

# Do Landlords Accept Housing Choice Vouchers?

## Findings from Los Angeles, California

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76%

of landlords in Los Angeles refused to accept vouchers overall

82%

of landlords in Los Angeles low-poverty neighborhoods refused to accept vouchers

We screened nearly **140,000 ads for available housing** in Los Angeles, more than any other site.

**High landlord denial rate in Los Angeles**, combined with the difficulty of finding eligible housing, **made paired testing nearly impossible**. Only 62 tests proceeded to in-person paired tests.

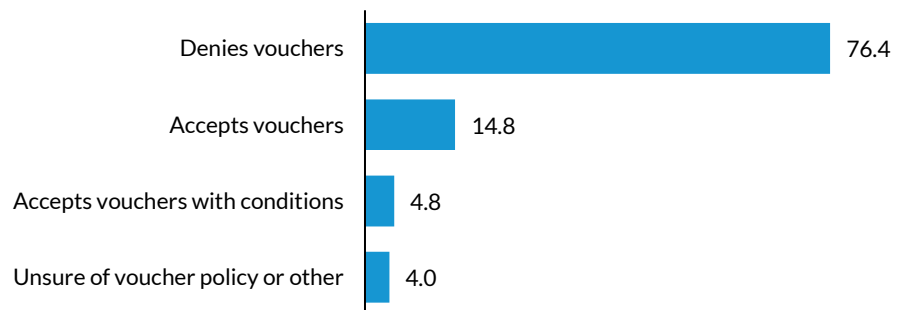
The Housing Choice Voucher program's main goals are to provide low-income households with stable, affordable housing and to improve access to a wide range of neighborhoods. In theory, voucher holders can move anywhere they can find an affordable home; in practice, their choices also depend on finding 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 Los Angeles landlords refuse to accept vouchers.** About 76 percent of Los Angeles landlords refused to accept vouchers. An additional 9 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 81.5 percent in low-poverty areas compared with 66 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 Los Angeles, we screened nearly 140,000 ads to complete 998 voucher acceptance tests, or about 137 ads per test.

FIGURE 1  
**Voucher Denial Rate, Los Angeles**



## 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](http://urban.is/2MnYitw)

## LOS ANGELES TEST SITE

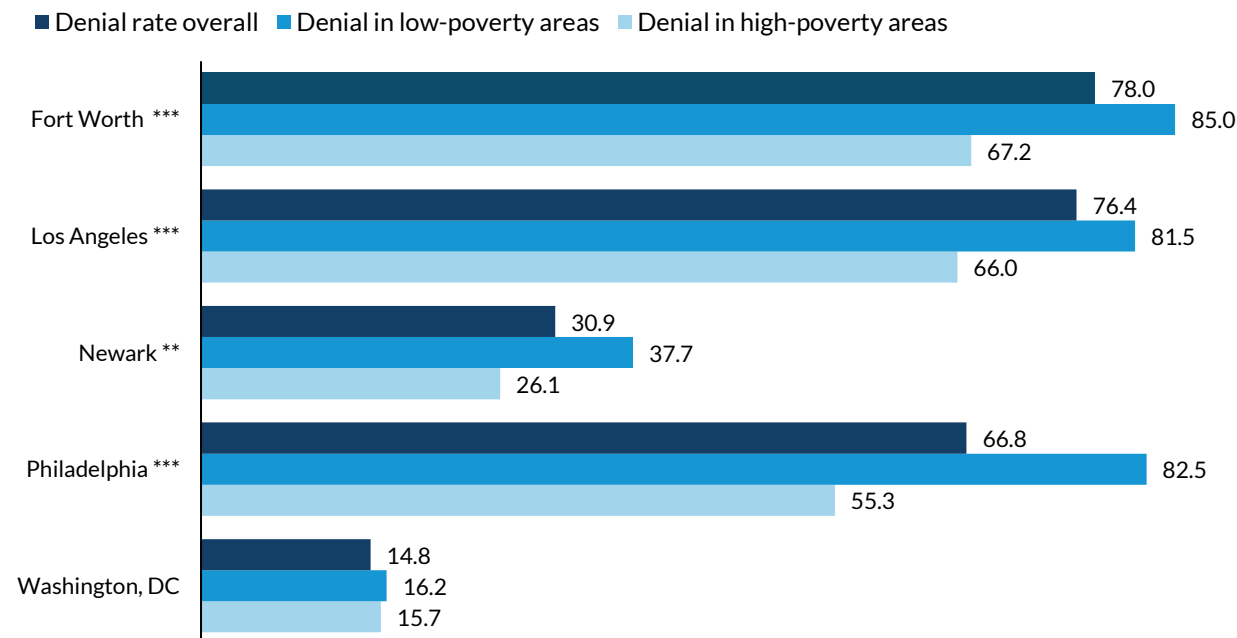
Voucher testing took place in Los Angeles County, which consists of 3,882 square miles, and houses more than 10 million people. Testing excluded 13 small cities with individual public housing authorities (PHAs) administering small numbers of vouchers. In 2015, Los Angeles County had the lowest rental vacancy rate in our study—3.7 percent. Los Angeles County does not have source of income protections for voucher holders.

Testers posed as voucher holders from six PHAs, which, in 2016, were authorized to administer over 78,000 vouchers: the Housing Authority of the County of Los Angeles; the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles; the Glendale Housing Authority; the City of Inglewood Housing Authority; the City of Pasadena Housing Department; and the City of Torrance Housing Assistance Office.

The high landlord denial rate in Los Angeles, combined with the difficulty of finding eligible housing, made paired testing nearly impossible. Only 62 of the 998 acceptance tests proceeded to in-person tests. We partnered with the Fair Housing Foundation to conduct paired testing.

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.  
\*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .