



# Rental Assistance Available in Every County in PA; Unprecedented Level of Flexibility Provided

The [Emergency Rental Assistance Program](#) is available in every county in Pennsylvania to assist households unable to pay rent and utilities due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Pennsylvania received \$847 million from the program created by the by section 501 of Division N of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, Pub. L. No. 116-260 (Dec. 27, 2020) and will receive an additional \$671 million from Section 3201 of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021.

The new program is one of abundance that provides an unprecedented level of flexibility to grantees to ensure all low-income renters, from all kinds of rental scenarios, and their landlords can access needed resources expeditiously to stabilize housing situations, repair strained business relationships, and preserve communities at large through the COVID 19 pandemic.

## How to Apply

The state's [COMPASS](#) website allows tenants and landlords to apply or it will direct them to the administering agency within the specific county. Program rules tend to differ by county.

## About the Program

A [full analysis](#) of the elements of the program are provided by the National Council of State Housing Authorities.

For more detailed information on the program, refer to

- The \$25 billion [Emergency Rental Assistance](#) program created by the COVID Relief Bill signed December 27, 2020
- The \$21.6 billion in rental assistance provided by the [American Rescue Plan](#) signed March 15, 2021, (Subtitle B—Housing Provisions, Sec. 3201. Emergency rental assistance)
- The [Frequently Asked Questions](#) issued by the U.S. Department of the Treasury (last updated March 26, 2021)

The Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania is a statewide coalition working to provide leadership and a common voice for policies, practices and resources to ensure that all Pennsylvanians, especially those with low incomes, have access to safe, decent and affordable homes. We promote common sense solutions to balance Pennsylvania's housing market and increase the supply of safe, decent homes for low-income people.

This brief uses the best guidance we had at the time of its creation. This brief is not financial or legal advice or mandates by the Housing Alliance. Individuals and program administrators should seek legal advice/assistance on how to best apply any information to their unique rental assistance needs.

Several aspects of the program provide **greater flexibility** compared to most other rental assistance programs and these include:

- **Written Attestation:** The option of a written attestation in the absence of documentation ensures those who are not able to produce documentation from shuttered employers or lost documents from sudden moves are eligible for this assistance. A written attestation can come from a third party such as a case manager, any other person with firsthand knowledge of the situation. or it can come from the applicant.
- **Participation with Missing Leases:** In cases where there is no written lease or the landlord has not provided a statement of funds owed, the program administrator may accept a written attestation from the applicant to support the payment of assistance.<sup>1</sup>
- **Longer and More Assistance:** Eligible uses of funds cover more situations that tenants may be facing including, but not limited to:
  - future payments on housing related costs for up to twelve months plus an additional three months if necessary to stabilize the security of the household. The American Rescue Plan increases the timeframe for assistance to 18 months;
  - housing relocation expenses including application fees, security deposits, mobile home lot rental fees, rent-to-own arrangements, and hotel/motel fees for those who can demonstrate that they would experience homelessness otherwise;
  - telecommunications such as internet;
  - related late fees or additional fees included in the lease; and
  - housing related arrears (rent and utilities or home energy costs).
- **No Cap on Value of Assistance:** While there is a cap on income eligibility<sup>2</sup> of the household, the only cap on the amount of assistance provided is length of time.
- **Case Management:** The provision of case management and other supportive services is optional and every household does not need these services. Services such as legal aid and landlord-tenant mediation can be funded.
- **Direct to Tenant Payments:** In previous emergency rental assistance programs, payments were made directly to the landlord; if the landlord did not agree to work with the program then assistance was not provided. The U.S. Treasury Frequently Asked Questions document provides specific details on the process that must be followed to outreach to landlords before a payment is provided directly to a tenant.

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<sup>1</sup> There is a cap in these situations of up to a monthly maximum of 100% of the greater of the Fair Market Rent or the Small Area Fair Market Rent for the area in which the applicant resides. Assistance is limited to three months in these situations. If additional assistance is needed after three months, a grantee must obtain supporting evidence of rent owed.

<sup>2</sup> Households with incomes of up to 80 percent of area median income (AMI) who meet the following conditions: (1) one or more individuals in the household has qualified for unemployment benefits or has experienced a reduction in household income, incurred significant costs, or experienced other financial hardship due directly or indirectly to the coronavirus; and (2) one or more individuals in the household can demonstrate a risk of experiencing homelessness or housing instability which may include (a) past due utility or rent notice or an eviction notice, (b) unsafe or unhealthy living conditions, or (c) other evidence of such risk as determined by the program administrator. Assistance must be prioritized to households with incomes of up to 50 percent of AMI and to households in which one or more household members is unemployed and has been unemployed for 90 days.