RENTAL ASSISTANCE

**Description:** Rental assistance provides funding to cover all, or part, of the rent of a housing unit. During the COVID-19 public health crisis, rental assistance has been used in response to sudden and projected income losses to both tenants and landlords. As eviction moratoria expire, rental assistance may play an important role in helping renters to avoid eviction over the medium- to long-term.

**Goals:**
- Increasing the affordability of rental housing
- Improving housing quality and safety
- Increasing housing stability for renters and stability of operations for rental property owners

**Approach:** Rental assistance can be funded and administered through a range of federal, state, or local programs. Depending on state and local law, rental assistance programs can be created through administrative actions by cities and states, the legislative process, or modifications of state of emergency declarations. Rental assistance can be provided either to tenants (who use it to pay the rent) or directly to landlords. During the current crisis, rental assistance is being used to relieve financial burdens on households facing income reductions and to prevent increases in homelessness and eviction.

**Housing Choice Vouchers** are one form of rental assistance that provides a subsidy intended to cover the difference between the rent (or a locally determined rent standard) and the amount a tenant can afford to pay. Substantial increases in permanent Housing Choice Vouchers would require federal funding, but some public housing agencies are taking advantage of flexibilities associated with the Moving to Work program to provide short-term rental assistance that functions similarly to the Housing Choice Voucher program. Other cities are using Community Development Block Grants and other funding sources to provide short-term rental assistance. Some short-term rental assistance programs provide a shallower form of assistance than Housing Choice Vouchers in order to assist a larger number of households with a set amount of funding.

**Stakeholder Involvement:** State and local governments, state and local housing agencies, Public Housing Authorities, and local nonprofit organizations.

**Short-term considerations:**
- Program sponsors may choose to provide one-time relief (for example, a single payment to prevent homelessness or eviction in the event of unexpected job loss or expenses, for instance) or ongoing assistance to help tenants with longer-term housing affordability challenges. Local budgetary constraints will affect the size and duration of the assistance jurisdictions can provide.
- Many jurisdictions have loosened eligibility criteria and means-testing in response to the COVID-19 public health crisis in order to serve a wider range of tenants.
- Assistance to landlords during the crisis has frequently been conditioned upon agreements not to evict tenants for nonpayment of rent.
• Stakeholders must also choose which funding sources are the most appropriate to target those most at-risk of displacement (i.e. federal funds may not be used to assist undocumented residents, whereas private or general funds may).

Medium- to long-term considerations:

• Jurisdictions may wish to provide at least some direct assistance to landlords, as losses of rental income will make it more difficult for landlords to perform building maintenance and repairs.
• While some forms of rental assistance assume tenants will later pay back arrears, many programs are providing assistance in the form of grants that do not need to be repaid given the economic uncertainty associated with the current crisis.
• Localities may wish to consider pairing rental assistance with other measures designed to ensure housing stability and enable tenants to choose to stay in their apartments.
• Due to anticipated tax revenue shortfalls, localities may wish to consider leveraging partnerships with other organizations to extend the lifespan of local rental assistance programs.

Examples in action: San Antonio | West Palm Beach | Arizona state

Complementary policies:

• Eviction moratoria
• Eviction prevention programs
• Housing Choice Vouchers
• Tenant-based rental assistance