

Do Landlords Accept Housing Choice Vouchers?

Findings from Fort Worth, Texas

Mary Cunningham, Martha Galvez, Claudia L. Aranda, Robert Santos, Doug Wissoker, Alyse D. Oneto, Rob Pitingolo, and James Crawford

78%

of landlords in Fort Worth refused to accept vouchers overall

85%

of landlords in Fort Worth low-poverty neighborhoods refused to accept vouchers

We conducted **1,146 voucher acceptance tests** in Fort Worth, more than any other site.

High landlord denial rate in Fort Worth, combined with the difficulty of finding eligible housing, **made paired testing nearly impossible**. Only 73 tests proceeded to in-person paired tests.

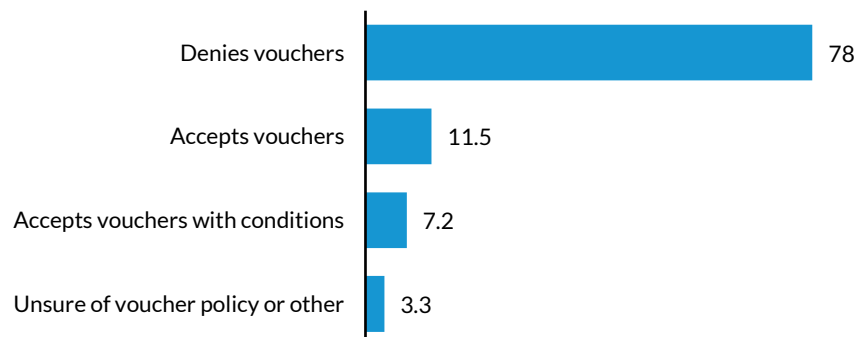
The Housing Choice Voucher program’s main goals are to provide low-income households with stable, affordable housing and to improve access to a wide range of neighborhoods. In theory, voucher holders can move anywhere they can find an affordable home; in practice, their choices also depend on finding landlords who accept vouchers. Our five-city study found that finding voucher-affordable housing and landlords that say yes to a voucher can be extremely challenging.

Three-stages of testing. In Ft. Worth, Los Angeles, and Newark, we found rental ads that met voucher requirements and used a three-stage testing approach to first ask landlords if they accepted vouchers and then track their interactions with matched pairs of testers (one with a voucher, one without) in phone and in-person interactions. In two other sites, we stopped after the first stage of testing.

Many Ft. Worth landlords refuse to accept vouchers. About 78 percent of Ft. Worth landlords refused to accept vouchers. An additional 10 percent placed conditions on voucher use or was unsure of their voucher policy. Denials were even more common in low-poverty areas (with poverty rates below 10 percent) compared with high-poverty areas (poverty rates above 30 percent): the denial rate was 85 percent in low-poverty areas compared with 67.2 percent in high-poverty areas.

Finding rental housing is challenging for voucher holders. Our study shows that finding housing with a voucher is extremely difficult, from identifying an available unit and reaching landlords to finding landlords willing to accept vouchers to meeting with landlords to view available housing. In Fort Worth, we screened nearly 67,000 ads to complete 1,146 voucher acceptance tests, or about 59 ads per test.

FIGURE 1
Voucher Denial Rate, Fort Worth



FORT WORTH TEST SITE

Voucher testing took place in Tarrant County, which consists of 864 square miles in the cities of Fort Worth and Arlington and houses approximately 1.9 million people. In 2015, the rental vacancy rate for Tarrant County was 9.2 percent. The county does not have source of income protections for voucher holders.

Testers posed as voucher holders from three public housing authorities, which, in 2016, were authorized to administer over 12,000 vouchers:

- Tarrant County Housing Assistance Office
- Fort Worth Housing Solutions
- Arlington Housing Authority

The high landlord denial rate in Fort Worth, combined with the difficulty of finding eligible housing, made paired testing nearly impossible. Only 73 of the 1,146 acceptance tests proceeded to in-person tests. We partnered with the North Texas Fair Housing Center to conduct paired testing.

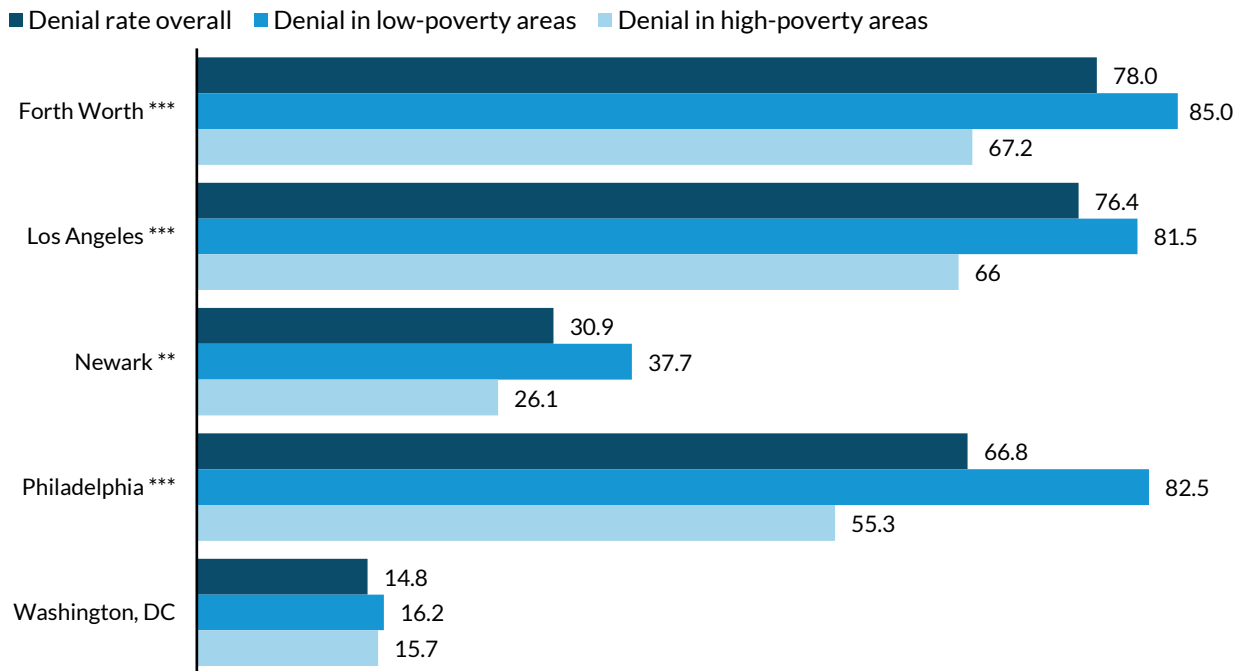
STUDY INFORMATION

This fact sheet pulls from the Urban Institute's pilot study, [A Pilot Study of Landlord Acceptance of Housing Choice Vouchers](#), sponsored by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. This pilot study uses rigorous paired testing methodology to explore landlord treatment of Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) holders during the initial stages of the housing search process. It is the first study to use paired testing methods across multiple sites to examine landlord treatment of HCV holders. Most of the testing occurred in 2016.

urban.is/2MnYitw

FIGURE 2

Voucher Denial Rates by Site and Low- and High-Poverty Areas



Note: Significance tests measured the difference in denial rates in low-poverty tracts compared with denial rates in high-poverty tracts. ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.