

ECONOMIC SERVICES ADMINISTRATION – COMMUNITY SERVICES DIVISION COVID-19 Response Overview June 24, 2020

In response to the ongoing outbreak of the COVID-19 virus in Washington state, the DSHS Community Services Division has been rapidly identifying and implementing waivers from federal and state requirements and making policy and service delivery changes to help meet the needs of our clients and staff.

BASIC FOOD:

Emergency Food Supplements – DSHS implemented [supplemental funding](#) for recipients of food assistance due to the impacts of COVID-19. These benefits started April 4, 2020 for March and April benefits and will continue on a month-to-month basis with federal approval. Recipients get the difference between their regular monthly benefit and the maximum amount for their household size. For example, a two-person household that typically gets \$200 per month in food benefits will receive an additional \$155 in emergency benefits bringing the monthly total to \$355. For more information, please see the [FAQs](#).

Basic Food Employment and Training – All BFET providers remain open statewide and are providing various services to BFET participants during this current state of the COVID-19 pandemic. Please contact BFET providers directly to obtain information about their services during this time. The BFET website has a “Find a Provider” feature here: [BFET - Find a Provider](#)

Abled-Bodied Adults Without Dependents – An injunction to the new ABAWD waiver rules has been approved in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Clients in all counties, including King County, will be temporarily granted good cause to not be terminated for non-participation.

We continue to offer referrals to any ABAWD client who is not participating in work or work-like activities to be connected to community resources. State Board Community and Technical College ABAWD navigators work virtually with clients.

NEW: Pandemic EBT – [P-EBT](#) food benefits are available to families with children in grades K-12 who are eligible for schools’ free or reduced-price meal programs. This assistance is for the time period schools closed due to COVID-19. The [Public Charge rule](#) does not apply to P-EBT benefits and will not impact immigration status. DSHS will implement P-EBT and is partnering with the [Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction](#) to distribute these benefits starting **June 28, 2020**.

Families receiving Basic Food through DSHS and with children who receive free or reduced-price school meals do **not** need to apply for P-EBT. They will automatically receive these one-time benefits on their EBT cards and benefits will be issued from June 28 through July 7. Families should check with their school districts to find out if their children need to apply for free or reduced-price school meals by **June 30, 2020**, so they can receive P-EBT funds.

Families with children who are eligible and approved by their school district for free or reduced-price meals and who do **not** currently get Basic Food benefits **must apply** online at washingtonconnection.org for P-EBT before **August 31** or the start of the 2020-2021 school year—whichever is later. (The Washington Connection website is available in English and Spanish.)

DISASTER CASH ASSISTANCE PROGRAM:

On April 17, 2020, DSHS implemented the Disaster Cash Assistance Program. The assistance is available to all Washington families and people without children who meet the income and resource limits of the program and who are not eligible for other cash programs.

To be eligible for DCAP, a one-person household must have less than \$363 in income after deductions are applied in the month of application. If an individual has no income and is resource eligible, they may qualify for the maximum payment amount of \$363 in DCAP. The [FAQs](#) has important details.

TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE FOR NEEDY FAMILIES/WORKFIRST:

Time Limit Extensions – Effective April 1, 2020, DSHS expanded the TANF 60-month Time Limit Extension to support families experiencing hardships due to the COVID-19 emergency. Families who exhausted 60 months on TANF cash assistance and are experiencing hardships due to COVID-19 will not be denied benefits.

Suspending the WorkFirst Sanction Process, Including Home Visits – Effective March 16, 2020, DSHS temporarily suspended WorkFirst sanction reduction or termination penalties. WorkFirst services are offered each month; however, if a participant does not continue to engage in their activity, no adverse action will be taken as a result of non-participation. Participants have good cause for non-participation since it is due to an event outside of their control. This also suspends the need for a home visit by our staff as part of the sanction process. Clients who closed in sanction will not have to cure sanction before being eligible for the cash grant.

Exempting WorkFirst Participation for Good Cause – Effective March 16, 2020, all WorkFirst participants are temporarily exempt from required participation. Clients can choose to continue participation and, to the extent possible, case management will continue, but participation will not be required.

Suspending Home Visits for the Teen Living Assessment – In compliance with federal law, DSHS conducts a Teen Living Assessment, which may include a home visit for all unmarried, minor parents applying for TANF cash assistance, to determine eligibility and offer support to the household. Effective March 16, 2020, the home visits are suspended until further notice. WorkFirst Social Service Specialists are responsible to make their best effort to determine a safe living environment and situation, for the teen and their child, by completing all required assessment screening tools in the office or over the phone.

Telephone WorkFirst Orientations - All WorkFirst Orientations are being conducted via the telephone.

Continuing Payment for WorkFirst Work-Study and Community Jobs Participants - Community Jobs and WorkFirst work-study participants will continue to be employed and receive payment even if they are temporarily unable to participate due to emergency operations changes or closures as a result of COVID-19. This aligns with directions for the federal/state work-study participants.

AGED, BLIND OR DISABLED/HOUSING AND ESSENTIAL NEEDS REFERRAL PROGRAMS:

Effective March 18, 2020, 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.

Effective March 26, 2020, DSHS postponed ABD disability reviews, modified HEN referral incapacity reviews and expanded medical evidence rules for eligibility purposes.

Mental Incapacity Evaluation contracts have been amended to allow for telephonic psychological evaluations.

CLASSIC MEDICAID ELIGIBILITY:

Certification periods for renewals that were not completed for March, April and May were extended for three months. Benefits will also not close for recipients of Medicaid unless the individual requests their benefits be terminated, the individual is no longer a Washington state resident or the individual is deceased.

Additional changes regarding Medicaid eligibility to support clients include:

- Reinstating Medicaid coverage if closed on or after March 18, 2020.
- Allowing a 30-day extension to provide verification of circumstances.
- Accepting self-attestation of income and resources at application, renewal and change of circumstances.
- Accepting self-attestation for medical expenses incurred needed to meet spenddown amounts for purposes of medically needy eligibility.

CERTIFICATION WAIVER FOR TANF, ABD, WFS AND BASIC FOOD:

As of April 29, 2020, DSHS extended certification periods for households with Eligibility Reviews due in the months of April, May and June for six additional months, extending these certifications through October, November and December 2020. Mid-Certification Review requirements for April, May and June were also waived, and benefits will continue through the end of certification periods while households meet all other eligibility requirements. This applies to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families; Aged, Blind or Disabled and Housing Essential Needs; Working Family Support; and all Food Assistance programs. Learn more [here](#).

WASHINGTON OFFICE OF REFUGEE AND IMMIGRANT ASSISTANCE:

ORIA partners with organizations across the state to continue to offer services that are culturally and linguistically relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic. These services include employment and training services, immigration assistance and naturalization services, supports for refugee elders, children, students and youth, and refugee health and wellness. Regular programs are open remotely during COVID-19, and providers are

offering response services due to the pandemic that include a needs assessment, information and referrals, providing and connecting with new services, and education and client engagement.

Washington extended Refugee Cash and Medical Assistance benefits for single or married refugee or humanitarian immigrant without children to receive benefits beyond eight months. People can apply by calling the DSHS Customer Service Contact Center at 877-501-2233 or online at [WashingtonConnection.org](https://www.washingtonconnection.org). For more information, please refer to the [program announcement](#).

ORIA is also offering the COVID-19 Emergency Support Services for Refugees, which is a program that provides assistance for eligible individuals and families to cover rent, utility, internet and other needed assistance.

For more information, please visit the [ORIA home page on the DSHS website](#).

CSD SERVICE DELIVERY:

Effective March 26, 2020, full services are available by phone through the Customer Service Contact Center at 877-501-2233. The Customer Service Contact Center can assist people with:

- Applying for benefits or completing an eligibility review without filling out a paper or online form.
- Completing an interview for benefits.
- Getting case information or reporting changes.
- Completing a mid-certification review.
- Requesting replacement of an EBT card.
- Reaching a WorkFirst case manager or social worker.

A few in-person services are available by appointment in CSO lobbies for a limited number of clients to pick up:

- An EBT card, when the individual has general delivery mail services only and for certain expedited food recipients. All other EBT cards will be mailed from the vendor or through a local office mail process. Clients may contact EBT Customer Service at 888-328-9271 for EBT card replacements.
- Emergency support services, when mailing those services is not an option.
- Consent form for the ABD application process, when the individual has general delivery mail services or participates in the Address Confidentiality Program.

People may continue to drop off paperwork via drop boxes, where available. Paperwork will be picked up daily and routed for processing.

WASHINGTON CONNECTION:

Clients can submit applications, reviews and mid-certifications online for program assistance at [WashingtonConnection.org](https://www.washingtonconnection.org). They can also report changes and find other local services.