



Section 8 News—November 2010

The 211...

Ever wondered who or what number to call to find out if assistance is available from some government and non-profit agencies? Now you know – **211!** This new system provides one-stop shopping for agencies and programs offering assistance with a variety of vital resources such as food, shelter, housing, health care and children's services. The service is available to all, but the focus is on meeting the needs of the most at-risk populations, including older adults, people with disabilities, caregivers, victims of substance abuse, non-English speakers, youth and families facing crisis. Just pick up the phone and dial 211.

Voucher Size

The number of bedrooms assigned to your voucher is based on an "occupancy standard" which currently provides 1 bedroom for the head of household (and spouse if any) and 1 additional bedroom for every two people, regardless of age, gender or generation. This means that you may not qualify for enough bedrooms for everyone to have a separate bedroom. Remember, the size of the voucher is subject to change every time someone moves into or out of the household, or you move to a new unit.

More Than Ever

Every month, households just like yours scramble to find enough money to pay the rent, keep the lights and gas on, and have enough food to eat. The Section 8 (S8) program once viewed as a safety net for families without earned income, is even more in demand as families that once held good paying jobs, find themselves struggling to keep housing. We opened our Tenant-based and Project-based S8 Wait Lists in March and in a 5-day period, received almost **40,000** applications! Our current average payment is over \$1,040 per month in rental subsidy, per family. Make sure to protect this benefit for your family by:

- a. Reporting all changes in household composition and income in writing within 14-days of occurrence;
- b. Advising your Housing Specialist immediately in writing if someone is absent from the unit;
- c. Complying with your lease by paying your rent on time each month, taking reasonable care of the unit, and not creating a disturbance for neighbors; and
- d. Not engaging in criminal behavior.

In baseball you get "**three-strikes**" before you're out. With S8, the rule is "**one-strike**" and you're out. Protect your housing subsidy for you and your family. Don't risk it.

Youth Today, Leaders Tomorrow

Within the home or heart of every adult, is a young person who represents our collective future. We have a responsibility to these pre-adults to teach them about good health (including a healthy diet and exercise); the value of education (something that cannot be taken away from them); pride (beginning with respect for themselves); and care for our neighborhoods (taking an active stand to preserve peace and quiet). Berkeley offers the best in education, parks and programs including those offered by the City of Berkeley and YMCA. With schools taking a break over the holidays, this is a great time to introduce or reintroduce yourself to the pre-adults in your home and your heart. Check it out!

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding S8 Program Participation

1. ***Do I have to be home for inspections?*** No. We inspect your unit at least 1 time every 12 months. The purpose of the inspection is to make sure the unit is safe, decent and sanitary – and all the appliances are working properly. The head of household does not have to be present. All we require is someone 18 years or older be present to allow us entry. We will make 2 attempts to inspect your unit. If we are not successful, we may withhold payments to your landlord, and/or initiate termination of your S8 voucher.

2. ***What happens if I am responsible for failure(s) on the inspection report?*** The owner and tenant share responsibility for ensuring that we have access to the unit, and that the unit passes minimum Housing Quality Standards. Your S8 assistance can be terminated if the inspector determines that you or a member of your household is responsible for the failure (i.e. grease build up on stove) and you fail to make the correction.
3. ***Why does BHA require me to complete a “Personal Declaration” each time I report a change?*** Two things happen each time you are “certified.” We confirm through written documentation, that the information you report about who is living in your unit and the income received is the same as we have on file, and we submit a new electronic report to HUD. Sometimes the information you report allows us to identify an additional benefit you are eligible to receive (such as medical or childcare expense). It is important that you answer each of the questions fully and honestly. If we determine that you deliberately reported false or incomplete information, your assistance can be terminated.
4. ***How does BHA determine my income?*** The process begins with staff reviewing the information you report on the Personal Declaration. This information is compared to information received from HUD that contains data from Social Security Administration and the CA Employment Development Department. We also have access to data from Alameda County Welfare Department and an on-line employment data base. If you are self-employed we can obtain data from the Internal Revenue Service. So again, it is important to report fully and honestly. We will let you know if some or all of the income is exempt from being counted.
5. ***How do I get credit for my medical expenses?*** If the head of household is 62 or older or disabled, you may qualify for a medical deduction for out-of-pocket medical expenses that are not reimbursed by insurance or other individuals. There are rules governing what is, and is not allowable. The projected annual expense must be more than 3% of total annual income. For example, a family with income of \$800 per month would need to have eligible medical expenses of \$288 for the year (approximately \$24 per month) to qualify. If you think you qualify, contact your Housing Specialist who will help you determine the documentation you need to submit.
6. ***When will BHA adjust my rent?*** If you have a decrease in income that will last 30 or more consecutive days, you may qualify for a deduction in rent. The reduced rent will be effective the 1st of the following month (for example, if you report a decrease on Oct 4th, the decrease will be effective November 1st). If you experience an increase in income that will last 30 or more consecutive days, implementation may be delayed until your next annual recertification. It is important to meet your obligation to report all income changes (within 14-days), and let staff advise you when it will be processed.
7. ***What happens if I leave my unit?*** BHA pays a rental subsidy on your behalf on the 1st of each month. HUD rules prohibit us from making payments on vacant units. If you (or any member of your household) are away from your unit for more than 30 days any reason, you must report it so that we can make any appropriate change(s) to the payment amount to your landlord. Failure to do so can result in an overpayment to your landlord, and termination of your S8 Voucher.

With all of these situations (and more), there may be special circumstances and conditions that impact your ability to comply. Our goal is to help you comply, and not to terminate your assistance so work with your Housing Specialist to guard this valuable assistance. Visit our website www.cityofberkeley.info/bha for a staff directory or call (510) 981-5470.

Office Closures

Reminder, BHA office is closed EVERY Friday. In addition, note the following closures:

Thursday, November 11th ... Veterans Day

Wednesday – Friday, November 24th – 26th ... Thanksgiving Holiday

December 22nd - Friday December 31st, possible reduced hours (Office will reopen on Monday, January 3, 2011). Check with office for more details.