
- Total voucher assistance payments to owners (or HAP, calendar year);
- Estimated sequestration cuts in vouchers, as of December 2014.

These are some of the data's key implications for housing policy:

Housing vouchers provide an important stepping stone that helps working families, people with disabilities, seniors, and veterans to keep a roof over their heads and make ends meet. The “Number of families using vouchers” shows vouchers’ large impact in helping low-income families in nearly every community to afford decent housing. This assistance is critical at a time when growing numbers of low-income renter families pay more for housing than they can afford. For more information on the families in your state using vouchers and those needing assistance, see our [State Fact Sheets](#).

Vouchers help to improve housing quality and prevent neighborhood blight. “Total voucher assistance payments to owners” shows the sum of payments made during each calendar year. These payments enable owners to make units available to low-income families at a rent they can afford. But they also provide a reliable stream of rents to owners. Owners use these rents in part to maintain properties in safe and sound condition and meet federal housing quality standards, as well as to pay property taxes.

Sequestration cuts have prevented thousands of low-income families from receiving the assistance they need to avoid homelessness and housing instability. As of December 2014, some 85,000 fewer low-income families were using housing vouchers than in December 2012, due to the across-the-board sequestration cuts implemented in 2013. The data include our estimates of these cuts for every agency.

Are state and local housing agencies using available funds effectively to serve families?

Voucher utilization rates — that is, the percent of authorized vouchers in use — vary considerably among agencies. There are many possible causes of low voucher utilization. While some, such as inadequate funding, are outside a local agency’s control, the effectiveness of agency management also can play a role. Poorly managed agencies may build up large reserves of unspent funds even as the waiting list for assistance remains long.

When an agency has a low voucher utilization rate, particularly in comparison to other agencies or the national average, this may signal that it could be using its funds more effectively to serve additional families. We encourage stakeholders to use the data to raise questions about whether local agencies are making the best use of available funds and to open a dialogue with local officials about how to improve utilization, where appropriate. Because only a fraction of eligible low-income families receive federal rental assistance due to funding limitations, housing agencies must use scarce resources as effectively as possible — especially following the sequestration cuts.