

Affordable Housing in Oakland and Berkeley

Where do I start?



Hello! This guide to applying for affordable housing in Berkeley and Oakland was created by reporters from Berkeleyside and The Oaklandside.

We know how expensive it is to live in the East Bay and how challenging it can be to find a safe and affordable place for you or your family. Included inside are some resources and guidance on what to expect. We hope you find something here to help you start your search.

What do we mean when we say “affordable housing”?

“Affordable housing” has many meanings depending on who you talk to. This guide refers to subsidized housing where the government or a nonprofit organization pays part of the rent, making it less expensive for low-income residents.

Do I qualify for affordable housing?

Affordable housing apartments are reserved for renters who make below a certain amount of income. This is determined by the government and based on the area median income, or AMI. For example, an apartment might be reserved for a renter or household that makes under 50% of the AMI. Some buildings have additional requirements, like only allowing seniors.

How much will I pay for rent?

At most affordable housing apartments, renters must pay 30% of their monthly household income. In this case, “income” refers to your work wages or government benefits like SSI.



How does the application process work?

Most affordable housing buildings have waitlists for apartments. Occasionally, the waitlist will open, and you can apply by providing information about your household and income. The organization operating a building will start calling people on the waitlist when apartments become available. If you get a call, you’ll have to submit a more detailed application for an apartment. You’ll need your tax and job documents at this stage.



Where can I find housing?

Alameda County has two main sites for affordable housing options:

- [achousingchoices.org](https://www.achousingchoices.org)
- [housing.acgov.org](https://www.housing.acgov.org)

The Berkeley Housing Authority and Oakland Housing Authority oversee Section 8 waitlists.

Where should I look for emergency housing if I’m homeless?

People who are currently homeless can call 211 to access the county’s “coordinated entry system” for options.



How long will it take me to find housing?

In some cases, you may apply to a building waitlist and hear back within weeks. If buildings are full, this same process could take years. It’s best to apply to as many buildings as possible to improve your chances.



Resources

County housing website: [achousingchoices.org](https://www.achousingchoices.org)

County housing website: [housing.acgov.org](https://www.housing.acgov.org)

Phone line for emergency housing: **211**

Oakland Housing Authority: **510-874-1653**

Berkeley Housing Authority: **510-981-5470**

Many nonprofit organizations that provide affordable housing have apartment listings online, though waitlists may be closed.

For more information, check out the full Affordable Housing Guide online at

- [berkeleyside.org/affordable-housing-guide](https://www.berkeleyside.org/affordable-housing-guide)
- [oaklandside.org/affordable-housing-guide](https://www.oaklandside.org/affordable-housing-guide)



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