

Applying for housing for people with disabilities in Massachusetts

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www.autismhousingpathways.org

www.18Section8.org



What's out there?

Affordable and subsidized housing options for people with disabilities in Massachusetts

	Federal	State	Private
Site-based (subsidy is attached to an address) 	Section 8 Disability/Disabled (veterans) Family (can be a household of over 20 people)	Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MVRP)	
Portable (subsidy is attached to a person) 	Section 8	MVRP 	

When you apply for more types of housing, you are likely to get housing faster.

But there are literally over 5,000 housing lists in Massachusetts. Where do you apply?

Start with a basic list of applications (1)

At Autism Housing Pathways, we generally suggest a basic set of applications to maximize your chances of getting housing, without turning applying into a full-time job.

That list comprises:

- **Section 8 portable** (the Centralized Waiting List and the EOHLC (formerly DHCD) regional non-profit list — these vouchers can be used anywhere in the state)
- **The Common Housing Application for Massachusetts Public Housing (CHAMP)** application for site-based state housing

(continued on next slide)

Start with a basic list of applications (2)

Basic application list (continued):

- **Alternative Housing Voucher Program (AHVP) portable** (can be used anywhere in the state; must be used for a one-bedroom apartment unless a reasonable accommodation is needed.)
 - As of July 2020, AHVP vouchers can be applied for by filling out a special section of the CHAMP application
- **2-3 additional applications appropriate to your situation** — these might include site-based federal housing, Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP) (either portable or site-based), or private affordable housing. A good way to identify these applications is by using www.HousingWorks.net.
 - As of October 2023, MRVP can be applied for by filling out a special section of the CHAMP application

Personalize it (1)*

Before finalizing your list, consider your situation. First, ask yourself these questions:

- **Does my family member need to rent from family as a reasonable accommodation for disability?** In that case, a portable voucher may be the only option.
- **Does my family member need a live-in aide?** In that case, elderly housing is generally not a good bet, as the vast majority of units in elderly housing have only one bedroom.
- **Can my family member live alone, but needs prompting throughout the process of activities like showering (not just reminders)?** In that case, site-based housing might be a good idea, as it permits MassHealth or CommonHealth members to use a drop-in service called Group Adult Foster Care.

* A checklist is at: <http://18section8.org/index.php/document-library/>

Personalize it (2)*

Questions to ask yourself (continued):

- **Where does my family member live now?** State and federal site-based housing lists use local preference. Your family member is unlikely to get in if they apply in a community they don't live in now. If your goal is to live in a different community, private affordable housing may be the only site-based option.
- **There are some towns and organizations that have portable Section 8 applications that have different waiting lists than either the Centralized Waiting List or the EOHLC (formerly DHCD) regional non-profit list. Are any of them appropriate for my family member?** To learn more, go to <http://18section8.org/index.php/applying-for-section-8/#Additional>

* A checklist is at: <http://18section8.org/index.php/document-library/>

Additional questions

Some additional questions can't be answered until you have actually started filling out the CHAMP or searching on www.HousingWorks.net. These are:

- **Am I comfortable with my family member living at a specific state or federal property?**
Some housing authorities will remove your name from all of that housing authority's lists if you turn down a unit when you reach the top. Take a look at the map or consider visiting the neighborhood. Only apply for what you are willing to take. (But don't worry too much — you can generally remove your name from the list for a specific location if you are not yet at the top.)
- **Are there MRVP units or portable vouchers in my family member's town?** If so, consider applying. These units and vouchers have local preference, so they stand a good chance of eventually getting one.
 - As of October 2023, MRVP can be applied for by filling out a special section of the CHAMP application

When should my family member apply?

Generally speaking, it can take anywhere from 3-12 years to get to the top of a housing list. If the goal is to have your family member living outside the family home by age 30, start getting on lists at 18. They are not allowed to apply earlier than that. As a rule of thumb, the timeline goes:

- 18: Section 8 (that's why this website has this name — clever, right?)
- 20-21: site-based Section 8, federal and state family housing, MRVP, private affordable housing
- 22: AHVP, elderly/disabled housing (you do not have to be 22, though)

How do we even begin?

- Autism Housing Pathways has created a Housing Search and Application Grid:

<https://autismhousingpathways.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/HousingSearchApplicationGrid-2023.pdf>

The grid corresponds to the chart you saw in the video. It is color coded and has links for portable Section 8, the CHAMP application (including AHVP vouchers), and www.HousingWorks.net. We will be using this grid as our road map for filling out applications.

- But first, we'll talk about application tips and tricks. These will help you fill out applications correctly, make sure they get to the right place, and help you keep your applications active.

Application tips and tricks:

How to fill out the application (1)

- Remember who is applying and who is going to be living there.
 - Your family member with a disability is the head of household.
 - They must be 18 or older to apply.
 - Income refers to their income (no one else's).
 - Income includes income from all sources: a job, any benefits (including Social Security, SNAP [food stamps], child support payments, gifts from family, any medical expenses family pays for the person, etc.
 - Assets refer to their assets (no one else's).
 - This includes all assets: bank accounts, stocks, bonds (including savings bonds), IRAs, etc.
 - A vehicle only counts as theirs if their name is on the title.

Application tips and tricks:

How to fill out the application (2)

- Remember who is applying and who is going to be living there.
 - They are a household of one.
 - They may need a two-bedroom unit if they need a live-in aide, but they are still a household of one. (The aide cannot be a close family member, or it will be a household of two, and the aide's income and assets will be counted, too.)
 - Even if they want to have a roommate, they are still a household of one if they are applying for a portable voucher. If they are applying for site-based housing, make sure they are the head of household and not the roommate. If they decided they don't want to live together anymore, only the head of household gets to stay [although they'll need to move to a smaller unit, unless they get another roommate]

Application tips and tricks:

How to fill out the application (3)

- There are some situations where your information may need to be substituted:
 - Use your phone number and email address if your family member is not able or likely to respond to calls or emails.
 - Use your mailing address if your family member does not live with you and is not able or likely to respond to correspondence in a timely manner.
 - **Make sure the physical address is that of your family member, however, as that determines local preference for waiting lists. The exception to this is if their physical address is a school or hospital, and their legal address is still your address.**

Application tips and tricks:

How to fill out the application (4)

- If asked, list reasonable accommodations needed. Examples might include:
 - The housing authority should communicate with the guardian.
 - Meetings with the housing authority and/or landlord need to be 1:1, with an advocate present.
 - Explain the lease in simple language.
 - The person needs a unit on a higher floor where it is quieter.

Application tips and tricks:

How to fill out the application (5)

- Other details:
 - If the family pays any medical expenses for the person, include the amount paid under any question about income and again under any question about medical expenses — they will cancel each other out, but need to be listed in both places.
 - Make sure the application is complete. On a paper application, either answer every question or write in “N/A” if the question doesn’t apply.

Application tips and tricks:

Getting the application to the right place and your family member onto the list

- Always make a copy for your own records before submitting a paper application; print a copy of any online application.
- It is a good idea to ask for a written receipt for any application and supporting documents you submit in person. Also ask the person taking the application to look it over for completeness.
- It is a good idea to mail all correspondence “certified mail” and “return receipt requested”, so you have proof you mailed it, and that it was received.

Application tips and tricks:

Remaining on the list: for written applications

- Write a letter annually to confirm your family member is on the list. Make sure you use the exact name of the list in question. Many housing authorities administer more than one list, and you need to know which one(s) your family member is on.
- Any letter should be signed by the person with a disability if they are able; otherwise, you should include a copy of the guardianship letter.
- All correspondence should be mailed “certified mail” and “return receipt requested”.

Application tips and tricks:

Remaining on the list: for online applications

- Login at least annually (the Section 8 Centralized Waiting List may require you to login every 3 months; make sure you make a note of when they want you to next login).
- Update information as needed — it is critical that the physical address and mailing address both be kept up to date.

Application tips and tricks:

Remaining on the list: for all applications (1)

- Keep a spreadsheet of everywhere your family member has applied. Include the exact name of the waiting list, the date of the application, and every date you have contacted the list either by mail or by logging in. A housing application spreadsheet is at:
<http://18section8.org/index.php/document-library/>
- When applying for site-based housing through a housing authority, make sure you regularly review where your family member is applying, and remove any locations they are not willing to accept. Otherwise, if they reach the top of a list and turn down a location, they might be removed from all waiting lists maintained by that housing authority.

Application tips and tricks:

Remaining on the list: for all applications (2)

- When your family member nears the top of a list, you will be contacted to update your family member's application, to potentially supply additional information, and to provide documentation.
- Never miss a deadline or a meeting. If you can't make it to a meeting, make sure you contact them ahead of time to reschedule. Remember, there is always someone in line behind you willing to take your spot.

The housing search & application grid

- Remember, your basic list is:
 - Section 8 portable (Gold)
 - The CHAMP (Blue) for state-funded:
 - Public housing
 - AHVP (apply to all 26 communities)
 - MRVP (only if your community has it)
 - 2-3 others using www.HousingWorks.net (Purple)
- Use your checklist to personalize it
- Detailed directions for each type are at www.18Section8.org; click on “Other ways to apply for housing”
- Track your applications using a spreadsheet.
- Checklist and spreadsheet are at <http://18section8.org/index.php/document-library/>

Affordable and subsidized housing options for people with disabilities in Massachusetts
(Follow key to determine how to search and apply)

	Federal	State	Private
Site-based (subsidy is attached to an address)	Section 8 Elderly/ disabled (sometimes) Family (can be a household of one person)	Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP) Elderly/ Disabled Family (can be a household of one person)	30%, 40%, and some 50% Area Median Income (AMI) units (pay a percentage of income in rent) Some 50% AMI, and all 60%-100% AMI units (fixed rent, but lower than market rate – may combine with portable Section 8)
Portable (subsidy is attached to a person)	Section 8	MRVP Alternative Housing Voucher Program (AHVP) for adults with disabilities	

Search/application key:



<https://18section8.org/index.php/section-8/>



CHAMP: <https://publichousingapplication.ocd.state.ma.us/>
(More information on AHVP is at: <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/alternative-housing-voucher-program-ahvp>; more information on MRVP is at <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/massachusetts-rental-voucher-program-mrvp>)



www.HousingWorks.net

Things to remember (1)

- Local Housing Authorities are like fast food restaurants – they have a lot of different items on the menu.
 - Telling me you applied at the Housing Authority doesn't tell me what you applied for – was it portable Section 8, site-based state elderly/disabled, the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program? You need to know the exact name of each program you've applied for.
- In general, housing programs are based on income, not on the presence of a disability.
 - Some programs require a disability, but NOT a specific diagnosis – in fact, they are prohibited from asking what the diagnosis is under the Fair Housing Act. Receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) is generally enough evidence, or a health care professional may be asked to confirm the person has a disability.

Things to remember (2)

- Supportive services are generally separate from affordable housing.
 - For example, a housing program that allows a live-in aide does not specify whether that means an Adult Foster Care provider, a Department of Developmental Services Shared Living provider, or simply an unofficial assistant, like a roommate or a cousin who only moved in to help out. In fact, housing authority personnel may well be completely unfamiliar with these programs.
- It is important to make certain the rules of the services you are planning on using mesh with the rules of the housing situation.
 - For example, a close family member can't be a live-in aide, or their income will be considered in determining rent and eligibility by the housing program. However, the Adult Family Care program requires the caregiver to live in the same unit. As a result, one would have to use Adult Foster Care rather than Adult Family Care.

Where do I go to learn more?

- For assistance in completing applications, go to www.18section8.org, and refer to Slide 21 of this presentation.
- To learn more about how housing interacts with services, go to:
 - The Turning 18 checklist <https://autismhousingpathways.org/turning-18-checklist/>
 - Housing in a month's worth of Tweets:
<https://autismhousingpathways.org/housing-in-a-months-worth-of-tweets/>
 - An infographic of housing models and supportive services:
<https://autismhousingpathways.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/infographic2gray.pdf>
 - Thinking about housing:
<https://autismhousingpathways.org/thinking-about-housing-webinar-tuesday-march-17th/>
 - Additional resources at www.autismhousingpathways.org

Glossary of acronyms

- AHVP: Alternative Housing Voucher Program (Massachusetts only)
- AMI: Area Median Income
- CHAMP: Common Housing Application for Massachusetts Public Housing
- CWL: Massachusetts Section 8 Centralized Waiting List
- DDS: Department of Developmental Services (Massachusetts)
- EOHLC: Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (formerly DHCD: Department of Housing and Community Development) (Massachusetts)
- HUD: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
- LHA: Local Housing Authority
- MRVP: Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (Massachusetts only)
- SSI: Supplemental Security Income
- SSDI: Social Security Disability Insurance

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