

CityFHEPS Frequently Asked Questions For Clients in the Community

This document gives general information about the CityFHEPS rental assistance program. This information is for those New Yorkers who currently have housing but might be at risk of losing it. This document is not meant to provide full details about the operation of the CityFHEPS program.

What is CityFHEPS?

CityFHEPS is a rental assistance program to help individuals and families find and keep housing. It is administered by the Department of Social Services (DSS), which includes both the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) and the Human Resources Administration (HRA).

Only DSS can determine your eligibility for the program. Your eligibility is based on a number of factors. The information below provides basic guidance on how eligibility is determined.

Can I get CityFHEPS?

To be eligible for CityFHEPS, households must have a gross income at or below 200% of the federal poverty level and meet **one** of the following four (4) criteria:

1. The household includes someone who served in the U.S. Armed Forces and is at risk of homelessness; **OR**
2. The household gets Pathway Home benefits and would be eligible for CityFHEPS if they were in DHS or HRA shelter; **OR**
3. The household was referred by a CityFHEPS qualifying program, and DSS determined that CityFHEPS was needed to avoid shelter entry; **OR**
4. The household is facing eviction in court (or was evicted in the past year)
AND:
 - Includes someone who has previously lived in a DHS shelter; **OR**
 - Includes someone who has an active Adult Protective Services (APS) case or is in a designated community guardianship program; **OR**
 - Lives in a rent-controlled apartment and will use CityFHEPS to stay in that apartment.

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How do I apply for CityFHEPS?

To apply for CityFHEPS, you must contact one of the DSS nonprofit service providers called Homebase. There are more than 20 offices across the five boroughs of New York City. Visit <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/hra/help/homebase.page> to learn more about Homebase and find the location nearest to you.

Once you are at a Homebase office, a caseworker will collect the information needed by DSS to assess your potential eligibility for CityFHEPS.

The caseworker may refer you to apply for other public benefits, including federal and state rental assistance programs.

If your household is found eligible for, and offered, other benefits, you **must** accept them. This is required by the CityFHEPS program.

How will I know I am eligible for CityFHEPS?

You will know that you might be eligible for CityFHEPS when you get the DSS letters from your caseworker. There are two letters you can get from your caseworker.

These are the “Shopping Letter” and “Household Share Letter.” Households seeking to stay in their current housing or to move into new housing will both get a Household Share Letter, but only those seeking new housing will get a Shopping Letter.

Your eligibility to receive CityFHEPS will be based on a number of factors, including, but not limited to, whether or not your identified housing unit meets the CityFHEPS requirements and whether or not you meet the CityFHEPS eligibility criteria.

What do I do with the letter(s) I get from my caseworker?

The Household Share Letter is **for your use only**. It is not meant to be shared with potential landlords or brokers.

The Household Share Letter tells you:

- Your potential CityFHEPS rental assistance supplement amount;
- An estimate of how much of the rent you will have to pay (your “household share”); and
- The reasons you may be eligible to receive CityFHEPS.

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What do I do with the letter(s) I get from my caseworker (*continued*)?

It is important that you review the information on your Household Share letter to make sure it is right. If you are approved for CityFHEPS you will receive a letter from DSS with your final household share. If your information changed from when you received your Household Share Letter, the amount your Approval Letter says you will have to pay may be different. Your Approval Letter has the correct amount you have to pay.

What if I want to remain in my current housing?

Your caseworker will help you file an application for CityFHEPS with DSS, which will include your eligibility, documentation of eviction, and arrears documentation.

Your eligibility to receive CityFHEPS in your current housing unit will be based on a number of factors, including, but not limited to, whether or not your identified housing unit meets the CityFHEPS requirements, the amount of the rent arrears, and whether or not you meet the general CityFHEPS eligibility criteria.

What if I want to move to new housing?

You will get the Household Share Letter and a Shopping Letter. Your Shopping Letter is **valid for 120 days**. The expiration date is listed on the Shopping Letter. Once you have this letter, you can start to look for housing.

You may share the Shopping Letter with any potential landlord or broker. The Shopping Letter will tell you, the landlord, and/or a broker:

- The highest amount of rent CityFHEPS will allow for your household size and housing type (i.e. apartment, room, SRO);
- The documentation needed from the landlord or broker to continue the CityFHEPS eligibility assessment; and
- It will also direct landlords and brokers to our website, www.nyc.gov/dsshousing, where more information about financial incentives they may be eligible to receive can be obtained.

Once you have the Shopping Letter and Household Share Letters, you can start to look for an apartment, single room occupancy (SRO) unit, or room. You must find a potential housing option and then contact your caseworker to complete your application.

Once you have found an appropriate housing option for your household size and contacted your caseworker, they will then submit your application and documents on your behalf to DSS so that we can determine if you are eligible for CityFHEPS.

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Do I have to be on Cash Assistance to get CityFHEPS?

If your household is eligible for Cash Assistance, you must be receiving those benefits. Additionally, you cannot have a “sanction” on your cash assistance case. A sanction is placed on a case when you, or someone in your household, do not comply with DSS/HRA rules and your household gets less benefits. If you or someone else in your household has a sanction, you must go to your DSS/HRA Job Center to clear it before you can get CityFHEPS.

How long can I keep getting CityFHEPS?

The CityFHEPS program generally provides for up to four annual renewals, with additional extensions available for “good cause” (five years total).

This five-year maximum does not apply to households that include someone who is 60 years old or older, or that include an adult who receives federal disability benefits. Renewals are subject to households continuing to meet eligibility requirements and the continued availability of funding.

What kind of housing can I rent using CityFHEPS? Where can I use my CityFHEPS?

You can use CityFHEPS to rent an entire apartment, a single room in an apartment, or a single room occupancy (SRO) unit. Any housing must be in the five (5) boroughs of New York City. SRO units are only available for households with one adult. The maximum rent that CityFHEPS will allow is \$1,634 per month.

A single room in an apartment is available to a household of no more than two adults. The maximum rent that CityFHEPS will allow is \$800 per month.

The payment standards are the maximum amount of subsidy that HRA will pay to the owner or landlord on behalf of the CityFHEPS tenant. HRA’s payment standards are based on the Section 8 standard adopted by the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA).

These payment standards vary based on the number of bedrooms and whether all or some utilities are included. Make sure you know which utilities, if any, are included in the rent. The table below shows the maximums HRA will pay based on the number of bedrooms and the types of utilities that are included in the rent, if any.

The payment standard also refers to the maximum number of bedrooms that HRA will subsidize. Payment standards are based solely on the number of people residing in the assisted household. HRA will pay for one bedroom/sleeping area for every two people. For example, if there are 3 people, HRA will pay for up to a 2 bedroom as that will allow for 2 people in one sleeping area and 1 in another.

NUMBER OF BEDROOMS	<u>All Utilities</u> Included	Without Cooking Gas & Electric	With Cooking Gas Only	With Electric Only	<u>No Utilities</u> Included
SRO	\$1,634	\$1,536	\$1,559	\$1,611	\$1,472
0 (Studio)	\$2,179	\$2,081	\$2,104	\$2,156	\$2,017
1	\$2,218	\$2,108	\$2,134	\$2,192	\$2,033
2	\$2,527	\$2,388	\$2,417	\$2,498	\$2,296
3	\$3,188	\$3,019	\$3,052	\$3,155	\$2,912
4	\$3,426	\$3,229	\$3,265	\$3,390	\$3,106
5	\$3,940	\$3,713	\$3,753	\$3,900	\$3,575
6	\$4,454	\$4,227	\$4,267	\$4,414	\$4,089
7	\$4,968	\$4,741	\$4,781	\$4,928	\$4,603
8	\$5,483	\$5,256	\$5,296	\$5,443	\$5,118
9	\$5,997	\$5,770	\$5,810	\$5,957	\$5,632
10	\$6,511	\$6,284	\$6,324	\$6,471	\$6,146

What if I find an apartment with fewer bedrooms than what is on my shopping letter?

HRA will pay the standard based on the actual rental, not the shopping letter. For example, if your shopping letter says you can rent an apartment with 3 bedrooms, but you rent an apartment with 2 bedrooms, we would pay up to the standard for a 2 bedroom apartment. If you have questions about a particular unit you are viewing or any special circumstances you may encounter, ask your case manager to escalate the unit for review.

What if I find an apartment with more bedrooms than what is on my shopping letter?

HRA will pay the standard based on the unit size for your household. For example, if your shopping letter says you can rent an apartment with 2 bedrooms, you may rent an apartment with 3 bedrooms as long as it meets the payment standard for a 2 bedroom apartment (\$2,527).

What if I find an apartment where the rent amount is the same as with all the utilities, but the utilities are not included? Can I make a deal with the landlord to lower the rent and I pay the difference?

HRA will not pay the amount for an apartment with utilities if they are not being provided by the landlord. Landlords must fill out a form telling HRA which utilities, if any, are being provided. And no, side deals with a landlord are not allowed.

Does DSS have any other requirements for the apartment/unit?

Yes. Similar to Section 8, all rents must pass a rent reasonableness test, meaning the rent charged cannot be more than other similar units in the neighborhood. The rent reasonableness test will be done after all paperwork is submitted to DSS.

How is the amount I have to pay in rent determined?

The amount you have to pay in rent is determined by a number of factors. These include your household size and the income of each household member.

What if a landlord says they won't take CityFHEPS?

Landlords/brokers cannot refuse to rent to you because you are receiving CityFHEPS. This is called "Source of Income" discrimination and it is unlawful in New York City. Please call the DSS Source of Income Discrimination Unit at 929-221-6576 if a landlord is refusing to rent to you because you receive CityFHEPS.

How will I know what CityFHEPS is going to pay my landlord and how much I will have to pay?

If you are approved for CityFHEPS, we will send you a notice that tells you how much we will pay your landlord and how much you must pay your landlord.

What if my landlord says I have to pay extra money?

Your landlord cannot ask you to pay more than the difference between the rent and what HRA is paying.

Please keep in mind if your shelter allowance goes down or if your rent goes above the maximum after the first year you will have to make up the difference.

Your landlord cannot ask you to pay a security deposit because DSS is giving them a voucher for security. If your landlord asks you to pay more money, please tell your caseworker immediately.

How do the monthly payments work?

DSS will issue a check to your landlord each month for the CityFHEPS portion of your rent.

What if my lease says all rent has to be paid by a certain date or there will be late fees?

As long as the payment is made in the month that the rent is due, it is not considered late. A landlord may still try to charge late fees however you cannot be evicted just for late fees.

Can the landlord take me to court over late fees?

The landlord cannot take you to housing court successfully just for late fees. The landlord also cannot take you to small claims court for late fees charged for the CityFHEPS portion of the rent. However, they can take you to small claims court if your portion is late and late fees have been charged. If you are having trouble paying your household share contact Homebase to see what help may be available. Call **311** to find the Homebase location closes to you.

Who should I call if I need help or have a question about CityFHEPS?

You should speak with your caseworker first about any questions you may have.

Do I have the right to stay in the same housing unit for as long as I receive CityFHEPS?

In general, if you are in a rent-regulated unit, you can stay in your unit. Otherwise, your right to stay in your unit is based on the terms of your lease.

What if my income changes and I can't pay my contribution?

You can submit a modification request to HRA with your new income documentation attached. You can find the Request for a Modification to your CityFHEPS Rental Assistance Supplement Amount available online at <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/hra/help/cityfheps-documents.page>.

When can my rent increase?

CityFHEPS does not protect you against rent increases after the end of your lease. If you are in a rent-regulated apartment, your rent can only increase in accordance with applicable regulations. This includes allowable mid-year increases. You can submit a signed lease with the rent increase amount with your renewal or you can use the Request for a Modification to your CityFHEPS Rental Assistance Supplement Amount available online at <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/hra/help/cityfheps-documents.page> .

What happens if I have trouble paying my rent or any other housing issues?

You can contact Homebase for aftercare services. Contact them immediately if you have trouble paying your rent, including any rent increase on lease renewal. Call **311** to find the Homebase location closest to you.

You Should Know

- A landlord or broker may not refuse to accept CityFHEPS. Refusal to accept CityFHEPS may constitute source of income discrimination under the NYC Human Rights Law.
- Side deals are prohibited. A side deal is when a landlord or broker asks you for additional up front or ongoing payments.
- If a landlord or broker refuses CityFHEPS or asks you for a side deal, call the DSS Source of Income Discrimination Unit at (929)-221-6576.
- The HRA security voucher is considered payment of security. A landlord or broker should not ask you to pay any additional monies for security.
- Brokers should not ask you to pay any additional broker fees because DSS is paying your broker's fee.
- Your landlord cannot force you to move to a different unit.
- Call the HRA Fraud Hotline at 718-722-8001 immediately if the unit you viewed at your walkthrough is not the same unit you are offered at the time you move in.

CityFHEPS is similar to the federal Section 8 program in that, subject to the availability of funding, it provides assistance, including rental assistance of specified amounts, to landlords and tenants who want to form a landlord-tenant relationship. Any contractual relationship will be solely between each tenant participating in the program and each tenant's landlord participating in the program.