

How Many Apartments in the City's Public Housing Developments Are Underoccupied?

The New York City Housing Authority provides affordable housing in its developments to roughly 400,000 city residents in 176,066 apartments. With a waiting list of more than 250,000 households, apartments in one of the housing authority's complexes are much in demand. As families wait for a vacancy and other families—already in public housing apartments—outgrow their living space, other public housing apartments are underoccupied—meaning they have more bedrooms than are needed by the families that live in them. (For example, a two-bedroom apartment would be considered underoccupied by the housing authority if it had one person or one married couple living in it.) IBO obtained data from the housing authority to examine how many units are classified as underoccupied. All data is as of January 2017, which the housing authority says is consistent with most months.

Nearly One-Third of All Public Housing Apartments Are Underoccupied				
Unit Size	Total Units	Underoccupied Apartments, Nonsenior Head of Household	Underoccupied Apartments, Senior Head of Household	All Other Apartments
All Apartments	176,066	28,477	28,678	118,911
Two Bedroom	84,751	13,205	16,999	54,547
Three Bedroom	39,482	12,673	10,008	16,801
Four Bedroom	5,665	2,169	1,414	2,082
Five or More Bedrooms	915	430	257	228

- Nearly one-third (57,155) of the housing authority's 176,066 public housing apartments were underoccupied.
- Of the underoccupied apartments, half were occupied by households headed by a senior citizen.
- Generally, the larger the unit the more likely it is to be underoccupied. For example, 36 percent of the housing authority's 84,751 two-bedroom apartments were underoccupied, while 75 percent of its 915 five- or more bedroom apartments were underoccupied. Given occupancy standards, none of the housing authority's 6,147 studios or 39,106 one-bedroom apartments were underoccupied.

Vacancy Rates Are Low for Public Housing Apartments							
Apartment Type	All Units	Studio	One Bedroom	Two Bedroom	Three Bedroom	Four Bedroom	Five + Bedroom
All Public Housing	1.0%	3.0%	1.2%	0.9%	0.7%	1.1%	2.2%
Senior Apartments Only	2.4%	1.6%	2.6%	3.1%			

- According to the housing authority, one of the reasons that it has been difficult to move households from underoccupied units into apartments more appropriate for their size is that apartment vacancy rates are low. For households willing to move, there are relatively few appropriately sized apartments available in any given month. Additionally, households often want to stay in the same development, further limiting options for moving.
- The vacancy rate for public housing apartments overall in January 2017 was about 1 percent, or 1,785 apartments. The vacancy rate for studios was 3.0 percent (185 apartments), 1.2 percent for one-bedroom apartments (486), and 0.9 percent for two bedrooms (746).
- The vacancy rate for public housing reserved for seniors was higher than the housing authority's overall vacancy rate, but still low, at 2.4 percent. With only 9,671 senior apartments citywide, this translates to 234 vacant apartments.

SOURCE: IBO analysis of New York City Housing Authority data

NOTE: Senior households are defined as households headed by a tenant 62 years or older.

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