

“Amended Attachment A”
Lancaster County, PA
Emergency Rental Assistance Program
and
Revised General Program Guidelines Program Year 2023

Introduction

The Lancaster County Rental Assistance Program was established to provide rental and utility payments to landlords and utility companies in order to keep residents housed during the COVID-19 pandemic and to ensure rental housing stability.

Initial funding was provided by the U.S. Department of Treasury directly to the County and through the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania through the Department of Human Services. **This funding (approximately 36 million dollars) was obligated or expended by the September 30th, 2022, statutory deadline.**

Through the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, the County has or will received additional funding of **approximately 28 million** directly from the U.S. Department of Treasury and through the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania through the Department of Human Services for the use of rental assistance to eligible households within the County (referred to as ERA2 funding). **As of October 7, 2022, 16 million of ERA2 funding has been obligated or expended.** Additional funds may be obligated (25%) for uses such as the creation of affordable housing units.

Program Changes Through December 31-2022

With the number of households eligible for assistance and the rate of which funding has been distributed each month for additional months of assistance, the following changes will be occurring through the end of December 2022.

- No first-time applications will be accepted, the application will remain closed to new households.
- Forward months of rent assistance will be available through the month of December 2022.
 - Example, an eligible household has recertified in the month of November, if approved they can expect payment of November and December rent only along with any arrears.
- Utility arrearages will be accepted through November 1st (Utility Moratorium will be in place in December). Payments will continue to be processed for any approved arrearages submitted by November 1st.
- Hotel stays will no longer be supported starting November 1st. Applicants that were previously approved will continue through their 90-day period of eligibility. Recertifications of additional months of hotel assistance, if applicable in the Hotel Policy, will not be accepted.
- Outreach efforts will continue; however, any application that does not provide documentation to support eligibility (Not Registered Status, Incomplete Documentation Status) by December 31st will be deemed ineligible and become a “denied” application.

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Program Guidelines Effective January 1, 2023

Eligible Assistance – At Risk of Eviction

Funds shall be used to provide financial assistance to eligible households that document a risk of eviction.

- Eligible household is defined as a household that has already submitted an application during the application period of March 8, 2021, through July 11, 2022, and has months of assistance available to them. No first-time application will be accepted.
- The payment of existing housing-related arrears that could result in eviction of an eligible household.
- Eligible households may receive up to twelve (12) months of assistance.
- Eligible households that have received 6 months of assistance and requesting additional payments for rental arrears will be required to enroll in case management services to review the applicant’s (household’s) housing stability.
 - This will include connecting the household to other programs and services for employment, legal assistance, food security, childcare, and other related assistance.

Rent Assistance Related to Rental Arrears and Eviction

- Rental arrears only.
- Eligible assistance with rent arrears as far back as March 13, 2020, (assuming no other financial assistance has been provided for the same months).
- Maximum assistance payments may include:
 - rental arrears
 - late fees or penalties due to nonpayment as provided in writing in the lease or court documentation.
- Maximum assistance will be established at time of recertification and review of the tenant’s lease agreement (written or 3rd party verified documentation showing residency and past payments).
 - Written signed and current lease; or
 - 3rd party documentation showing tenant residency, landlord ownership and payments of rent.

Other Expenses Related to Rental Arrears and Eviction

- Other expenses related to housing incurred due, directly or indirectly, to the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak, as defined by the Secretary.
 - Eviction court fees and legal representation for non-payment of rent only
 - Eligible households will provide a bill, invoice, or evidence of payment
 - Security deposits, first month’s rent to ensure eligible households’ stability due to permanent or temporary relocation due to COVID-19.

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Eligible Households

Household individual or individuals **meet the following three (3) program criteria:**

Criteria 1: Meets and can provide documentation of one of the following:

- Qualified for unemployment benefits; or
- Experienced a 10 percent or higher reduction in household income; or
- Incurred significant costs, or experienced other financial hardship due, directly to the novel coronavirus disease (COVID–19) outbreak,

Criteria 2: Meets and can provide documentation of the following:

- Demonstrated risk of experiencing homelessness or housing instability due to eviction, which includes:
 - A past due rent notice; and
 - Current documentation of Threat of Eviction

Criteria 3: Meets and can provide documentation of 80 percent area median income:

- Household has a household income that is not more than 80 percent of the county area median income for the household. Current area median income is based off Program Year 2021.
<https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/il/il2021/2021summary.odn>
- Acceptable documentation of household income:
 - Annual income for Year 2020
 - HUD definition of annual income through W-2’s or wage statements, paystubs, bank statements demonstrating regular income or attestation from employer.
 - 2020 Form 1040 as filed with the IRS
 - Monthly income
 - Documentation of income provided at time of application will be extrapolated over a twelve (12) month period, and redetermined every three month during the duration of assistance.

Ineligible Households

Other than households who do not meet the criteria listed in the above section, the following are examples of ineligible households:

- Households that have already received **12 months of assistance** as of 1/1/2023.
- **Households requesting assistance for future months of rent.**

Payments

In general, funds will be paid directly to landlords.

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If a landlord does not provide required documentation to accept payments on behalf of eligible households, and upon a reasonable effort to contact the landlord, funds shall be paid directly to the eligible household if:

- Landlords have not responded after notification in writing by mail and seven (7) calendar days have passed; or
- Landlords have not responded after at least three (3) attempts by phone, text, or email during a minimum five (5) day period; or
- Landlords confirm in writing that they do not wish to participate.

Prioritization of Eligible Households and Assistance

Households (In Priority Order)

1. Households at or below 50 percent of the area median income (AMI).
 - Households with a scheduled eviction hearing or “Notice to Quit” letter from the landlord.
2. Households with an individual or individuals who have been unemployed as of the date of the application for assistance for the ninety (90) day period preceding such date.
 - Households with a scheduled eviction hearing or “Notice to Quit” letter from the landlord.

Assistance (In Priority Order)

1. Rental arrears to avoid eviction
2. Other expenses related to housing (security deposit and court costs)

Program Overview

Application Process

Program Start Date: March 8, 2021

Program End Date: September 30, 2022 unless otherwise extended.

Obtain Application: Directly through www.lancasterhelp.rent or with assistance from county and city organizations with support staff and computer access. Call 2-1-1 or helpline for information on how to apply.

Application Submission (Pre-Screening): Tenants (applicant) will apply online at www.lancasterhelp.rent.

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- An applicant will establish an account with username (email address) and password.
- Landlords can assist applicants with online submission of application.
- Online application is available in numerous languages through Google Translate feature.
- Software will check for duplicate household applications.
- Applicants can save progress and exit application and submit another time.
- Applicants will provide basic information about the household, income, and answer questions to determine initial eligibility for rent and/or utility assistance.

Application Prioritizing: Upon submission of all required documentation and completion of eligibility determination, landlord and utility provider outreach and payment approvals will be prioritized on a bi-weekly basis to meet the federal and local prioritization as established in the Program Guidelines. The application submission is not a first-come, first-serve or lottery-based process.

Applicant Eligibility-Screening and Document Review: Using the same account credentials, an applicant can log onto www.assistancecheck.com to update contact information, submit required documentation and check the status of their initial submission. Applicants will have access to the web portal the day following the date that a submitted application is received through Waitlistcheck, except on weekends, and access will be available the next business day.

Applicants will download, fill out and upload documents to assist in eligibility determination including:

- Pennsylvania Labor & Industry Pandemic UI Assistance Letter
- Pennsylvania Labor & Industry Notice of Financial Determination Letter
- W-2s and paystubs of income earned
- Bank statements of employer direct deposits
- Attestation of unemployment, reduction of income and significant costs and financial hardship
- 2020 1040 IRS tax filing
- Employer Income Form – completed and certified by tenant applicant’s employer
- Tenant Duplication of Benefits Certification Form
- Tenant’s “lease agreement” (e.g., for a house, mobile home, apartment, room rental)
 - 3rd party documentation showing tenant residency, landlord ownership and payments of rent.
- Tenant’s eviction notice and/or late payment notice(s)
- Tenant’s utility bill(s) and late fees(s)
- Case managers will review information and documents submitted through the online application and applicant access websites.
- Case managers will have access to records to cross-reference other federal, state, and local assistance programs to verify no duplication of services for the same rent and utility costs being requested through this Program.

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- Case managers will complete eligibility determination. Payment requests will be initiated for eligible applicants. Denials will be sent to any applicant that does not qualify.

Application Recertification Form (Eviction and Arrears Only): Applicants will be required to fill out an **Application Recertification Form and Documentation of Current Monthly Income** for additional assistance. Applicants who were income qualified by 2020 1040 IRS tax filing will only have to complete the Application Recertification Form. Applicants can request assistance with arrears and an Application Recertification Form will be required for each request of additional assistance, for a maximum of twelve (12) months of assistance between ERA1 funding and ERA2 funding.

Case Management Requirement (ERA2 funding): Applicants who are requesting rental arrear assistance and are determined to be eligible will be required to enroll in case management services to review the applicant’s (household’s) housing stability. This will include connecting the household to other programs and services for employment, legal assistance, food security, childcare, health, and other related assistance. Applicants will be required to sign a form that they acknowledge the case management services requirement as a condition to receive the ERA2 funding.

This requirement applies to applicants who:

- Are requesting or have met six (6) months of assistance.

Landlord Outreach and Review of Assistance: In general, funds will be paid directly to landlords.

- Landlord specialist will obtain information from the landlord to verify balances owed due to arrears within the eligible period of assistance.
 - Landlords will be contacted by written notification through mail and will have seven (7) calendar days to respond, or
 - Landlords will be contacted at least three (3) times by phone, text, or email during a five (5) day period, or
 - In instances of immediate eviction, payments may be made directly to the tenant.
 - Landlords may provide in writing that they wish not to directly participate in the program.
- Landlords will fill out and/or upload documents to verify arrear balances, W-9 form, and voided checks necessary for providing payment.

Online Information for Landlords: www.lchra.com/landlord/

- Review Payments for units/tenants within the Program

Dedicated Helpline (717) 590-3101

The helpline will assist applicants, landlords, and utility companies with questions about the program and how to get computer access and assistance in providing necessary documentation for eligibility.

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- Refer applicants to locations with staff support and computer access.
- Refer applicants to website.
- Inform tenants of eligibility requirements and informal screening of eligibility.
- Inform tenants and landlords on submission of documents for eligibility and payments.
- Inform tenants and landlords on how to obtain status and payment updates.

Computer Access and Application Assistance

Along with a dedicated helpline, since the Program is an online computerized based platform, there will be locations throughout the County and City for residents with limited computer knowledge or limited or no computer access. With the help of the Eviction Prevention Network, state representative offices, school districts and other partnering organizations and groups, the Program will be able to provide additional assistance for applicants needing help to apply, gain computer access, or scan and upload necessary documentation.

Applicants can call 2-1-1, the helpline or directly to the location for hours and scheduling an appointment.

Location Information will be updated on www.lancasterhelp.rent.

Appeals Process

Applicants will be given the opportunity to submit an appeal for decisions on eligibility determination and payment assistance.

Appeals related to the denial of assistance will be heard by a four-member panel comprised of representatives of the Housing Authority, City of Lancaster, Housing Equity and Equality Institute (HEEI) at Tabor/LHOP, and one other organization. Applicants can visit <https://www.lchra.com/appeals/> to access an appeal form.