Participant Handbook

Illinois Department of Human Services
Bridge Subsidy Program

Welcome and Introduction

Thank you for choosing to be a part of the Bridge Subsidy Program.
If you are reading this handbook, you have started the process of getting ready to move out.

What is the purpose of this handbook?

This handbook gives you information about the program. We want you to know what to expect so that you can be successful. It also contains general information about:

- Working with your care team
- Finding an apartment
- Being a tenant and working with a landlord

Please read this handbook. Ask questions about anything that you don't understand! You can also take notes of things you want to remember.
Add contact information and who created the handbook.

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How the Bridge Subsidy Program Works

This program helps eligible people (like you) pay rent on an apartment in the community as you prepare for the next step in your life. In this program, you will work on two main housing goals:

- **Finding a place to live now** with your Bridge Subsidy
- **Making long-term plans for housing** such as applying for a Section 8 Housing Voucher, getting on the Statewide Referral Network waitlist, or increasing your income to pay for an apartment without a subsidy.

What supports are available to me?

The Bridge Subsidy program provides many support services. You may have a care team that can help you with many things:

finding mental health services like therapy or substance use services

finding a doctor or making medical appointments

understanding the process to pay your rent and other bills

getting a job or finding career training

learning how to take care of everyday tasks like cooking and cleaning

getting equipment you need to help you in living independently

finding transportation

getting a phone

getting a new state ID, license, or documents you may need

build tenancy skills to be a good neighbor and tenant

find social activities

You do not have to use any of these services to be part of the Bridge Program. We hope you use them though and find them helpful!
Participation in services is not mandatory. Your care team is here to support your goals and using services is how we can be supportive.

Who can help me when I have questions?

There are several people that make up your care team and who will help you along the way. Below is more information about their roles. You can keep track of their names and contact information here:

	Care Manager	**Housing Locator**	**Subsidy Administrator**
	• Meets with you regularly and provides support services • Is the first person you can reach out to when you have questions	• Helps you find a place to live and move in • Can answer any questions about the Bridge subsidy	• Coordinates your apartment inspection to make sure the apartment is safe • Makes sure the subsidy part of your rent is paid monthly
Name			
Phone Number			
Email Address			

Now that you have gotten your approval letter, your care manager or housing locator will work with you to find an apartment that meets your needs. You may have other people join your care team, too.

Finding a Place to Live

Here is what the process usually looks like:

1. **Think about what you want in a place.** There are worksheets near the end of this handbook you can use to help you think about the community, building, and apartment you want.

   Important: Subsidy Administrator **guaranteed payments** of up to 100% of monthly rental costs. If a household has income, that household pays 30% of their income towards rent. If a household has no income, then that household pays nothing, and the full rental amount is covered by the subsidy. Bridge Subsidy recipients are eligible to occupy a unit with 1 bedroom per household member and must adhere to the Fair Market Rent (FMR) payment standards.

2. **Start looking for a place to live**. Your care manager or housing locator will help! Visit many places so that you can make sure you end up in a place that is a good fit for you. Meet the property manager or landlord before you decide, too.

   Important: Just because you like an apartment does not mean you will get it. This is a normal part of the process. Sometimes your credit, housing, or justice system history, cost of rent and landlord bias can make the housing search harder. Your care team will support you along the way.

3. Once a landlord offers you a place, **your care manager or housing locator will arrange an inspection with the subsidy administrator.**

   Important: <u>The subsidy administrator must approve the place you want to live in before you sign the lease.</u> The lease is the legal agreement that you must sign to live in the apartment or house. *Do not sign a lease until the apartment is approved by the Subsidy Administrator.*

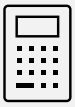
4. **After the apartment has passed inspection, then you will need to sign the lease.** Always read a lease or any legal document carefully. Your care manager or housing locator can help you review it. A lease usually says:
    - The rent amount
    - When the lease starts, ends, and how to renew it
    - How much you must pay if your rent is late
    - Who is responsible for repairs and how to get repairs made
    - Rules about when your landlord can come to your apartment
    - Any other promises made by the landlord
    - Information about lease violations

    Ask any questions before you sign it.

The questions on pages 11-12 might help you sum up important parts of your lease. If you would like to see an example of a lease, you can go to the Illinois Legal Aid website at https://bit.ly/ILsamplelease.

Getting Ready to Move

Having a subsidy means the Bridge program pays part of your rent, and you pay part of your rent. **You only have to pay 30% of <u>your</u> income toward the rent.** Here's an example to get the idea:

				
Meet Terry.	Terry's income is $500 each month. Terry will pay 30% (about 1/3) of their total income toward the rent. 30% of $500 is $150.	Terry finds an apartment that is $800 a month.	Each month, **Terry pays $150 and the Bridge program pays the rest, $650,** for a total of $800.	Terry can use the rest of their money each month to pay other bills, save, or spend on other things.

You rent amount and your income will be different than Terry's. You will pay 30% of <u>your</u> income toward your rent. The Subsidy Administrator will send you a copy of what you will need to pay each month.

What other fees do I need to know about?

You may have to pay a security deposit or move-in fee before you move in.

What is a Security Deposit?	What is a Move-In Fee?
• **A fee usually** 1x **to** 2x **your monthly rent** • Money you get back **when you move out unless there is damage caused by more than normal use** (then your landlord can keep it)	• A fee to move-in to an apartment • A fee that is not returned when you move out

Some apartments have utilities like light and heat included in the rent. Some do not. It's important that you know what you need to pay for in your new place.

Our program can help you. We can pay for costs like security deposits, moving fees, utility deposits, and household items like furniture. The exact amount depends on where you move and other factors. Your care manager or housing locator will help you with these decisions.

Rights and Responsibilities

What are my rights as a tenant?

You have the right to expect the landlord to:

- Keep the home up to local building code
- Keep the home safe to live in
- Give you written notice before ending the lease
- Not have a landlord enter your home without telling you in advance, except in an emergency

Learn more about your rights through the Illinois Tenants Union at www.tenant.org and Illinois Legal Aid at www.illinoislegalaid.org.

What are my responsibilities as a tenant?

As a tenant, you are expected to:

- Pay rent when it is due and follow the rules in the lease
- Keep the home clean
- Not make major changes to the home unless the landlord says it is okay
- Tell the landlord about any problems with your home
- Give the landlord notice before you move out

If you have questions about your housing or are not sure if you should call your landlord, talk to your care manager or housing locator. They can help you fix problems with your place and talk with your landlord.

Summary

We know you may still have a lot of questions — your care manager can answer all of them (or find the answers when they don't know!)

While you wait for your care manager to reach out, you can start thinking about what is important for you in an apartment, building, and neighborhood on the following pages. There are also documents you can use to help you make sure you understand your lease and to help you learn about your new neighborhood when the time comes.

We are happy you are here and look forward to working with you!

Your Apartment Needs

Think about each feature below. Write a ✓ in the box to show if you must have it, would like to have it (but don't need it), or definitely don't need it.

	I must have…	I would like…	I don't need…
My own apartment ***(****not* ***a shared house)***			
Studio apartment			
One bedroom			
More than one bedroom			
Furniture			
Washer and dryer in my apartment			
Dishwasher			
Air conditioning			
Utilities included			
Closets and storage			
One first level (no stairs)			
My own bathroom			
Quiet unit			
Other:			

Your Building Needs

Think about each feature below. Write a ✓ in the box to show if you must have it, would like to have it (but don't need it), or definitely don't need it.

My notes about Accessibility:

	I must have…	I would like…	I don't need…
Specific type of building *(single family, duplex, etc.)*			
Secured entrance			
On-site laundry			
Yard/playground			
Off-street parking			
Handicap accessibility *(add notes below)*			
Elevator			
Pets allowed			
Storage space			
On quiet street			
Quiet building			
Other:			

Your Neighborhood Needs

Think about each feature below. Write a ✓ in the box to show if you must have it, would like to have it (but don't need it), or don't need it.

	I must have…	I would like…	I don't need…
Near public transportation			
Near major roads/highways			
Near schools/daycare			
Near work			
Near healthcare and supportive services			
Near parks/play areas/public library			
Near family/friends			
Near grocery store and shopping			
Near religious places and recreation places like gyms			
Children can play outside			
Quiet neighborhood			
Other:			
Other:			

What Your Lease Says About Payment

You must understand your lease. if you break any of the rules, you could be charged extra fees or even be evicted. Work with your care manager to review the rules about your lease. You can write them here. Keep this page so you can review it if you need to.

Questions About Payment	What My Lease Says
What is my monthly rent?	
When is my rent due each month?	
Where do I send my rent payment?	
How much is the security deposit or move-in fee?	
If the rent is late, is there a late fee? How much is the late fee?	
When does the landlord start charging a late fee?	
If my check bounces, does that mean it's a late payment?	
When does the landlord start eviction if the rent is not paid?	
What utilities do I have to pay?	
How can I access the Internet?	
What other fees do I have to pay? *(For example: fee for pets, garage, laundry, key deposit, service fee if my check bounces?)*	

What Your Lease Says About Apartment Rules

You must understand your lease. if you break any of the rules, you could be charged extra fees or even be evicted. Work with your care manager to review the rules about your apartment's rules. You can write them here. Keep it so you can review it if you need to.

Questions About My Apartment	What My Lease Says
What are the rules about noise? What should I do if my neighbors are loud?	
What pets are allowed? *(Kind of pet, how many, size)*	
Are there rules about how I clean my house? Do I have to do any yard work?	
What happens if something breaks, or someone damages my apartment? What should I do?	
Can the landlord come into my apartment anytime they want to?	
What are the rules about someone living with me? How long can someone visit me if they aren't living with me?	
What happens if the police come to my apartment or someone in my family is arrested?	
What happens if someone in my apartment uses illegal drugs?	
How long is my lease? What if I want to move before my lease ends?	
What happens when my lease expires?	
If I want to move out, how soon do I have to tell my landlord?	

Your New Neighborhood

As you move into your new home, it will help to learn about your neighborhood. Your care manager or housing locator can help you fill out this section.

My nearest grocery store is…

My nearest bank is…

I can access transportation at…

My nearest laundromat is…

My nearest pharmacy is…

My nearest library branch is…