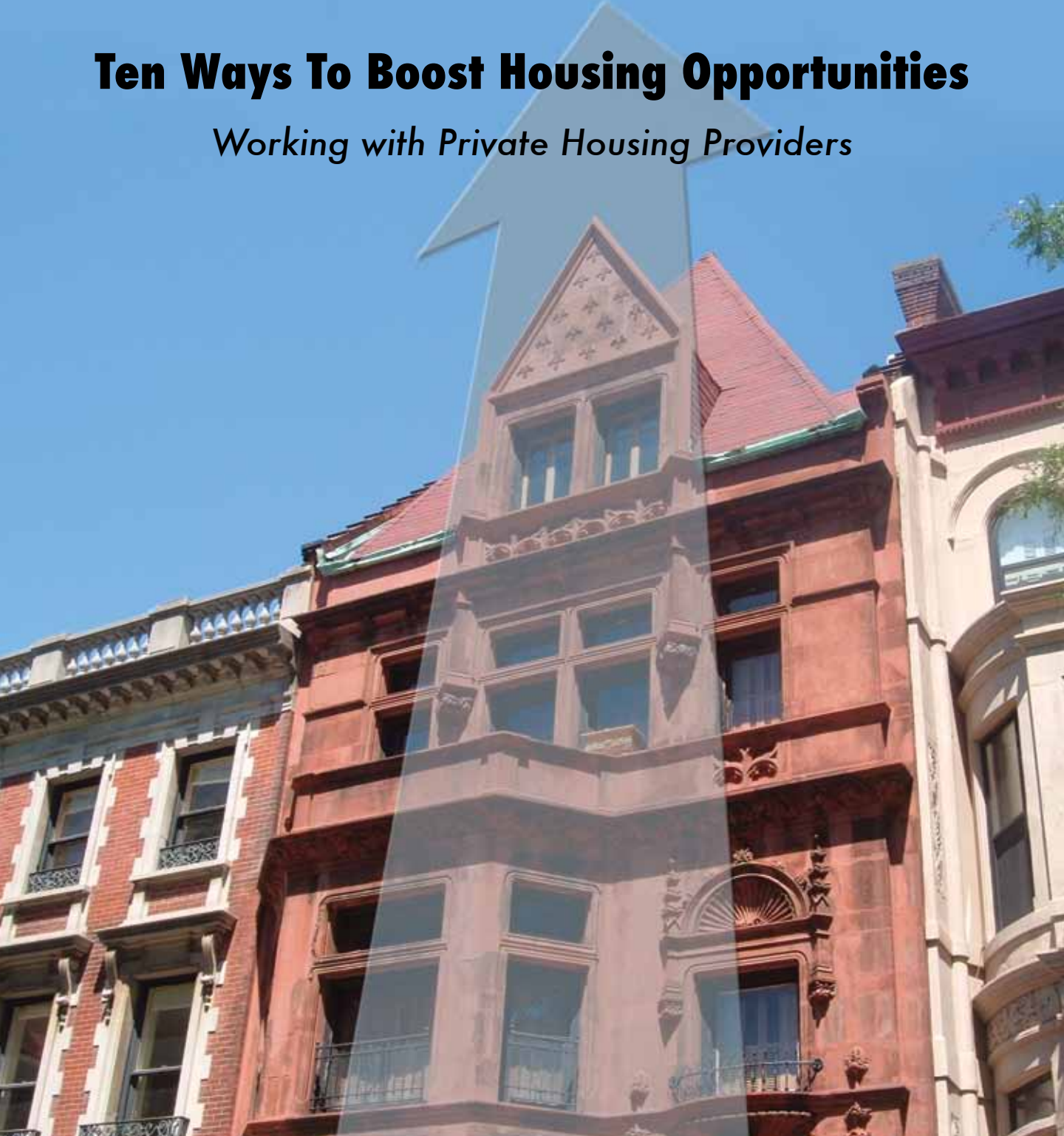
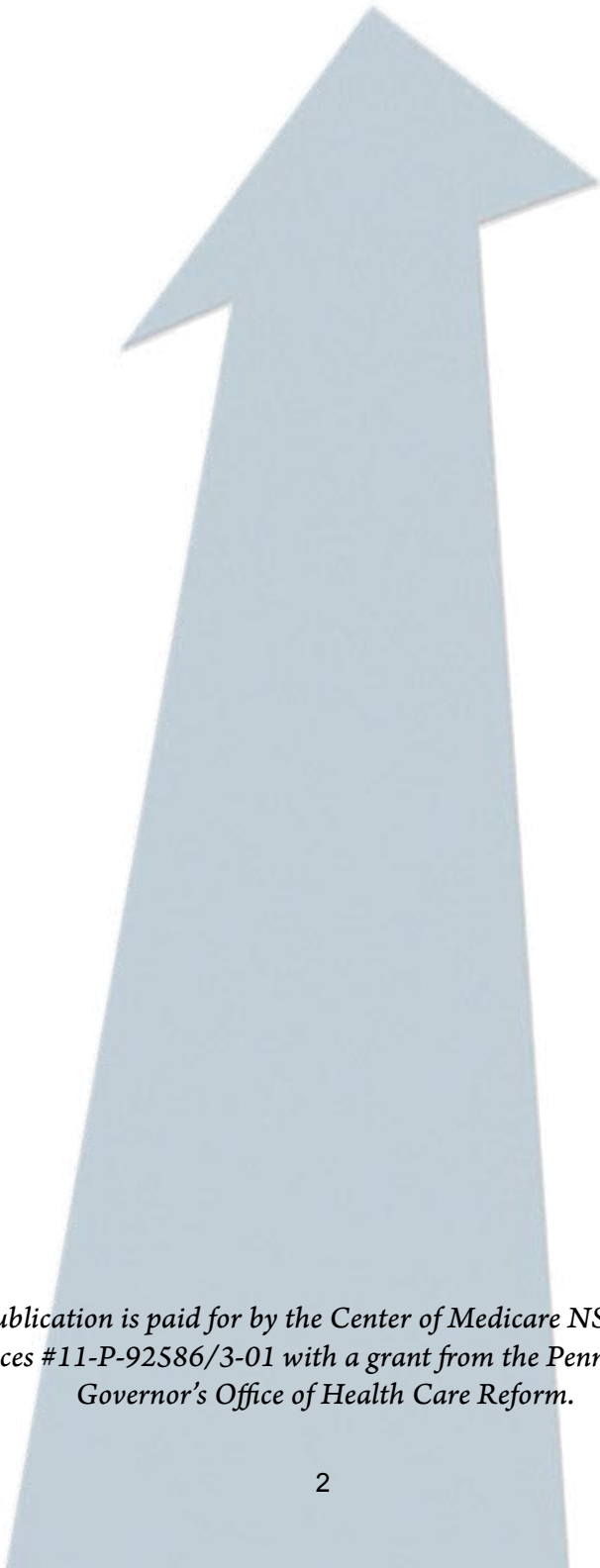


# Ten Ways To Boost Housing Opportunities

*Working with Private Housing Providers*





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# Ten Ways to Boost Housing Opportunities Working with Private Housing Providers

## INTRODUCTION



The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has long recognized the need for homes within reach of elderly and people with disabilities of low and moderate incomes. The PA Governor's Office of Health Care Reform was successful in obtaining a Real Choice Center for Medicaid Services Grant to identify strategies to remove barriers that prevent Medicaid-eligible individuals with disabilities of all ages from residing in the community or in the housing arrangement of their choice. One way of accomplishing this is to work with private housing providers. This includes both for-profit and nonprofit entities including landlords, realtors, property owners and managers, real estate developers and other private providers of rental housing. These private entities own and manage housing throughout the Commonwealth that can be used to expand housing opportunities for elderly and people with disabilities. As such, the participation of these private housing providers is critical to the successful expansion of housing opportunities for these families and individuals in the Commonwealth.

## PURPOSE OF THIS MONOGRAPH

The purpose of this monograph is to help its readers to understand the need for homes within reach of elderly and people with disabilities of low and moderate incomes and to promote the use of proven strategies for working with private housing providers to help meet that need. The recommended strategies are based on findings from recent landlord focus groups, as well as years of professional experience in the field.

The monograph is directed to both:

1. Agencies assisting members of the target populations to find homes within reach
2. Private property owners, landlords and property managers interested in learning more about the benefits of and how to participate in public programs serving these households



## Why is a strategy of working with private housing providers beneficial for agencies?

Working with private housing providers is a good way to increase access to affordable accessible housing:

- Agencies can take advantage of existing housing rather than waiting for new units to be built, which can take upwards of 3 years from start to finish
- Existing privately owned housing can provide a comprehensive array of locations, types of units, and special features
- Existing private housing often provides good integration into the community for those eligible for housing subsidies
- Private housing providers can take advantage of certain government subsidies such as Section 8/Housing Choice Vouchers and other tenant based rental assistance programs

## What is the benefit to private housing providers working with local housing and disability organizations?

There are commensurate benefits to housing providers including:

- Agencies can be a source of reliable tenants; in some cases the agencies can even assist in training, certifying or pre-screening tenants
- They can provide a reliable stream of tenants and a dependable guaranteed source of income
- Agencies can provide and/or open access to services and supports needed by tenants
- They can serve as a single contact point for issues and problems faced by the housing provider

## BACKGROUND

Many Pennsylvania communities have serious affordable housing problems:

- Low and moderate income families and individuals are paying far in excess of the HUD and industry standard of 30% of their incomes for housing costs. In fact, the 2000 census revealed that 28.6% of Pennsylvania's renter households were cost burdened, paying in excess of 35% of their income for housing. <sup>1</sup>

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1. Accessed from <http://www.factfinder.census.gov>

- Of even greater concern, 23.1% of all Pennsylvania households whose incomes are within 0-80% of area median income are severely cost burdened (as defined by HUD), which means they are paying in excess of 50% of their incomes for housing.<sup>2</sup>
- Worse yet, the percentage of persons experiencing severe housing cost burden is higher for persons with disabilities<sup>3</sup> and the elderly: 37% of renters with disabilities, 28.4% of renters aged 75 to 84 and 39% of renter-occupied households headed by persons 85 years old are severely cost burdened.<sup>4</sup>
- Finally, the discrepancy between the cost of housing and people's income is especially problematic for an individual with a disability in Pennsylvania living on Supplemental Security Income (SSI), who on average has to pay 87.9% of his/her income for an efficiency apartment and 100% of his/her income for a one bedroom apartment.<sup>5</sup> Even in Johnstown, the state's most affordable housing market, an individual on SSI is severely cost burdened, needing to pay 66% of his/her income for an efficiency apartment.<sup>6</sup>

Affordability is not the only challenge faced by these households. Elderly households and those with disabilities may need wheelchair accessible housing, housing with features to address hearing or visual impairments, or access to specific supports and services. Despite requirements for a percentage of new publicly funded housing units to meet federal and state accessibility standards (5% and 10% respectively), obtaining affordable accessible housing in most communities is a daunting challenge.

A large majority of the homes within reach of low and moderate income Pennsylvanians is in government owned and/or government subsidized housing. Unfortunately there are two major obstacles to accessing these units. First, most of these units are already occupied and have very low turnover rates; waiting lists of two to five years are not uncommon in many parts of the Commonwealth. Second, these units are frequently in large complexes and/or located in areas far from the housing seeker's family, community and supports.

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2. Accessed from [http://www.dataplace.org/area\\_overview/?place=x124813](http://www.dataplace.org/area_overview/?place=x124813).

3. Accessed from [http://www.phfa.org/forms/housing\\_study/Hsg\\_Persons\\_Disabilities.pdf](http://www.phfa.org/forms/housing_study/Hsg_Persons_Disabilities.pdf)

4. Accessed from [http://www.phfa.org/forms/housing\\_study/Elderly\\_and\\_Hsg\\_in\\_PA.pdf](http://www.phfa.org/forms/housing_study/Elderly_and_Hsg_in_PA.pdf)

5. Technical Assistance Collaborative, "Priced Out in 2006."

6. *ibid*

## ONE WAY – THE PRIVATE MARKET

It is critical that not only the number of accessible homes within reach in the Commonwealth be increased, but also that they be dispersed in ways to meet the demand of households needing those units.

In 2008, Diana T. Myers and Associates, Inc., P4A's housing consultant, conducted focus groups with private housing providers in Cumberland and Bradford Counties. Over 20 entities providing housing to elderly and persons with disabilities participated.

### **The purpose of the focus groups was to:**

- *learn about positive and negative experiences of landlords who are providing housing to the target populations*
- *identify specific barriers landlords encounter when housing people with special needs*
- *inform landlords of community resources that are available to members of the target populations living in the community*
- *identify ways in which public agencies and those serving the target populations can collaborate with property managers and landlords to increase affordable, accessible housing*
- *identify strategies to assist landlords to expand housing opportunities*



The focus groups were attended by realtors, landlords, property managers, developer/owners and other private providers of rental housing. The participants had a broad range of experience dealing with tenants with special needs and reported that persons with disabilities are commonly long term tenants that take very good care of the units. In fact one landlord stated, “Percentage-wise I have more problems with the general population than I do with people with disabilities. I welcome them.”

Most participants had housed tenants with Section 8/Housing Choice Vouchers and were aware of the benefits of both renting to people with disabilities and of using public subsidy programs. However, they were generally unaware of public resources other than Section 8/Housing Choice Vouchers. For example, they did not know who to call if a tenant needed assistance with daily living or other problems. Most participants had already provided housing to people with criminal histories and poor or no credit rental histories and were willing to continue to do so under the right circumstances

(excluding providing housing for arsonists and sex offenders). However, participants were not only unacquainted with existing resources, but also unaware of their responsibilities under fair housing laws. For example, one landlord admitted to denying occupancy to elderly and/or disabled individuals living independently in the community due to concerns for their safety and security.

## WHAT PRIVATE LANDLORDS WANT

While generally unaware of other public and non-profit agency and program resources and supports, participants were extremely receptive to the idea of making the target population – low-income people with a disability -- a priority if appropriate resources and supports were readily available. In addition, several landlords expressed interest in making more apartments accessible if financial incentives were available and if they could be assured of a pipeline of tenants needing the features of the unit. A number of attendees experienced difficulty in finding qualified contractors to do home repairs and modifications and expressed a need for current information on financial resources. Finally, the clear message was that they are “in business” and therefore need to minimize vacancies or loss of income during the marketing period.

## STRATEGIES

Below are ten ways to boost housing opportunities through partnerships between agencies and private housing providers. Your community can consider implementing one or a combination of these strategies:

### 1. Build On-going Relationships/Channels of Communications

Initiating lines of communication among communities, agencies and private housing providers is the crucial foundation for building on-going relationships. Through these relationships obstacles can be identified and partnerships and solutions developed.

#### ✓ Focus Groups

A good first step is to conduct a focus group, bringing together 8-10 private housing providers to hear about their experiences, both positive and negative. It can be beneficial to start with a small group in order to get a handle on the key issues and

needs. You can identify issues that are unique to your community as well as those which are common to many communities.

*Landlord focus groups were recently held in both Cumberland and Bradford Counties. Cumberland landlords were pleased with their participation in public programs for people with disabilities and were interested in modifying properties if necessary to accommodate future tenants. In Bradford County, the private housing providers were concerned that the enforcement of the local building and occupancy codes was hampering their ability to provide decent rental housing. During the meeting it was agreed that LHOT members and landlords would go together to meet with Borough officials to air their concerns.*

### ✓ Regular Meetings/Communications

Another desirable way of forming and sustaining long term relationships is through regular meetings. These meetings could take place monthly or annually, but the advantage is that all parties can look forward to a regularly scheduled opportunity to discuss issues of mutual interest. As such, it is important that the meeting agenda, time and location are known by all participants. Following are successful communication strategies used in the Commonwealth:



- A support services agency representative attends regular meetings of the Housing Providers

*For example, in Dauphin County the Local Housing Options Team (LHOT) Coordinator attends meetings of the Dauphin County Landlord Association; the Landlord Protocol discussed below emerged from this association.*

- Housing Providers attend Local Housing Option Team (LHOT) or other housing consortium meetings: The LHOT could invite individual housing providers and/or a representative of the Landlord Association to its regularly scheduled meetings to provide input and feedback.

*In Bradford County the landlords who attended the focus group were enthusiastic about a regularly scheduled annual or semi-annual meeting with the agencies.*

- Special joint meetings: In general, better attendance is assured through attendance at the target group's regularly scheduled meetings. However, some communities do not have formal associations or meetings or may not welcome guests on a regular basis. In such cases, a good strategy would be to schedule a special meeting of the interested parties.

#### ✓ Written and Electronic Information

- An inter-active website or newsletter as discussed below, can be an excellent means of on-going communication, both between interested parties and among members of each group to transmit information and to share concerns and solutions.
- Written flyers or brochures can also be a good way to inform landlords about the availability of certain programs and their benefits. The Housing Department of the Center for Independent Living of Central Pennsylvania is creating a series of brochures that are informative and easy to understand. These include: "What is Section 8 Anyway," "What is Shelter Plus Care," and "What is Apartment Master Leasing". Contact [www.cilcp.org](http://www.cilcp.org) and click on Housing Services under Programs & Services for more information.

#### ✓ Survey of Private Housing Providers

Another good step is to conduct a written survey of the private housing providers in your community. This is a way to reach a much broader audience and can be used to collect information on such topics as: the type and location of units; the policies concerning tenancy; individual experiences; and suggestions for improving programs. It should be noted however, that if the recipients are not familiar with the originator of the survey or sympathetic to their mission, the response rate may be low. Conducting a survey as a follow-up to a meeting or focus group may ensure a higher response rate.



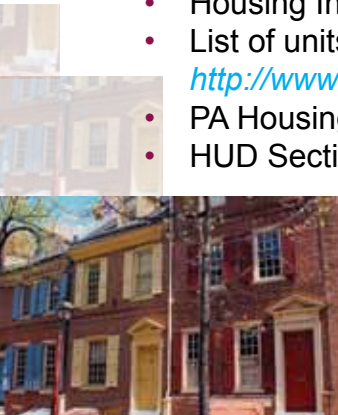
## 2. Create a Local Inventory of Resources

The need for current information about housing and services was quite clear. If not already available, it is recommended that local agencies prepare inventories of the following information to be made available to agencies and private housing providers as well as to housing seekers:

### ✓ Inventory of Affordable Accessible Units:

Every community should have a comprehensive inventory of affordable accessible housing. If not already available this inventory can be compiled using some or all of the following resources:

- Consolidated Housing Plan (from the local Office of Housing and Community Development )
- Public Housing Authority list of Section 8/Housing Choice Voucher Landlords
- Housing Inventory from the Homeless Continuum of Care
- Housing Inventory from the County Mental Health Housing Plan
- List of units funded by the PA Housing Finance Agency  
[http://www.phfa.org/applications/multifamily\\_inventory.aspx](http://www.phfa.org/applications/multifamily_inventory.aspx)
- PA Housing Finance Agency Apartment Locator at <http://pal.phfa.org/>
- HUD Section 202 and 811 units <http://www.hud.gov/library/bookshelf09/fundanoc.cfm>
  - USDA Section 515 Properties in Pennsylvania from [http://www.pahousingchoices.org/USDA%20PA\\_515\\_Report.pdf](http://www.pahousingchoices.org/USDA%20PA_515_Report.pdf)



*The City of Philadelphia has a comprehensive inventory of housing and other resources in the "Philly Primer" which is available on the Philadelphia Office of Housing and Community Development website [www.newsontap.org](http://www.newsontap.org).*

### ✓ Inventory of Services:

A resource that would be invaluable to private housing providers as well as local public agencies and non-profit groups, is an inventory of the various programs and services available to the elderly and people with disabilities. This should include the services available through the local Area Agency on Aging (AAA), center for independent living, United Cerebral Palsy (UCP), community action agency, county mental health office

and other human service and disability organizations serving these populations in your county. This inventory could focus on services directly related to housing or be more comprehensive, including legal services and tax and rent rebate programs, such as found on the Philadelphia Corporation on Aging website [www.PCACares.org](http://www.PCACares.org). You can also access the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency Quick Start Housing Resources at [http://www.phfa.org/applications/housing\\_services\\_resources.aspx](http://www.phfa.org/applications/housing_services_resources.aspx) for community resources. It is updated every 30 days and can be searched by county.

### 3. Create an Interactive Website

Another resource that could prove invaluable to both housing providers and agencies is an interactive website. The website can be used for any of the following purposes:

- ✓ To post housing and service inventories
- ✓ To list available units (including those vacant and/or accessible/visitable)
- ✓ To provide general information on funding and financing resources
- ✓ To post current funding opportunities for:
  - rehabilitation loans and grants
  - accessibility and visitability modifications
  - rental assistance
  - waivers
  - weatherization and other public resources
- ✓ To provide an interactive bulletin board so that:
  - housing providers could share information on local contractors through consumer reviews;
  - agencies could share information on new programs and resources
- ✓ To collect basic information on apartment seekers
- ✓ To establish a waiting list for units
- ✓ To publish newsletter articles of interest to the users



The Philadelphia website [www.newsontap.org](http://www.newsontap.org) cited above also includes the Homefinder, a list of accessible units that are currently available for rent in the City of Philadelphia. The information can be accessed by neighborhood or by bedroom size of the unit.

Although creating and maintaining a website can sound like a daunting task, many

communities have colleges and universities that may be willing to take on this responsibility. Another alternative would be to contact the PA Housing Finance Agency and ask if they would add the information to the Quick Start Housing Resources for your community at [http://www.phfa.org/applications/housing\\_services\\_resources.aspx](http://www.phfa.org/applications/housing_services_resources.aspx).

*For example, the Integrated Studies Department of Penn College in Williamsport is in the process of creating an inter-active website containing many of the above elements for the Lycoming County Local Housing Options Team. For more information contact Jim Meehan, Regional Housing Coordinator for the Self Determination Housing Project at Futures, Inc. at [jmeehanrhc@yahoo.com](mailto:jmeehanrhc@yahoo.com).*

#### 4. Link Private Housing Providers to Sources of Tenant-Based Rental Subsidies

Given that the incomes of most of the households in the target populations are in the low and moderate ranges (less than 50% of the median income), market rents in many areas of the Commonwealth will not be affordable to them. The availability of rent subsidies is critical to making those units affordable. Therefore, agencies should make a concerted effort to obtain rental subsidies for their communities and to educate private housing providers about the availability and benefits of these subsidies. There are a number of programs that can provide rental subsidies to accomplish this for existing housing.

##### ✓ Tenant-Based Rental Assistance (TBRA)

Tenant-based rental assistance is made available to eligible households who locate rental housing within the fair market rents for their area. The household pays up to 30% or 40% of its adjusted gross household income towards the rent and the program pays the difference between that amount and the fair market rent directly to the landlord or property owner. If the household leaves the unit, the assistance moves with them for use in another eligible unit. The most popular and common tenant-based rental assistance is through the **Section 8/Housing Choice Voucher Program** administered by local Public Housing Agencies(PHA) located throughout the Commonwealth. PHAs are required to keep a list of landlords in their area that accept Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers. Any private housing provider that wants to take advantage of this program can ask



to be included on the list. Tenant-based rental assistance is also an eligible use of funds from other sources including: county housing trust funds; state or local HOME funds; McKinney-Vento Supportive Housing Program or Shelter Plus Care (for homeless households); Health Choices reinvestment dollars and county mental health base dollars (for people with serious mental illness); and HOME and Department of Public Welfare funds (specifically for individuals transitioning from nursing homes to the community).

### ✓ Bridge Subsidy

A number of communities are offering short term or bridge subsidies, designed to fill the gap between the time when an individual signs up for long term TBRA and when the rental assistance actually becomes available. The maximum time for these bridge subsidies is generally two years. Some communities are using Health Choices reinvestment dollars available through their county office of behavioral health to provide this assistance for people with serious mental illness, while others are serving a broader range of individuals, often using HOME funds. The key to a successful bridge program is to have a Memorandum of Understanding or other agreement with the PHA or other source of long term rental assistance and to require recipients of the bridge subsidies to place their name on the appropriate waiting list in order to be eligible for the bridge subsidy.



### ✓ Exception Rents as a Reasonable Accommodation

Finally, it is sometimes necessary to exceed the PHA fair market rents in order to provide decent housing to people needing accessibility features. If a unit is the only one meeting the needs of the eligible household, under fair housing laws the PHA and/or HUD may approve an exception rent of 110% or 120% of the fair market rent as a reasonable accommodation.

## 5. Promote the Use of Other Subsidies to Enhance Affordability

There are a number of other techniques that can be used to enhance the affordability of rental housing for the target populations. Meet with your PHA to see if these are already available in your community and, if not, to identify which programs might be added or expanded. They include:

## ✓ PHA Preferences

Through a designation in the HUD required Administrative Plan, local PHAs have the ability to set preferences for certain groups in the Section 8/Housing Choice Voucher Programs. A number of county and city housing authorities in PA have assigned a preference to people with disabilities, which means that their names move faster up the waiting list. The other advantage of a preference is that the PHA has the option to keep the waiting list open at all times for individuals applying for a preference. This could be a great benefit, especially in those counties in which the lists are closed for long periods of time due to the excessively long wait on the list.



*For example, the Mifflin County Housing Authority has a preference for people moving out of institutions in its Section 8/HCV program. The Housing Authority of Cumberland County has a preference for “applicants who are living in a bridge housing facility that have an operating plan acceptable to the Housing Authority.” They also have a preference for individuals with mental retardation or mental illness who are transitioning from community living arrangements or Community Residential Rehabilitation programs.*

## ✓ Mainstream Vouchers

Some PHAs have Mainstream Vouchers, which are HUD vouchers designated specifically for persons with disabilities. Originally issued when the PHAs designated certain facilities “elderly only,” HUD periodically issues a Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) for additional mainstream units. PHAs and qualified nonprofit organizations are eligible to apply. Agencies that are issued mainstream vouchers are generally required to continue to use them to serve people with disabilities when those vouchers turn over. Determine whether your PHA has mainstream vouchers, ask how many they have and learn about the application process. A list of PHAs with Mainstream Vouchers can be found at <http://www.pahousingchoices.org/vouchers.pdf>. In addition, you can encourage your PHA to apply for new Mainstream Vouchers issued by HUD.

### ✓ Project-Based Subsidies

Finally, PHAs may “project base” up to 20% of its vouchers/certificates, which means they can attach them to specific rental units in the community. The landlord must house an eligible household from the PHA waiting list, but when the household leaves, the subsidy remains with the unit to benefit the next eligible household. An excellent strategy would be to provide project-based rental assistance to landlords who make accessibility modifications to their units so that the community can be assured that the unit will remain affordable over a given period of time.

### ✓ Visitability Tax Credits

In 2006, the Pennsylvania legislature passed Act 132, which enables local taxing authorities to provide for a tax credit to encourage property owners to include Visitability design features on their properties. Visitability features enable an individual with a mobility impairment to visit a home. They include one no-step entrance to the home, wider doorways and interior circulation path and a bathroom or powder room on the first floor. For more information on Visitability, go to <http://visitabilitypa.com/>. You can also work with others to encourage your local government to adopt a Visitability ordinance.

*The City of Pittsburgh passed a Visitability ordinance that grants the lesser of \$2500 (over a five year period) or the total amount of all increases in property taxes levied by Allegheny County/City of Pittsburgh as a result of new construction or renovation to make a property Visitable. For more information go to [http://www.sdhp.org/promoting\\_visitability\\_in\\_pennsy.htm](http://www.sdhp.org/promoting_visitability_in_pennsy.htm).*

## 6. Enhance Units with Technology and Accessible Features

### ACCESSIBILITY MODIFICATIONS

For many of the households targeted, accessibility is needed as well as affordability. The modification of private rental housing can be an excellent way to increase the stock of accessible and Visitable housing. Accessible properties are those that are fully accessible for wheelchair users, while Visitable properties include the three major features described above that enable a person who uses a wheelchair to visit the home.

Tax credits are available for eligible small businesses that make improvements to their properties in order to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act. As such, if a landlord makes modifications that meet the requirements of the ADA and if he/she is an eligible small business (less than \$1 million gross receipts the preceding year and fewer than 30 full time employees) he/she can claim a tax credit by using IRS form 8826.

Communities and agencies need to provide information and incentives to private housing providers to make their properties accessible and Visitable and communities need to take maximum advantage of funds available. Sources include Medicaid waivers, the PA Department of Community and Economic Development, the PA Housing Finance Agency, the Self-Determination Housing Project and other public and private agencies. And funds should be made available to landlords and rental property owners as well as homeowners. For information on the full range of resources available for home modification go to <http://homemods.jevs.org/resourcechart.asp>.

Finally, the obligations of private housing providers under fair housing laws must be made clear. For example, once modifications are made to a property, it is the responsibility of the tenant, not the owner, to return the unit to its previous condition.

## BUILDING AND ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

In addition to modifications that accommodate people with mobility, visual and hearing impairments, there is a range of assistive and building technology that is designed to help people age in place. These features can be installed in existing rental units to monitor the individual's health, daily activities and medication regimen. For example, sensors on a pantry door can detect whether the door has been opened, indicating whether or not the occupant is eating regularly.



- Several companies in Pennsylvania are actively marketing these types of technology. For more information see “The State of Technology in Aging Services in Pennsylvania” by the Center for Aging Services Technology (CAST) American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging (AAHSA), which can be found at <http://www.agingtech.org/index.aspx>

- In addition, The Pennsylvania Assistive Technology Foundation provides low interest loans to people with disabilities and older adults to purchase the assistive technology devices they need. For more information on PATF go to <http://www.patf.us>

## 7. Notify Agencies when Vacancies are Available

A simple, but effective, technique can be used to assist landlords to market affordable and/ or accessible units. The local disability agencies can pre-screen applicants and keep a list of households seeking housing. When the landlord has a vacancy, he/she contacts one or more agencies. At that point, either the agency or the housing provider can contact the next person on the waiting list about the vacancy. An alternative approach to this for marketing units can be to use a website such as the HomeFinder on the Philadelphia Office of Housing and Community Development website [www.newsontap.org](http://www.newsontap.org).



## 8. Conduct Training

The need for education and training of multiple parties is evident. Information should be made available:

- ✓ **For all interested parties on:**
  - Tenant & landlord rights and responsibilities
  - Fair housing laws
  - Safety and liability issues

The Self-Determination Housing Project is an excellent resource for information on tenant/landlord issues.

- See [www.sdhp.org](http://www.sdhp.org)

The Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission, the Fair Housing Council of Suburban Philadelphia and the Disability Rights Network of Pennsylvania all provide extensive


information and training on fair housing laws. More information can be found at the following websites, as well as from your local fair housing council or organization:

- Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission  
<http://www.phrc.state.pa.us>
- Fair Housing Council of Suburban Philadelphia  
<http://www.fhcsp.com>
- Disability Rights Network of Pennsylvania  
<http://drnpa.org>

✓ **For housing providers on disability awareness, available services and housing assistance:**

This should include information on basic “people first” language, common myths about people with disabilities, sources of funding/ financing for the rehabilitation of properties, accessibility modifications, and rental assistance programs.



 *The Lehigh Valley Center for Independent Living recently received a grant from the Pennsylvania Developmental Disabilities Council to create a program to encourage private landlords to rent to people with disabilities. The program, “Landlords for All” offers workshops to landlords to educate them about the benefits of renting to people with disabilities. The program also provides a 24-hour toll-free housing hotline.*

✓ **For tenants:**

There should be a program that includes information on how to prepare for renting, what to look for in a suitable unit and what services are available. The Self-Determination Housing Project currently offers PREP, the Prepared Renters Program, to agencies to help them prepare individuals with disabilities to become good renters. For more information, go to <http://www.sdhp.org>.



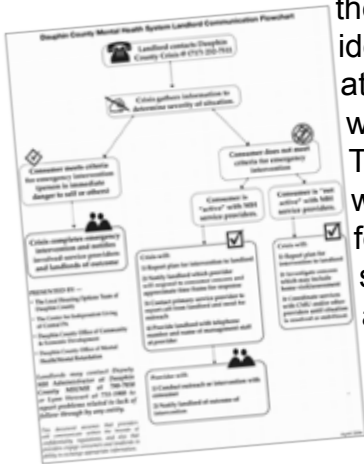
In addition, landlords indicated completion of a renter’s certification program would definitely be an incentive for them to rent to these individuals.



*The Butler County LHOT is building on the PREP program in their county to create a certification program for renters with poor credit, poor rental history or criminal records.*

## 9. Develop Protocols for Interventions

An important outcome of communication between agencies and housing providers is the creation of solutions to address problems and challenges identified. In several counties, the landlords expressed frustration at either not knowing who to call or not getting a timely response when having a problem with a tenant referred by a public agency. This resulted in the development of a clear protocol identifying who to contact in the event of a problem, and who is responsible for responding under certain circumstances. The key is that with a single phone call, the housing provider is assured of a timely and appropriate response.



*In Lackawanna County, a team of community agencies are collaborating to develop a voluntary Eviction Prevention Program. Landlords will contact the team when an eviction is pending so that the agencies can work with the tenant to alleviate the situation, hopefully within five days of the initial contact.*

## 10. Develop a Master Lease program for Hard to Serve Populations.

Some of the individuals in the target population have criminal records, or poor or no credit or rental history, making them unattractive tenant prospects to landlords. One way of providing housing to these individuals while safeguarding the landlords is through a master lease program. Under this type of program, the landlord leases to a third party, such as a public or non-profit agency, which then subleases to the high-risk tenant for a specified period of time. This arrangement gives the tenant an opportunity to establish a good rental history. Once proven, the agency can then put the lease directly in the tenant's name. A number of counties have allocated Health



Choices Reinvestment dollars to master lease programs, serving people with serious mental illness or with criminal records and other hard to serve populations.

*Master lease programs are currently being operated in Fayette and Huntingdon/Mifflin/Juniata (HMJ) Counties. In Fayette, they are using a three way lease between the Fayette County Community Action Agency, the Landlord and the Tenant for individuals receiving mental health services from the county. In HMJ the rental assistance is funded with county "base" mental health dollars. A nonprofit agency holds a three year lease on the properties with the average length of stay for a single household anticipated to be 18-24 months. They plan to establish an interest free loan program for individuals to use for start up costs for a new home so that upon repayment of the loan, the individuals will have a good credit reference.*

### Additional Information and Technical Assistance

Sample documents, forms and additional information on the examples cited above can be found on the following websites:

- [www.p4a.org](http://www.p4a.org)
- [www.pahousingchoices.org/landlorddocs](http://www.pahousingchoices.org/landlorddocs).

Finally, if you are interested in pursuing one or more of these strategies and need technical assistance, please contact one of the following technical assistance resources:



#### **Diana T. Myers and Associates, Inc.**

6 South Easton Road  
Glenside, PA 19038  
215-576-7970

## Self- Determination Housing Project-Regional Housing Coordinators

### **Region One UCP of Pittsburgh**

UCP-CLASS

PO Box 33

Mill Village, PA 16427-0033

814-449-6606 business cell

**RHC – Jodi Schersten Email - [jschersten@ucppittsburgh.org](mailto:jschersten@ucppittsburgh.org)**



### **Region Two Life and Independence for Today**

503 East Arch Street

St. Marys, PA 15857-1779

Voice / TTY 814-781-3050

800-341-LIFT (5438) Fax: 814-781-1917

**RHC- Darlene Nortum Email – [rhc@liftil.org](mailto:rhc@liftil.org)**

### **Region Three Futures Community Supports**

23 Main St

Towanda, PA 18848

570-265-3800 Fax 570-265-8271

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### **Region Four- United Neighborhood Centers of NE PA**

425 Adler Street

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### **Region Five Allegheny Co. Disability Connection**

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**Region Six Center for Independent Living of Central PA**

207 House Avenue, Suite 107,  
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717-731-1900

717-737-1335 (TTY)

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**Region Nine Residential Living Options**

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**Region Ten Residential Living Options**

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# SDHP Regional Coordinator Housing Map

