



Referral Agent Guide

Section 1: Introduction

About the Ohio 811 Program

The Ohio 811 Project Rental Assistance (PRA) Program (hereinafter Ohio 811 Program) is a project-based rental subsidy demonstration designed to expand the supply of housing for extremely low-income, non-elderly individuals with disabilities. This program is administered by the Ohio Housing Finance Agency (OHFA) in coordination with the Ohio Department of Medicaid (ODM), the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD), and the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS). OHFA secures program units through new and existing multifamily housing properties that receive any form of OHFA funding, while ODM, DODD and OhioMHAS work to ensure a healthy pipeline of eligible tenants.

Purpose of this Guide

The Referral Agent Guide explains the roles and responsibilities of Referral Agents as they relate to the Ohio 811 Program. ODM, DODD and OhioMHAS coordinate with Referral Agents, individuals who work with prospective tenants one-on-one in each of the interagency systems to understand, apply, and participate in this program. Referral Agents play a critical role as they are responsible for identifying eligible individuals, assisting them with the application process, and verifying that they are linked to the services and supports needed to live independently.

Section 2: Eligible Households

Tenant Eligibility

An eligible household must meet all of the following criteria:

- Complies with the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) definition of an “extremely low-income family” as defined in [24 C.F.R. § 5.603](#). Adjusted annual income cannot exceed 30 percent of the [area median income limit](#), adjusted for family size; and
- Is at least 18 years of age, but no older than 61 at the time of admission into the property; and
- Meets HUD’s definition of a “person with disabilities” as outlined in [42 U.S.C. § 8013\(k\)\(2\)](#) and [24 C.F.R. § 891.305](#); and
- Is eligible for community-based, long-term care services as provided through Medicaid waivers or Medicaid state plan options; and
- Needs safe, affordable housing; and
- Is a candidate for community living with services and/or supports necessary for their chosen location.

Section 3: Role of the Referral Agent

Eligible Referral Agents

All Referral Agents must be approved by either ODM, DODD or OhioMHAS and must complete an online training course to be granted access to SocialServe. SocialServe is the online system Ohio uses to help tenants gain access to Ohio 811 Program units and is discussed below.

An ODM Referral Agent must be either a:

- HOME Choice Transition Coordinator;
- Home and Community Based Services Waiver Case Manager (includes Ohio Home Care, PASSPORT and Assisted Living);
- MyCare Waiver Service Coordinator;
- Specialized Recovery Service (SRS) Program Recovery Manager;
- Managed Care staff member; or
- Any other Referral Agent identified by ODM that is appropriate to serve in this role.

A DODD Referral Agent must be a local Board of Developmental Disabilities (DD) employee or an agent designated by a DD Board.

An OhioMHAS Referral Agent must be a local Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health Board (ADAMH Board) employee who assists with housing, or an employee from a provider agency who is designated by an ADAMH Board to assist with housing.

Outreach

The Referral Agent's role begins with outreach to potential tenants, including pre-screening for eligibility using SocialServe. Once an individual is determined to be interested in and eligible for the Ohio 811 Program, a Referral Agent will assist with entering an application into SocialServe. This process places the individual onto the waitlist. The Referral Agent will assist the individual with securing access to services and supports, selecting the properties in which the individual is interested in living, assisting the individual in making an application to the property, ensuring the individual has all the necessary documentation needed to apply, and assisting with the individual's move to the property. The Referral Agent will ensure that appropriate services are in place once an eligible individual has met the property's leasing requirements and is ready to move in. Supports and services are voluntary and flexible and depend on an individual's need and may vary during the transition and over time.

Change in Referral Agent

The Referral Agent plays a critical role in the Ohio 811 Program. OHFA must receive notification when an applicant's Referral Agent changes via e-mail to 811Program@ohiohome.org. Changes to the Referral Agent should simultaneously be reported in SocialServe.

Section 4: Affirmative Marketing

HUD Guidelines and the Ohio 811 PRA Program Tenant Selection Plan (Ohio TSP) require that OHFA and the Ohio 811 Program partners ensure that outreach addresses those “least likely to apply” for housing as identified in the Affirmative Fair Housing Marketing Plan (AFHMP). For this reason, when Referral Agents use a specific office to meet with tenants about the Ohio 811 Program, they are required to post the HUD Fair Housing Poster in the office where they meet to signal that they are fair and non-discriminatory in their role. This additional notification is not required if the Referral Agent meets with a prospective tenant elsewhere in the community. Owners and property managers with Ohio 811 Program units are always required to comply with Fair Housing requirements and must display the poster in places where any rental activity takes place.

Section 5: Program Application

SocialServe

The Ohio 811 Program employs SocialServe as the centralized online pre-screening, assessment, intake, and referral (PAIR) process. Referral Agents will be provided SocialServe access to apply for Ohio 811 Program units on behalf of eligible individuals once they have completed the required online training course. The training includes a walk-through for prospective Referral Agents of the SocialServe system and the pre-screening and application.

Pre-Screening

During the pre-screening process, the Referral Agent will assess potential applicants to ensure they meet the Ohio 811 Program’s threshold eligibility criteria, outlined and summarized below:

- **Income limits:** The combined annual income of all members of the applicant’s household at the time of admission into the Ohio 811 Program cannot exceed 30% of area median family income as defined by HUD.
- **Disability:** The applicant household must include at least one person with a HUD-defined disability who is at least 18 years of age, but no older than 61 at the time of admission into the property.
- **Medicaid Eligible:** The applicant must qualify for Medicaid.

Program Application

Once an applicant is pre-screened and determined to meet threshold criteria for the Ohio 811 Program, the applicant will be prompted by SocialServe to complete the online application. Based on responses, the applicant will be placed on the waitlist(s) for his or her preferred location(s). Applicants may indicate up to five counties in which they are interested in being housed. They should also indicate at this time whether an accessible unit is required. If an applicant is denied in the SocialServe pre-screening process, the denial shall stand unless the denial was due to an inputting error or the applicant has a change of circumstance (e.g., income, Medicaid eligibility, etc.). SocialServe sorts

applicants based on the time in which they applied for the program. Applicants will be referred by the OHFA Waitlist Manager to a property when a unit is available.

Section 6: Post-Application

While an individual is waiting for an Ohio 811 Program unit to become available, the Referral Agent should assist the applicant with crucial activities that will help to ensure they are able to obtain and maintain housing. A few of these activities are:

- Gathering necessary documentation;
- Identifying any potentially disqualifying personal history; and
- Securing resources for move-in.

It is important to start these activities as soon as possible so the individual is prepared to move when a unit becomes available.

Applicant Housing History

Although SocialServe determines applicant eligibility for the program, the owner or property manager has the right to independently assess an applicant as long as the assessment complies with [§PRA.403](#). Owners and property managers may conduct a background check to assess whether the tenant is likely to meet the requirements of the lease. Basic lease requirements may include:

- Paying the rent on time and in full;
- Maintaining the unit in clean, sanitary, and safe condition;
- Getting along with other tenants; and
- Not engaging in illegal activity.

Some applicants may have tenancy-related or other histories which may result in a property rejecting their application or screening them out. Such background issues might include:

- Criminal background;
- Poor landlord references;
- Eviction;
- Credit issues such as non-payment of rent and/or utilities or bankruptcy; and/or
- Other history which indicates the applicant may have difficulty meeting the lease requirements.

The period of time between program application and referral to a property is a good time for a Referral Agent to talk with an applicant about his or her history and to identify any potential barriers to housing and, most importantly, address them. For example, if the applicant owes back rent or utility payments, this is a good time to set up payment plans to clear these debts. Even if the applicant still owes money when a referral is made, he or she will be able to demonstrate a commitment to meet their obligations. There may be a logical reason the applicant fell behind in their rent, but property managers will want

to see a willingness to fix the problem. Referral Agents can assist applicants with providing explanations regarding past criminal or tenancy histories. Reasonable accommodations may assist in such situations.

Resources for Security Deposits and Other Needs

Owners and property managers participating in the Ohio 811 Program may collect a security deposit equal to one month of the tenant's rent share or \$50, whichever is greater. Owners and property managers must return the security deposit when the tenant moves out, less any costs for damages.

Some applicants for the Ohio 811 Program may not have the financial resources for a security deposit or move-in expenses (e.g., utility deposits or furniture). Referral Agents should become familiar with state and local resources to assist with these costs (local 2-1-1, furniture banks, etc.).

Section 7: Unit Referrals

Notification of Unit Availability

When an Ohio 811 Program unit becomes available, the OHFA Waitlist Manager will notify the Referral Agent. The Referral Agent will be notified by e-mail that a unit is available. The notification will provide some basic information about the unit including:

- Address;
- Unit size;
- Any known accessibility features;
- Owner and/or property manager contact information; and
- Formal offer letter.

Applicants and their Referral Agents will have ten (10) calendar days to inform the OHFA Waitlist Manager of interest in applying for the unit, notify the property manager of interest in the unit, arrange to visit the property if desired, and begin the application process. If circumstances related to the applicant's disability require an extension, a reasonable accommodation request should be considered.

If the prescribed period of time and any extensions have elapsed before a property application is submitted, or the applicant declines the unit during that period, the property manager will notify the OHFA Waitlist Manager via email and a new referral will be made for the unit. Applicants may decline up to three units and retain their position on the waitlist.

Applicants may complete an application and be screened by a property but not be offered a unit; in this case, applicants will retain their place on all waitlists. At no time shall the owner or property manager charge an application fee to apply for an Ohio 811 Program unit.

Many applicants will need assistance in deciding whether to accept an Ohio 811 Program unit offer. The Referral Agent may need to assist the applicant with:



- Obtaining and completing the property application, including gathering updated or additional documentation;
- Arranging to view the unit;
- Arranging and attending an interview with owner or property manager;
- Attending and assisting the applicant with walk through of the unit before move-in; and
- Completing other related tasks as needed and appropriate.

The applicant may need assistance in determining whether the unit meets his or her needs by considering:

- Any reasonable modifications that would assist in full enjoyment of the premises;
- Whether the location provides direct access to stores, banks, services, or public transportation to such amenities;
- Whether the location of the site promotes or limits the likelihood of accessing voluntary support services;
- Whether the applicant can easily reach his or her family, friends, workplace, and medical appointments from the unit;
- Whether the applicant is likely and/or able to meet the property's screening criteria; and
- Whether the applicant feels comfortable and safe in the neighborhood.

Some applicants may not require assistance or have family members/guardians available to assist them. Even if assistance is not needed, it is the responsibility of the Referral Agent to follow up with the applicant to make sure he or she makes a decision about whether to accept the unit within the required timeframe.

Denial Rights

It is important to note that while applicants can be found eligible for the Ohio 811 Program by SocialServe they could be found ineligible or not qualified by the owner or property manager. Owners and property managers are required to promptly notify the applicant, Referral Agent, and OHFA in writing if the applicant is denied. The letter must set forth the specific reason for denial and include a notice that the applicant has the right to meet with the owner or property manager or other representative within 10 days. The applicant has the right to request a reasonable accommodation. More information about this process is located below. The applicant may also exercise other rights if the applicant believes that he or she is being discriminated against. After rejection from a property, the applicant will remain on the SocialServe waitlist where they will be referred to the next unit that comes available in one of their chosen locations.

Section 8: Moving In

Once an applicant has accepted an Ohio 811 Program unit, the Referral Agent should help facilitate the applicant's move, including, but not limited to:

- Assistance signing the lease for the apartment;
- Education about the tenant's rights and responsibilities;
- Assistance with the move-in inspection; and
- Assistance gathering information and documentation for calculation of tenant rent share.

Model Lease

After an applicant is approved for a unit, he or she will sign the lease for the Ohio 811 Program unit. The property must use the [HUD Model Lease](#). It can be helpful to familiarize yourself with the Model Lease. It is a legal document which may be difficult for applicants to fully understand. The Referral Agent should review the key sections of the lease with the tenant and answer any questions they may have. It is important that the tenant understand his or her responsibilities and consequences of violating the lease agreement. If circumstances relating to the applicant's disability prevent actual occupancy within a reasonable time of the lease start date, consider a reasonable accommodation to address this.

Referral Agents should be aware that some applicants prioritized for this program will have increases in their income that must be immediately reported. For example, individuals leaving an institution who receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) will begin receiving their full SSI benefit amount when they move to community. According to the HUD Model Lease used in the Ohio 811 Program, the tenant is required to notify the owner or property manager of income increases that are \$200.00 or greater. Such increases trigger recalculation of the tenant rent share. The Referral Agent may assist an individual with formally disputing the tenant rent share if he or she disagrees with the amount.

Move-In Inspection

Prior to occupancy, the eligible applicant must be present for the move-in unit inspection unless a reasonable accommodation is made to have a representative inspect the unit. The inspection of the Ohio 811 Program unit must be completed by both the owner or property manager and the prospective tenant or tenant representative. Both parties must sign the [HUD Move-In/Move-Out Inspection Form](#), certifying that each has inspected the unit and has determined it to be decent, safe, and sanitary in accordance with the criteria provided in the form. The owner or property manager will keep a copy of this inspection form and include it as an attachment to the lease.

The Referral Agent should assist the tenant in making arrangements to participate in the inspection to ensure it meets any accessibility requirements and that the individual will be able to access the services and supports they need while living in the unit and building. If a reasonable modification is needed, the Referral Agent can assist with this process, which is described in detail below.

Supporting Tenants after Move-In

The Ohio 811 Program requires that tenants are linked to supports and services they need when referred to the program. Tenant reliance on supports or services after move-in will vary based on individual need. Some tenants may be connected to supports and services during a transitional period, but they will eventually subside or be replaced by mainstream services which are available in the community.

Referral Agents are responsible for determining which supports and services a tenant will need on a long-term basis for successful community living. In cases where the need for services and supports is ongoing and the Referral Agent's role is transitional in nature, the Referral Agent should verify that the tenant is linked to an ongoing support or service provider.

Section 9: Reasonable Modification and Reasonable Accommodation

Reasonable Accommodation

A reasonable accommodation is a change, exception or adjustment to a rule, policy, practice or service that may be necessary for a person with a disability to have an equal opportunity to use and enjoy a dwelling, including public and common use spaces. It must be linked to a person's disability. Since rules, policies, practices and services may have a different effect on persons with disabilities than on other persons, treating persons with disabilities exactly the same as others will sometimes deny them an equal opportunity to use and enjoy a dwelling.

A reasonable accommodation may be requested when a person is applying for housing, anytime during tenancy, or at eviction. Accommodations are considered reasonable when they are practical and feasible and when they don't cause undue burden or result in a fundamental alteration of the basic operation or nature of services provided.

Reasonable Modification

A reasonable modification is a structural change made to existing premises, occupied or to be occupied by a person with a disability, in order to afford such person full enjoyment of the premises. Reasonable modifications can include structural changes to interiors and exteriors of dwellings and to common and public use areas. It is unlawful for a housing provider to refuse to allow a reasonable modification to the premises when such a modification may be necessary to afford persons with disabilities full enjoyment of the premises. Owners must pay for reasonable modifications under the Ohio 811 Program so long as they would not result in a fundamental alteration of the nature of operations or cause an undue financial or administrative burden.

Role of Referral Agent

Reasonable accommodations and reasonable modifications are helpful tools for applicants but it can be difficult for applicants to understand how to use and implement these tools. Part of the Referral Agent's role is to help applicants identify when it may be useful to request a reasonable accommodation or reasonable modification. The Referral Agent can also assist an applicant or tenant in making the request. When assisting an applicant, the Referral Agent should make requests in writing and keep a copy. In the event a request is denied, the Referral Agent may need to help the applicant appeal the denial of a reasonable accommodation with the Owner or, potentially, the HUD Regional Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity (FHEO).

Please refer to the [Reasonable Modification and Reasonable Accommodation Guide](#) on OHFA's website for more in-depth information. Use [this form](#) to submit your request.



Section 10: Dispute Resolution

During move-in, the Referral Agent should educate the tenant to ensure they are aware of and understand their rights and responsibilities, the obligations of the owner and property manager, the terms of their lease, and what to do if there is a disagreement or issue. If there is an ongoing case manager or support provider working with the individual, they too should reinforce this information throughout tenancy and assist as needed.

Denials and disputes at the property level during tenancy in an Ohio 811 Program unit are handled in accordance with the [HUD Handbook 4350.3](#), or no different than any other unit in the project in which the unit is located. If a dispute or issue cannot be resolved, the tenant may exercise their rights pursuant to Ohio landlord/tenant laws.

Program Contacts

OHFA staff manages the waitlist for the Ohio 811 Program and are available for questions or issues via email at 811Program@ohiohome.org.

Please contact your state agency lead regarding specific questions related to target population and eligibility. OHFA can help you identify your state agency lead if you do not have this information.

SocialServe

The SocialServe call center can be contacted for assistance Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. at (877) 428-8844. You can also email them at info@socialserve.com.