



Planning to rent

Most people rent their first home and, though some people later decide to buy a home, lots of people decide renting works best for them throughout their life. If you can find a good place to rent it might be your forever home or, if your situation changes, you have the flexibility to find a better rental in a new location.

Types of Rentals

There are different types of rentals that you will want to consider:

Apartments vary from walk-up units in low buildings to units located in tall buildings with elevator access. Some apartments have a washer and dryer, while others have shared laundry rooms, common rooms and fitness facilities. Some of the advantages of apartment living include secured access (for example a door buzzer) and no maintenance of grounds.

House rentals include townhouses, duplexes, semi-detached and single-detached houses. A basement apartment in a house is usually called a suite and considered an apartment. House rentals provide more space than most apartments and often give the tenant access to some outside space.

Rooming houses are shared accommodations with both short-term (week-to-week) and longer-term rental options. Many rooms have their own refrigerator for a tenant's personal use.

What do you need in a rental?

Before beginning your search for a rental unit, you should take some time to consider several things and discuss them with your family or support network:

- **Affordability:** How much can you afford each month and still have money left over for your other bills (renter insurance, cable, telephone service, internet, etc.)?
- **Location:** How close do you want to be to work, university, daily activities or family and friends?
- **Parking and public transportation:** If you have a car, how accessible is parking? If you don't have a car, how easy is it to go grocery shopping or to get to appointments?
- **Surroundings:** Do you want to be at the center of activity or in the quiet suburbs or countryside?
- **Availability:** Some rental properties are harder to find during certain months of the year. Can you wait a few months to move so you have more variety to choose from?
- **Safety:** Are there a lot of break-ins or crime in the area that you need to consider?

Subsidized Rental Units

In many cities and towns rents are very high and for people with and without disabilities it can be hard to find something affordable. Though it may take some time, if you are eligible it is worth getting on the list for a subsidized rental unit with BC Housing and local housing organizations. Subsidized housing is long-term housing and rental fees are calculated on a rent geared to income basis (30% of gross household income). If your income is only Persons with Disabilities (PWD) assistance, your subsidized rental rate



would be the shelter allowance which is currently \$375 per month (2020). If your income goes up because, for example you get a job, your rent would also go up but it would never go over 30% of your income.

BC Housing has other housing programs that you may also be eligible for depending on your circumstances. If you are a senior, a parent, indigenous, at risk of being homeless, or are working and have a low to moderate income, there may be a housing program that you are eligible for. To find out more about subsidized housing programs, you can go to the BC Housing website at bchousing.org.

Finding a Rental Property

If you are looking to find a rental property be sure to check:

- Online. Search for electronic bulletin board postings, specialized websites, online newspaper classified ads, and apartment listing websites.
- Local, community and ethnic newspapers in the area where you want to search.
- Free publications that publish rental accommodation ads.
- Physical bulletin board postings at libraries, community centres, grocery stores, laundromats, and places of worship.
- With friends, family and acquaintances in your community.
- With your campus housing office if you are a student.
- Local real estate offices.
- The neighborhood where you want to live, as a “For Rent/For Lease” sign might catch your eye.
- With a local community organization that offers housing assistance.

Visiting the Rental Property

When you visit a rental property for the first time, there are things to discuss:

- Are utilities such as heat, electricity, water, cable television, or internet included in the monthly rental fee, or are the costs shared with other tenants?
- What type of heating is used - natural gas, oil or electric? Some energy sources cost more than others.
- Which utility companies service the unit? On average, how much did tenants pay before for utilities each month?
- Is there parking? How much does it cost? What about additional vehicles, including guest parking?
- Is there additional storage? Is this included in the rental cost? Does this include bicycle storage?
- Is parking or laundry extra? If so, how much does it cost?
- Can changes be made to the unit, including painting the walls a different colour?
- Why are the current tenants leaving?
- If pets are allowed, what kinds? Is there a pet deposit? Does the property need to be professionally cleaned at the end of the lease?
- Is smoking permitted?
- What are the neighborhood and other tenants like?
- What security systems are in place?
- Are there policies on overnight guests or long-term visitors?

What to expect during your visit

A visit to a rental property is about getting to know the landlord as much as it is about touring the space. This will help both you and the landlord decide if you would like to enter into a rental agreement (lease) together. For this reason, landlords can legally ask:

- About income and where you work.
- How many people will be living in the home and if you have any pets.
- If anyone who will be living there smokes.
- For written permission to run a credit check (to see if you pay your bills on time).
- For references and contact information, including from previous landlords.

Landlords cannot legally ask questions that infringe on a tenant's human rights as outlined in the *BC Human Rights Code*. According to section 10 of the *BC Human Rights Code*, a landlord may not refuse to rent to you because of your race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, religion, marital status, family status, physical or mental disability, sex, sexual orientation, age (if 19 or older), or lawful source of income.

Safety and Healthy Living Considerations

Safety, security and healthy living are also important to consider when looking for a place to live. Before deciding to rent, make sure to:

- Consider the nearest transit stop and parking areas if you have a vehicle. Are they isolated, or are there enough people around to walk to and from safely?
- Scan the local news for any reports of crime in the area or call the local police station to ask.
- Check the locks on the windows and doors, and if you have concerns ask the landlord to change them at their expense before you move in. (They are, however, not legally obligated to do so.)
- Examine sliding glass doors, like patio doors, for a reinforcement rod in the track that prevents them from being forced open.
- Check for working smoke detectors, fire exits and/or fire escapes, and fire extinguishers. For basement units, make sure the windows are large enough to crawl through.
- Look for properly vented space heaters and fireplaces with plenty of room around each for furniture to be placed safely.
- Look for the presence of mold (stains on the walls, musty smells, or rotting wood) to make sure the air you are breathing is clean.
- In rural areas, ask about wells, septic systems and hard water which might need more hands-on management, seasonal road conditions, proximity to a fire department and hospital, and cell phone reception and internet access.

Lease and Rental Agreements

Rental agreements between a landlord and tenant are commonly referred to as a "lease". There are two types of rental agreements – a written lease and an oral rental agreement.

A written lease is a good idea because it clearly says what a landlord and tenant are agreeing to when renting a property. It outlines terms for the rent, deposits, parties responsible, what is included and what is not, and the conditions for ending the lease (e.g. how much notice you need to give the landlord). Both written and oral rental agreements define the legal rights and responsibilities for both the landlord and the tenant. A written agreement is better, however. A verbal agreement makes it much more difficult to refer to if there is a disagreement between the landlord and tenant.

Information Resources

There are several resources that can assist you in understanding rental agreements and help you if you have a disagreement with your landlord. The BC government's Residential Tenancy Branch can be found at <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/housing-tenancy/residential-tenancies>.

The Tenant Resource and Advisory Centre (TRAC) can be found at <http://tenants.bc.ca/>.



www.KeyToHomeBC.ca

