

DOUGLAS COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF GENERAL ASSISTANCE

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Property Owners' Fact Sheet on General Assistance (GA)

Douglas County government has a statutory obligation to provide certain aid for indigent persons residing in Douglas County. The Department of General Assistance (GA) administers this aid. Rent payments issued on behalf of eligible individuals can only be made to the property owner of record or his/her authorized agent. Anyone who receives monies from Douglas County under false pretenses may be considered to have defrauded Douglas County. It is also expected that a landlord will notify General Assistance if they become aware of any changes in the tenant's household size or if the tenant vacates the property.

The rental agreement or lease is always between the landlord and tenant. The laws of the State of Nebraska that govern landlord-tenant relationships are NOT in any way affected by GA payments. The responsibilities and rights of both landlord and tenant are specified in those laws. For more information you may wish to visit the following websites: www.housing.ne.gov or www.fhasinc.org. The latter website is Family Housing Advisory Services' website. Informative resources are available for property owners and tenants as well.

Beginning in February 2010, new clients who request rental assistance will first be required to attend an informational session on the responsibilities involved in a landlord-tenant relationship.

GUIDELINES OVERVIEW:

- Acceptance of a GA payment is to be considered full payment for the eligibility month.
- Payment is only allowable for time that the client actually occupies the property.
- No payment can be authorized until a determination of a client's eligibility has been made.
- GA does not guarantee payment for any month that the tenant does not meet his/her eligibility requirements, nor does GA pay deposits, or assume responsibility for any tenant-related property damage.

Frequently Asked Questions

How do I become a GA vendor/landlord? The process to become a Douglas County approved vendor may take several days. You must complete a *Property Description* form to identify the category of the property. A *W-9 Taxpayer Identification Number* form is necessary to allow computer processing of payments and mandatory reporting of payments to the Internal Revenue Service. Forms are enclosed if they are not currently on file with GA.

How much does GA pay? Payment is determined by two factors. A client must qualify for financial assistance. Payments are then calculated as the rent amount minus any client income. Second, GA payment shall not be larger than the maximum permissible for the type of rental situation as governed by Douglas County GA guidelines. GA recognizes three types of rental situations. GA determines the classification by the information submitted on the *Property Description* form and the pattern of use the owner establishes for the property. There are three classifications:

- The property owner and client both live in the same residence.
- All occupants are renters and share common areas such as an entrance, kitchen and/or bathroom. In this situation, a property owner will receive a total monthly rent that will change according to the number of occupants living in the property from month to month.

- Rent is one rate for the property or unit, such as a traditional apartment. This classification is a residential unit. If utilities are not included in the rent, a client's utility obligation is paid first from the GA maximum and the remainder is considered available to pay rent to the landlord/owner.

Am I guaranteed to receive rent checks for a period of time? There is no guarantee of ongoing payment. Clients must meet eligibility requirements on a month to month basis. Recipients of General Assistance, who are considered medically able to work, must participate in a GA approved job training program or perform community service hours. Failure to comply with job training requirements is a loss of Douglas County rent benefits for a 3 month period and loss of Douglas County medical coverage for 1 month. The individual may reapply and benefits may be reinstated after the penalty period, if the client is compliant with eligibility requirements.

When will I receive my rent check? No payment can be issued until a client's eligibility has been determined. Ongoing eligibility for General Assistance is determined on a month to month basis. Clients are notified by letter each month of their eligibility for the following month. Clients are encouraged to share this information with their landlord. Payments for ongoing assistance on behalf of approved clients are generally issued on the second Tuesday of the month.

What if I let a tenant move-in before he/she is approved for General Assistance? As stated above, no payment can be made until a client's eligibility has been determined. A letter is mailed to the client when the initial eligibility decision is made, whether approval or denial. Clients are encouraged to show the letter to their prospective landlord.

What happens if the tenant leaves without giving me notice? Clients are required to report changes in their living circumstances to their caseworker. A client's notice to a caseworker is NOT a substitute for notice to the landlord.

What if a GA client wants to move during the middle of the month? If rent has been issued at a different address for a full month, no additional rent can be paid for the same month unless the move was needed for safety or health reasons. If a client gives proper notice to the current landlord and to the caseworker, a prorated arrangement may be made in some situations.

Can I have my tenant cover the difference between what I would like to receive in rent and what General Assistance pays? Acceptance of a GA payment must be considered payment in full. There are no exceptions permitted.

What if my tenant receives income? Clients must report changes in financial circumstances to their caseworker within 5 days of the change. The client is held responsible for paying as much of the rent as their income will cover, and the GA payment is reduced dollar for dollar by a client's income.

What should I do if I decide to stop accepting General Assistance payments? If this means that your tenant will be evicted, the laws of the State of Nebraska and the terms of the lease/rental agreement must be followed in notifying your tenant who in turn will notify GA.

If you have additional questions, you may call 402-444-4779 or contact us through the website www.douglascounty-ne.gov/generalassist/