



DISABILITY RIGHTS
PENNSYLVANIA

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(877) 375-7139 (TDD)
www.disabilityrightspa.org

Transition to Adulthood

A Guide for Transition Age Individuals with Disabilities and Their Families

Chapter 3 - Housing

Chapter 3: Housing

Housing Resources

Most people need some support, especially when they are first out on their own. Below are some resources to consider if you are looking for **affordable housing** in the community. There are many sources for information about housing. If you need additional information please contact the Disability Rights Network of Pennsylvania at 1-800-692-7443.

Rental Assistance programs are run by your local Public Housing Agency (PHA). There are three main programs run by the PHA – Public Housing, Housing Choice Vouchers (Section 8), and Privately Owned Subsidized Housing. These programs often have long waiting lists, and some PHAs close their waiting lists when they get too full, so it's important to apply early. To find your local PHA, go to <http://www.hud.gov/local/pa/renting/hawebsites.cfm>.

Public Housing is available to low income families and individuals, and rent is usually 30% of a household's monthly income. Most public housing units are apartments and townhouses, located near each other, but some – called "scattered sites" – are spread out in the community.

Section 8 Housing Vouchers allow families and individuals to find their own housing in the community. The PHA pays part of the rent so that the household pays only 30% of its monthly income. The rent for the housing has to be within the Fair Market Rents for your community. This is set by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). If the housing you choose costs more than the Fair Market Rents, you have to pay the extra rent.

Sometimes a few of these vouchers are set aside just for persons with disabilities. When one person stops using one of these vouchers, it has to go to another person with a disability.

Privately Owned Subsidized Housing is housing that is owned by a

private person or company, but gets public money so it can have cheaper rent. You can search for some of these apartments and houses by going to <http://www.hud.gov/apps/section8/index.cfm>.

Affordable Housing Locator Websites can help you find affordable housing in Pennsylvania. There are at least two websites that let you search for units that are subsidized or have sliding scale rent (rent that is based on your income). You can also search for units that have special accessibility accommodations. These are good websites to use if you have a Housing Choice Voucher or if you don't qualify for Rental Assistance.

PA Housing Search <http://www.pahousingsearch.com>

Columbus Property Management (CPM) Home Finder (Southeast Pennsylvania only)
<http://www.cpmhomefinder.com/>

There are also several housing programs that link supportive services to housing. These **supportive housing** programs are described below.

Domiciliary Care (Dom Care) is for individuals with disabilities who need some help with activities of daily living, but do not need 24 hour care. In Dom Care you live in a provider's home. You and the provider will be matched, and some providers and consumers develop close, family-like relationships. Your rent gets you a private bedroom, use of common areas, such as the kitchen and living room, and food. The provider gives you some support and care based on your needs, such as help with meals and laundry. You and the Dom Care provider work together to set house rules about things like noise, visitors, pets, etc. You have rights in the Dom Care program that have to be respected and you can file complaints if you feel you are not treated well.

The cost of Dom Care is usually covered by your SSI benefit and a state supplement. There is a Dom Care program in every county in Pennsylvania. Although Dom Care is run by the Area Agency on Aging (AAA), you only have to be 18 or older to use it. To learn more, contact

your local Area Agency on Aging – you can find yours on the Pennsylvania Department of Aging’s website (<http://www.aging.state.pa.us/>) under “local resources.”

Shelter Plus Care (Western Pennsylvania) gives rental assistance to homeless persons with disabilities. Individuals get affordable housing and are connected to supportive services. Some Shelter Plus Care programs offer housing to anyone with a disability, but some are reserved for individuals with a behavioral health impairment or substance abuse disorder. For information about Shelter Plus Care in Western Pennsylvania, contact one of the organizations below:

DuBois Housing Authority
Contact: Kimberly A. Stroka, Project Manager
Phone: (814) 371-2290
Fax: (814) 371-2733
Email: duboisha@choiceonemail.com
Address:
Dubois Housing Authority
21 East Long Avenue
DuBois, PA 15801
<http://www.duboishousing.org/Shelter.htm>

FamilyLinks
Phone: (412) 343-7166
Address: FamilyLinks
2644 Banksville Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15216
<http://www.familylinks.org/>

Permanent Supportive Housing is affordable housing for persons with disabilities, including substance abuse disorders. Along with housing, supportive services are available, such as case management, employment support, mental health services, and life skills training. All supportive services are completely optional. Many organizations across the state offer Permanent Supportive Housing, but space is limited. A few are listed below.

Allegheny County: Transitional Services, Inc.

Contact: Jessica Burr, Clearinghouse Manager

Phone: (412) 461-1322, ext. 252

Fax: Attention: Clearinghouse Manager (412) 461-0308

Email: jburr@transitionalservices.org

Address:

Transitional Services, Inc.

Attention: Clearinghouse Manager

806 West Street

Homestead, Pa 15120

<http://www.transitionalservices.org>

Lackawanna County:

Catherine McAuley Center

Phone: (570) 342-1342

Fax: (570) 341-8108

Address:

Catherine McAuley Center

430 Pittston Avenue

Scranton, PA 18505

<http://www.catherinemcauleycenter.org/>

Philadelphia:

Project H.O.M.E.

Phone: (215) 232-7272

<http://www.projecthome.org/our-work/housing>

Fairweather Lodges provide shared housing and employment for individuals with behavioral health impairments. Five to eight people live in the house. They decide on the house rules together, run a business together, and share responsibilities, like paying bills and taking care of the house. There are not many Fairweather Lodges in Pennsylvania yet, but there will be more soon. For more information, contact one of the organizations listed below.

Allegheny County:

Family Services of Western Pennsylvania
Phone: (888) 222-4200
<http://www.fswp.org>

Mercy Behavioral Health
Phone: (877) 637-2924
<http://www.mercybehavioral.org/>

Centre County:
Strawberry Fields, Incorporated
Phone: (814) 234-6023
Fax: (814) 234-1439
Email: sfields@sfionline.org
Address:
Strawberry Fields, Inc.
3054 Enterprise Dr.
State College, PA 16801

Delaware County: Elwyn
Contact: Lewis Manges
Phone: (610) 891-2081
Email: Lew_Manges@elwyn.org
<http://www.elwyn.org/>

Erie County:
Stairways Behavioral Health
Contact: Kim Stucke
Phone: (814) 878-2170
Email: kmstucke@stairwaysbh.org
<http://www.stairwaysbh.org/>

Need more help with housing? Contact your Center for Independent Living (CIL) or Local Housing Option Team (L-HOT).

CILs offer many services to help empower people with disabilities. These services always include information and referral, advocacy, peer mentoring,

and life skills training. Each CIL also has additional services based on the needs of its community. If you have a question about services and programs in your community, call your local CIL for help. You can find the CIL in your area at http://www.pcil.net/pages/cils/locate_a_cil.aspx.

L-HOTs are made up of different agencies and individuals who are interested in finding solutions to the housing problems faced by people with disabilities. L-HOTs work to identify these problems and create more housing options. If you have a behavioral health impairment, your local L-HOT can be a great source of information about supportive housing options in your area. You can find the contact information for all the current L-HOTs at <http://www.pahousingchoices.org/housing-resources/local-housing-options-teams/>.

Housing Rights

When you are looking for housing, you have the right to have access to the same housing as a person without a disability. Landlords and realtors cannot discriminate against you because you or someone you know has a disability. They also have to allow certain changes to the building and to their rules if you need the changes to have full access to the house or apartment.

It is illegal for most landlords or realtors to:

- Refuse to rent or sell to you because of a disability;
- Tell you a house or apartment isn't available when it is;
- Set a different price or different contract terms for you;
- Give you fewer services than other tenants;
- Use discriminatory language in advertisements. This includes stating that an apartment or house is not accessible;
- Threaten, intimidate, or harass you;
- Refuse to make reasonable accommodations in policies, practices, or procedures that are necessary to allow you equal enjoyment of the premises;
- Make you pay extra fees because of your reasonable accommodation;

- Refuse to allow you to make reasonable modifications to the premises at your own expense if necessary to provide you with equal enjoyment of the property; or
- Ask you if you have a disability or what kind of disability you have. If you need an accommodation or modification and it is not obvious why you need it, the landlord can ask for just enough information to understand. The landlord cannot ask you for more details than he needs. The landlord also cannot ask about other disabilities that don't relate to the accommodation or modification.

It is okay for a landlord to give preference to people with disabilities or to advertise that housing is accessible to people with disabilities.

Reasonable accommodations are changes in rules, policies, or services to allow an individual with a disability to have an equal opportunity to use and enjoy the housing. The accommodation must be related to your disability. The landlord is responsible for any costs related to making the accommodation. There is no complete list of reasonable accommodations, but some examples are listed below:

- Giving you a reserved parking space if you need to park close to the building because of your disability;
- Letting you have a service animal even if the housing doesn't allow pets;
- Not charging guest fees or parking fees for your home health care aide;
- Helping you fill out the rental application form if you have a visual impairment; and
- Letting you mail your rent check instead of bringing it to the office if you have a behavioral health impairment that makes you afraid to leave your apartment.

Reasonable modifications are physical changes to your house, apartment, or apartment building to allow you full use of your home. You can request a reasonable modification before you move in or at any time while you live at the premises. You are responsible for paying for reasonable modifications and you might have to put things back the way

they were when you move out. You are also responsible for the upkeep of the modification unless it is in a common area that the landlord normally maintains. Your landlord can insist that whoever makes the modification get the necessary permits and do the work in a workmanlike manner. However, if your landlord wants you to use a certain contractor to do the work or make it look a certain way, you only have to agree if the modification will still do what you need and the landlord pays any extra costs. There is no complete list of reasonable modifications, but some examples are listed below:

- Putting a grab bar in your bathroom;
- Widening doors or lowering counters because you use a wheelchair;
- Putting a ramp into the building or your apartment;
- Replacing your doorknobs with levers;
- Installing a peephole because of a hearing disability so you can see who is at the door; and
- Replacing carpeting with a smooth, finished floor.

REMEMBER, you can only get an accommodation or modification if you need it because of your disability. Your landlord can't guess what you need. He or she only has to make changes that you ask for. There is no special way that you have to ask for your accommodations or modifications, but it's a good idea to make your request in writing and keep a copy for yourself. If the landlord doesn't respond to your request promptly, it counts as failing to allow a reasonable accommodation. You'll want the written request as proof of what you asked for and when you asked for it, in case you need to file a complaint.

Filing a Complaint

If you think a landlord or realtor has discriminated against you, you have one year to file a complaint with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) or two years to file a lawsuit in federal court. If you want to file a complaint, you can file online or download a form from www.hud.gov. You can also send a letter that includes the following: (1) your name and address; (2) the name and address of the person your complaint is about; (3) the address of the house or apartment you were trying to rent, buy, or get an accommodation for; (4) the date the incident

occurred and whether it happened one time or is ongoing; and (5) a short description of what happened. Send your form or letter to:

Fair Housing Hub
U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development
The Wanamaker Building
100 Penn Square East
Philadelphia, PA 19107

Keep track of when you filed your complaint, because HUD has to complete an investigation into your situation within 100 days. If you need help, you can contact the complaints office for Pennsylvania at (888) 799- 2085 or (215) 656-3450 (TTY) or Complaints_office_03@hud.gov.

Contact Information

If you need more information or need help, please contact Disability Rights Pennsylvania (DRP) at 800-692-7443 (voice) or 877-375-7139 (TDD). The email address is: intake@disabilityrightspa.org.

The mission of Disability Rights Pennsylvania is to advance, protect, and advocate for the human, civil, and legal rights of Pennsylvanians with disabilities. Due to our limited resources, Disability Rights Pennsylvania cannot provide individual services to every person with advocacy and legal issues. Disability Rights Pennsylvania prioritizes cases that have the potential to result in widespread, systemic changes to benefit persons with disabilities. While we cannot provide assistance to everyone, we do seek to provide every individual with information and referral options.

IMPORTANT: This publication is for general informational purposes only. This publication is not intended, nor should be construed, to create an attorney-client relationship between Disability Rights Pennsylvania and any person. Nothing in this publication should be considered to be legal advice.

PLEASE NOTE: For information in alternative formats or a language other than English, contact Disability Rights Pennsylvania at 800-692-7443, Ext. 400, TDD: 877-375-7139 or intake@disabilityrightspa.org.