

Statement of Housing Needs and Strategy for Addressing Housing Needs

The Virgin Islands continues to experience a severe shortage of affordable housing available to extremely low-income, very low-income, and low-income households. While substantial progress has been made in recovering from the impacts of Hurricanes Irma and Maria, the Territory's housing market remains constrained by limited housing inventory, escalating construction costs, increased insurance premiums, supply chain challenges, and the ongoing loss of long-term rental units to short-term vacation rental markets. These conditions have contributed to rising rents, increased housing cost burdens, and reduced housing opportunities for families seeking affordable housing assistance.

The Virgin Islands Housing Authority (VIHA) continues to observe significant demand for housing assistance, as evidenced by persistent waiting lists for both the Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCVP) and Low-Income Public Housing (LIPH). Many applicant households are extremely low-income and face barriers to obtaining safe, decent, and affordable housing in the private rental market. Elderly persons, persons with disabilities, families experiencing homelessness or housing instability, and working families with limited incomes remain among the populations with the greatest housing needs.

The shortage of affordable housing units cannot be fully addressed through tenant-based rental assistance alone. Accordingly, VIHA will continue to pursue aggressive expansion of its Project-Based Voucher portfolio as a strategic mechanism to increase the supply of permanently affordable housing. The use of PBVs allows VIHA to support housing development, preservation, and redevelopment initiatives while ensuring long-term affordability for eligible households. Through strategic partnerships and leveraging of public and private resources, VIHA seeks to significantly increase the number of affordable units available to voucher holders and other low-income families throughout the Territory.

To address these challenges, VIHA will pursue the following strategic objectives:

1. Preserve and Expand Affordable Housing Opportunities

- Continue redevelopment, rehabilitation, and modernization activities to restore and preserve affordable housing assets throughout the Territory.
- Support the development and expansion of affordable housing through Project-Based Voucher (PBV) initiatives and strategic partnerships with public and private housing developers.
- Identify opportunities to leverage federal, territorial, and private funding resources to increase the supply of affordable housing.

2. Maximize Housing Choice Voucher Utilization

- Maintain high voucher lease-up and utilization rates to ensure full use of available Housing Assistance Payments (HAP) funding.
- Expand landlord outreach and recruitment efforts to encourage participation in the Housing Choice Voucher Program.
- Increase housing opportunities across neighborhoods throughout the Territory to provide participants with greater housing choice.

3. Promote Economic Mobility and Self-Sufficiency

- Strengthen the Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Program by connecting participants with education, workforce development, financial literacy, and employment opportunities.
- Promote homeownership opportunities through the Section 8 Homeownership Program and other pathways that support long-term economic stability and asset building.
- Collaborate with local employers, educational institutions, and service providers to reduce barriers to employment and increase household earnings.

4. Support Vulnerable Populations

- Prioritize housing assistance for eligible populations in accordance with HUD requirements and VIHA preferences.
- Continue collaborations with supportive service providers to address the housing needs of families facing homelessness, persons with disabilities, elderly households, and survivors of domestic violence.
- Ensure compliance with fair housing and equal opportunity requirements while promoting access to housing for all eligible families.

5. Strengthen Organizational Capacity and Program Performance

- Improve administrative efficiency through enhanced technology, staff training, data management, and compliance monitoring.
- Maintain strong fiscal stewardship and effective program administration to maximize the impact of federal housing resources.
- Utilize performance data, community input, and housing market assessments to guide policy decisions and future housing initiatives.

Through these strategies, VIHA seeks to increase access to safe, decent, sanitary, and affordable housing while advancing self-sufficiency, expanding housing opportunities, and improving the overall quality of life for families throughout the Virgin Islands.

Operation and Management

The Virgin Islands Housing Authority (VIHA) continues to strengthen the administration and performance of the Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCVP) through policy modernization, administrative efficiencies, strategic utilization of available funding, and expanded housing opportunities for low-income families. During FY 2027, VIHA will implement several operational improvements designed to improve housing stability, increase program utilization, maintain compliance with HUD requirements, and expand pathways to self-sufficiency and homeownership.

Emergency Housing Voucher (EHV) Transition Initiative

In response to HUD guidance regarding the wind-down of the Emergency Housing Voucher (EHV) program, VIHA has amended its Housing Choice Voucher Administrative Plan to establish a local preference for eligible EHV participants transitioning into the HCV program. This initiative is intended to preserve housing stability for households currently assisted under the EHV program and reduce the risk of homelessness as EHV funding is exhausted. Eligible

EHV participants will receive the highest priority on the HCV waiting list and may transition to regular HCV assistance when funding becomes available, consistent with HUD guidance and program requirements.

The EHV Transition Preference has been incorporated into VIHA's waiting list administration policies and is ranked above all other local preferences, ensuring continuity of assistance for eligible families currently receiving EHV assistance. Verification of eligibility will be conducted through VIHA program records and established eligibility procedures.

Waiting List Administration and Admissions

VIHA maintains a centralized tenant-based HCV waiting list and separate waiting lists for Project-Based Voucher developments and special housing programs. The Authority continues to administer waiting lists in accordance with HUD regulations and local preferences adopted through the Administrative Plan. Admissions policies are designed to ensure fairness, transparency, and equal access while addressing local housing priorities and maximizing utilization of available housing assistance resources.

VIHA will continue utilizing objective ranking procedures based on established preferences, residency status where applicable, and date and time of application. The Authority will routinely review waiting list data and admissions practices to ensure efficient program administration and compliance with federal requirements.

Expansion of Project-Based Voucher Activities

VIHA will continue utilizing Project-Based Vouchers (PBVs) as a strategic tool to expand the supply of affordable housing throughout the Virgin Islands. Given the limited availability of affordable rental units and increasing housing costs, VIHA will pursue partnerships with public agencies, nonprofit organizations, private developers, and housing finance entities to increase the development and preservation of affordable housing units supported by PBV assistance. PBV expansion remains a key operational strategy for increasing housing opportunities, supporting redevelopment initiatives, facilitating right-to-return efforts where applicable, and ensuring long-term affordability within the Territory.

Homeownership Opportunities

VIHA has revised its Section 8 Homeownership Program policies to expand access to homeownership opportunities. The previous requirement that applicants be participants in the Housing Choice Voucher Program for at least one year has been eliminated. Eligible families must now meet HUD homeownership eligibility requirements and be in good standing with VIHA. This revision broadens access to the program for eligible low-income families, including public housing residents who seek to transition to homeownership.

The Administrative Plan has also established a preference system for the Homeownership Program that prioritizes eligible residents of Williams Delight Villas, existing public housing residents, and other qualified families residing within the Virgin Islands, while providing additional preference to participants enrolled in the Family Self-Sufficiency Program.

Program Performance and Compliance

VIHA remains committed to maintaining strong program performance through effective fiscal management, accurate reporting, quality control reviews, timely inspections, regular recertifications, and staff training. The Authority will continue monitoring leasing rates, Housing Assistance Payment expenditures, utilization levels, waiting list administration, and program compliance to ensure that available federal resources are used efficiently and effectively to serve eligible families.

Through these operational initiatives, VIHA seeks to maximize housing opportunities, improve customer service, expand affordable housing resources, promote self-sufficiency and homeownership, and ensure continued compliance with HUD regulations and program requirements.