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HUD Announces Changes to UPCS Protocol

HUD has announced two changes to the UPCS inspection protocol that will impact agencies with public housing units and Project-Based Rental Assistance (PBRA) properties. HUD has been performing a “wholesale reevaluation” of the Real Estate Assessment Center (REAC) since 2017. HUD’s announcement included two significant changes to the Uniform Condition Physical Standards (UPCS) inspection process. The first change is a switch to a 14-day notification period for PHAs and inspectors to schedule and perform an inspection on public housing and PBRA units. The second change is a new inspection model that will be informed by listening sessions that HUD will host across the country. The new model will begin as a pilot and is aimed to ensure REAC scores more accurately reflect the quality and safety of public housing and PBRA units.

HUD will issue a notice informing PHAs of the change to a 14-day notification period for scheduling an inspection shortly. This is a dramatic change to prior inspection scheduling procedures. If a PHA is unable to schedule the inspection within the 14-day notification period, they will receive a preliminary inspection score of zero. The PHA will be able to reschedule the inspection within 7-days after the end of the 14-day notification period. If the PHA is still unable to reschedule their inspection within that 7-day timeframe, the inspection score will remain zero.

HUD is also planning to host listening sessions across the country to inform their new inspection model pilot program. Events will be held in Philadelphia, PA (Feb. 21); Fort Worth, TX (March 19); Atlanta, GA (March 21); Detroit, MI (March 26); and Seattle, WA (March 28).

Although NAHRO firmly believes in the need for quality inspections that ensure residents live in safe, secure homes, there are concerns about HUD’s switch to a 14-day notification window. NAHRO is concerned that HUD does not have the inspection capacity to adequately perform inspections on public housing properties within the 14-day timeframe. As is, PHAs already struggle to schedule and keep inspection appointments due to a dearth of inspectors available. Other challenges arise with HUD’s shift to a 14-day notification window as well. This includes staffing capacity at PHAs, especially smaller PHAs, which often have limited staff. It is critical for staff to be present during an inspection, but if an agency only has two full-time employees, as is the case for many small agencies, this is can difficult to arrange in such a short timeframe. Furthermore, inspections scheduled at the beginning of the month have the potential to interfere with other critical public housing operations including rent collection, necessary maintenance projects, and unit turnover.

The switch to a 14-day inspection notification window may also negatively impact residents. Agency staff are often required to remind tenants about resident-caused inspection violations, such as furniture blocking a window or egress, power cords hidden underneath rugs, and other potential violations caused by tenants that were not reported to agency staff. It takes time to address these violations, especially for elderly and disabled residents. The 14-day timeframe also raises privacy concerns, especially

for residents who want or require more than 14 days before opening their homes to HUD inspectors, or residents who want to be in their unit while the inspector and PHA staff are inside their home.

NAHRO has expressed these concerns to HUD and will continue to do so at the upcoming listening sessions. Please contact Eric Oberdorfer at eoberdorfer@nahro.org to express any specific concerns you may have with HUD's planned changes to their inspection protocol. NAHRO staff will be able to relay these concerns to staff at HUD headquarters.

NAHRO CEO's Statement on UPCS Protocol Changes

"A shorter inspection notice is not the only indicator of whether units are decent and healthy. Another, more accurate indicator is the level of funding available for timely repairs. For over a decade, the federal government — after acknowledging a multi-billion dollar capital backlog that grows each year — has actively and vocally disinvested in public housing. And now, on the heels of that disinvestment, it seeks to discover the condition of units.

"If we are to 'stay true to the promise of providing housing that's decent, safe and healthy,' as the Secretary suggests, perhaps HUD will rediscover its responsibility as the primary funder of decent, safe and healthy units, and also its role in defining a sustainable national housing strategy. Neglecting the federal government's culpability in the poor condition of some public housing sites is disingenuous. Families in these communities need ALL hands on deck, and not just, as our 26th President might say, the dusty hands of those in the arena."

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