

State Benefits During COVID-19

What You Need to Know

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Eastside Legal Assistance Program

Who we are & what we do

- ELAP provides free civil legal aid to low-income clients who live in East and Southeast King County, and any domestic violence survivors throughout King County.
- We have 30+ legal clinics per month staffed by volunteer attorneys, Staff Attorneys that offer DV and Housing services, and Know Your Rights presentations.



Benefits Legal Assistance – Solid Ground

Who we are & what we do

- Free legal assistance to individuals and families.
- State public benefits issues related to the following programs:
 - Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
 - Food
 - Healthcare
 - Childcare
 - Aged, Blind, and Disabled (ABD)



Statewide Poverty Action Network

Who we are & what we do

- We are a grassroots advocacy organization that supports grassroots leaders, mobilizes voters, and advances equitable policy solutions to end poverty in Washington state.
- Each legislative session we work on 4-5 different policy campaigns, one of which is always centered around improving access to the state's basic needs resource and strengthening the state safety net.



Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

- **Extending Program Benefit Time Limits:** Special extension for 60-month program time limit.
- **Suspending WorkFirst Sanction Process:** All WorkFirst sanctions and terminations are suspended as of March 16, 2020.
- **Suspending WorkFirst Participation:** TANF participants are not required to participate in WorkFirst activities.
- **WorkFirst Orientation:** Orientations will be conducted at home, either on the computer or via telephone, and in-person orientations have been suspended.
- **Restarting benefits when terminated in sanctions:** Participants who were terminated from TANF in the sanctions process will no longer have to cure their sanction prior to restarting TANF benefits.

Aged, Blind, and Disabled (ABD)

- **The state will not enforce sanctions** due to the participant's inability to follow required treatment, vocational rehabilitation, and/or SSI requirements.
- DSHS suspended treatment monitoring and good cause for participation in medical treatment for ABD, participation in substance use assessment and treatment and participation in vocational rehabilitation.
- DSHS postponed ABD disability reviews, modified HEN referral incapacity reviews, and expanded medical evidence rules for eligibility purposes.

Healthcare

- Washington State has opened a special enrollment period for health benefits. This period of enrollment is open through **May 8, 2020**.
- Visit [wahealthplanfinder.org](https://www.wahealthplanfinder.org) to enroll.
- Individuals can still apply for Medicaid/Apple Health at any time.

Basic Food Assistance for Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDS)

- **Prior to COVID-19**, Able Bodied Adult Without Dependents (ABAWDs) received Basic Food Assistance for three months and then were terminated unless participants met certain work or education requirements or other criteria, such as:
 - An inability to work due to a physical or mental limitation;
 - Caring for a person who is incapacitated;
 - Participating in a chemical dependency treatment and rehabilitation program.
- Now, participants in all counties will be temporarily able to continue receiving those benefits and will not be terminated after three months. This means that participants will not be penalized if they are unable to meet the work requirement.
- **Any ABAWD that reapplies (if they received BFA previously) will not need to meet re-qualification rules in order to regain eligibility for food assistance and may be eligible as long as they meet all other requirements for the food assistance program. This includes those who have already used their 3 non-qualifying months.**
- **Currently, this rule is in place for March & April 2020.**

Additional Basic Food Assistance Benefits

- Most recipients will receive the maximum amount of food benefit for their household size for the months of March and April, regardless of income level.
- But if a participant has an overpayment, the household is not eligible for the additional benefits.
- Supplements for March should be deposited in early April and April supplements will be deposited at the time of regular April benefit deposit date.
- As of now, this is only for March and April 2020.

Disaster Cash Assistance Program (DCAP)

- **New benefit program, as of April 17th!**
 - Available to a household one time during a twelve month period
 - Must have suffered a loss of income or property related to COVID-19
 - Available to both individuals and families
 - Immigration status and lack of SSN is NOT a factor of eligibility
 - Households must apply for other available/applicable sources of income first (ex. Unemployment Compensation)
 - Households must apply for and be determined ineligible for other cash programs first (TANF, SFA, ABD)
 - Program availability ends when State of Emergency period ends

Opportunities for Further Support

- **Remind clients to file their taxes.** Federal stimulus checks are in the process of being sent out to many Americans— **but almost everyone needs to have filed their 2018 or 2019 taxes, or provided the IRS with their most recent income information, in order to receive a stimulus check.** Non-filers must enter their payment info via this web tool: <https://www.irs.gov/coronavirus/non-filers-enter-payment-info-here>
- **Share resources for state unemployment benefits.** Direct clients to <https://esd.wa.gov/unemployment> to file. Reminder that under the federal CARES Act, many more workers (such as gig workers and part-time workers) are eligible for unemployment. The Unemployment Law Project, unemploymentlawproject.org, is also doing excellent webinars and legal advocacy for those having issues accessing unemployment benefits during this time.
- **Encourage clients to share their story with Poverty Action.** The economic effects of this pandemic will be long-lasting, and low-income communities will need support for longer than these temporary measures allow.

Resources

- BFA: <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/os/office-communications/media-release/dshs-receives-supplemental-funding-boost-benefits-basic-food-recipients>
- Basic Food ABAWD - <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/esa-1>
- Poverty Action's fact sheets on federal stimulus checks: <https://povertyaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Stimulus-check-FAQ.pdf> and unemployment benefits: <https://povertyaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Unemployment-FAQ.pdf>
- Solid Ground's resources page on changes to public benefits: <https://www.solid-ground.org/get-help/coronavirus-resources/#publicbenefits>

Questions? We're here to help!

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