

Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) Initiative: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

The purpose of this FAQ is to provide guidance to stakeholders in California on the FYI and FUP programs. The FAQ aims to address recurring questions and misunderstandings so more young people are able to access FYI and FUP vouchers and be stably housed. If you have questions you would like to be answered, please email Madeleine Wykstra at mwykstra@ylc.org.

The information provided in this resource does not, and is not intended to, constitute legal advice; instead, all information, content, and materials are for general informational purposes only.

The most recent notice from HUD on the FYI Program is notice PIH 2023-04, issued on March 15, 2023:

<https://www.hud.gov/sites/dfiles/OCHCO/documents/2023-04pihn.pdf>

You can also find a FAQ from HUD, last revised on September 29, 2021 at:

[https://www.hud.gov/sites/dfiles/PIH/documents/FYI_FAQs_Version_VMS_Reporting_&_Amended_Notice_Update_9.29.2021_%20\(002\).pdf](https://www.hud.gov/sites/dfiles/PIH/documents/FYI_FAQs_Version_VMS_Reporting_&_Amended_Notice_Update_9.29.2021_%20(002).pdf)

Glossary of terms included in this FAQ:

CoC: Continuum of Care
FUP: Family Unification Program
FYI: Foster Youth to Independence Program
HCV: Housing Choice Voucher
JPD: Juvenile Probation Department
MOU: Memorandum of Understanding
NOFO: Notice of Funding Opportunity
PCWA: Public Child Welfare Agency
PHA: Public Housing Authority
THP-NMD: Transitional Housing Program for Non-Minor Dependents
SILP: Supervised Independent Living Placement

Questions for Public Child Welfare Agencies (PCWAs) and Juvenile Probation Departments (JPDs)

1. May county child welfare agencies and juvenile probation departments collaborate with more than one PHA for FYI referrals?

Yes, PCWAs may collaborate with more than one PHA. PCWAs must have a partnership agreement or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with each PHA that it intends to work with, in order for that PHA to administer FYI vouchers.

2. May agencies other than the PCWA make referrals for FYI vouchers to the PHA?

Yes. The child welfare agency can designate organizations other than itself to make referrals to the PHA for an FYI voucher. In cases where a referral comes from another organization in the community, the child welfare agency still must certify that the youth meets the eligibility requirements.

3. Can PCWAs or community-based organizations provide the supportive services to FYI voucher holders? Can the PHA provide the services?

Yes. The PCWA can provide or secure a commitment of supportive services for participating youth. The PCWA can arrange for services from community-based organizations and/or the PHA. It is highly recommended that child welfare agencies and PHAs leverage existing services in the community.

4. Can Juvenile Probation Departments (JPDs) work with PHAs to request FYI vouchers?

Yes. Just like a PCWA, a Juvenile Probation Department can partner with PHAs to request vouchers because they serve probation supervised foster youth and AB-12 young people.

5. What is the difference between a FUP and FYI voucher?

FUP and FYI vouchers are both Housing Choice vouchers designated for child welfare involved individuals. While FUP vouchers can be used for families *and* young people who are leaving or have left foster care, FYI vouchers can only be used for young people who are leaving or have left foster care.

The only difference between how FUP and FYI vouchers work is how they are distributed. To date, FUP vouchers have been issued to Public Housing Authorities as part of a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) when vouchers are available. PHAs with FUP vouchers can award them to eligible young people and families.

FYI vouchers can be issued through NOFOs, but also can be issued upon request (“on demand”) for any number of young people, not to exceed 50 per PHA per fiscal year. As long as the PCWA and PHA are willing to collaborate, any PHA in California administering House Choice Vouchers can request FYI vouchers on demand for eligible youth from HUD.

Questions for Public Housing Authorities (PHAs)

6. What is the difference between competitive and non-competitive FYI vouchers?

Competitive FYI vouchers are awarded by HUD through a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO), which are periodically released by HUD. A PHA would apply for a certain number of vouchers through a NOFO and then distribute those vouchers. The last [NOFO](#) was issued in 2022.

Noncompetitive FYI vouchers are vouchers that a PHA can request directly from HUD “on demand.” “**On demand**” means that once the PCWA verifies that young person’s eligibility and refers the young person to the PHA, the PHA is able to email HUD and request an FYI voucher. PHAs can request up to 50 FYI vouchers per fiscal year. They can request the vouchers one by one as needed or make requests in batches.

7. Can a PHA request non-competitive FYI vouchers if they missed or did not apply for vouchers under the NOFO?

Yes. All PHAs that administer Housing Choice Vouchers can request non-competitive FYI vouchers even if they missed or did not apply for vouchers under the NOFO.

8. What is the minimum number of non-competitive FYI vouchers that may be requested by a PHA in a fiscal year?

There is no minimum number of vouchers to request. As few as one voucher may be requested through the FYI program.

9. What is the maximum number of non-competitive FYI vouchers that may be requested by a PHA in a fiscal year?

Noncompetitive FYI vouchers can be provided to the PHA through an on-demand process (i.e. upon request from the PHA). October 1st is the beginning of the federal fiscal year. PHAs will be eligible to request as many as 25 non-competitive FYI vouchers at that time with an option to ask for another 25 during the fiscal year (total of 50 vouchers per fiscal year).

10. Do PHAs need to have a 90% utilization rate to request an additional 25 vouchers each fiscal year?

Not necessarily. Recent updates from HUD provide PHAs more flexibility to request vouchers when they have not yet reached a 90% utilization rate. If, for example, the PHA may be in a situation where it is in the process of supporting youth in leasing up units and their utilization rate is increasing. HUD's [PIH Notice 2023-04](#) (from March 2023) changes the threshold requirements for PHAs and allows them to submit a narrative to justify the need for more vouchers based on actual leased or issued vouchers and/or their plan to improve utilization.

11. Must the Continuum of Care (CoC) be involved in a referral or application for FYI or FUP vouchers?

No. It is not required that the CoC be involved. It is the choice of the jurisdiction if they would like to include the CoC.

Eligibility Questions

12. Are youth exiting the juvenile justice system eligible to participate in the FYI program if they meet the age foster care status requirements?

Yes. In California, the county JPD supervises youth in foster care and in extended foster care. For that reason, many young people who are or have exited the juvenile justice system will meet the eligibility requirements for the FYI program, which are:

- i. Be least 18 years and not more than 24 years of age (have not reached their 25th birthday),
- ii. Have left foster care, or will leave foster care within 90 days, and
- iii. Are homeless or are at risk of becoming homeless at age 16 or older.

13. What happens to the status of a FUP or FYI eligible youth if that youth gives birth after they have leased up under a FYI voucher?

A young person who gives birth after receiving a voucher remains eligible for the voucher. Just like any other FYI voucher recipient, the young person is eligible for 3 years of the voucher, with the option to extend for 2 additional years if they participate in the Family Self Sufficiency Program or a similar program (that focuses on supporting employment and training).

14. In order to qualify as a former foster youth, does a youth have to have lived only in a foster family home or would any residential placement by the child welfare agency qualify them for the FYI voucher?

Under the federal definition of foster care, placement in foster care can include, but is not limited to, “placements in foster family homes, foster homes of relatives, group homes, emergency shelters, residential facilities, child care institutions, and pre-adoptive homes.” This also includes youth in extended foster care who are placed in supervised independent living placements like THP-NMD and SILP placements.

15. Does the youth have to have been in foster care in the county that is making the FYI referral to the PHA?

The youth does not have to have been in the custody of the child welfare agency that is partnering with a PHA to administer FYI vouchers. Young people are eligible for FYI vouchers even if they were in foster care in another county in California or were in foster care in another state.

For example, Alexis was in extended foster care in Butte County and aged out at 21. She moved to Contra Costa County to be closer to her support system. Alexis lost her housing in Contra Costa and asked the child welfare agency in Contra Costa to refer her to the PHA for FYI voucher. Contra Costa CWA should refer Alexis to the PHA for an FYI voucher after verifying her foster care status.

16. Can a referral for an FYI voucher be made prior to a youth turning 18?

Yes. A referral may be submitted on behalf of a youth who will leave foster care within 90 days, in accordance with a transition plan.

It is recommended that planning for an FYI voucher and the development of a housing plan

begin well before the 90 days before discharge. Preparing for that referral and all the steps that will follow is something that can be done before a referral is made and can help expedite what can be a lengthy process. For example, once the PHA accepts the referral from the CWA, the young person will need to complete the Housing Choice Voucher application.

While there may be some minor differences in the HCV applications for each PHA, they all have elements that you can expect: request for income information, identification, contact information, etc. It is highly recommended that assistance be provided to the young person in advance of the 90 days to begin gathering all the information that is needed for the HCV application. In addition, an apartment search can also begin.

17. If foster youth have a criminal record, are they eligible to participate in the FYI program?

In many cases, yes, but there are some circumstances where a landlord can refuse to rent to an individual due to a what is called a “directly related criminal conviction.” For example, when a criminal conviction has a negative specific and direct impact on the housing provider or other residents. The landlord needs to inform an applicant of their policy to consider criminal records and must provide the applicant an opportunity to provide mitigating evidence. This provides an opportunity for advocacy. If you have questions about your rights related to criminal records and access to Housing Choice Vouchers and options to appeal, please contact your local civil legal aid provider.

It is important to note that landlords are prohibited under California law to consider the following types of criminal history:

- Adjudications or matters processed in the juvenile justice system
- Arrests that did not lead to convictions
- Information indicating that the individual was apprehended or questioned by law enforcement
- Citations
- Referrals to pretrial or post trial diversion programs
- Criminal convictions that have been sealed, dismissed or expunged

18. Do FYI program participants age out of the program?

No. The upper age limit is for entering the program, not for participating in the program. Young people can enter the program at any time after turning age 18 and prior to reaching age 25.

For example, a 24-year old participant may enter the program and continue with the program until they have received 36 months of assistance (and an additional 24 months if the youth elects to participate in the Family Self-Sufficiency program or meets other criteria).

19. Does a young person have to accept services to receive an FYI voucher?

No. Services are voluntary. Participation in supportive services cannot be required as a condition of receipt of assistance under the notice. Services can be very helpful to a young person, especially as they begin living on their own. Young people are encouraged to try out services and ask for what they need.

Questions About Living with Other People

20. Can a young person with an FYI voucher live with other people who do not have a voucher?

Yes. Once they have an FYI/FUP voucher, the young person is treated in the same way as any other voucher holder. In most cases, living with a non-voucher holder is allowed, but the FYI voucher holder should talk with the PHA that provided the voucher to understand how rent will be calculated in a situation where one person has a voucher and the other does not.

21. Can a voucher holder have a roommate who does have a voucher?

Yes. Two individuals with vouchers can live together.

Questions about Where Vouchers Can Be Used

22. Can an FYI voucher be used for on-campus housing at a college or university?

It depends. In most cases, if the housing you are renting has a lease and you have your own personal space, such a unit would qualify for use of a voucher. We will provide more information as we have it and recommend that you contact an attorney or advocate if you are in this situation and need help.

Questions about Vouchers and Moving

23. Can a young person use an FYI voucher in a different county than the county that issued the voucher?

In many cases, they can. Each housing authority has rules around taking vouchers out of the jurisdiction they are issued in, which are called rules on portability. Portability of an FYI participant is handled in the same way as regular Housing Choice Vouchers (HCVs), so a PHA may not restrict or deny portability for an FYI participant for reasons other than those specified in HCV program regulations.

If a young person is living in one county now, but plans to move to another county, they should ask for information so they understand the portability rules for the PHA where they now live so they can make a decision that meets their needs regarding whether to apply for voucher where they currently live or where they plan to relocate. For example, the young person will want to know if the PHA requires that the voucher holder live in its jurisdiction for a certain amount of time before they can take the voucher to another area. If the young person wants to move immediately and portability rules of the PHA do not allow for that, they may want to ask for a referral for an FYI voucher to the PHA in the area that the young person wants to live in.