

# WELFARE BENEFITS:

## Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Rules and Eligibility

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### Who is this publication for?

This publication discusses who is eligible for TANF and what is required under the law. You may want to read other related publications, such as [What are My Rights Dealing with DSHS](#). You have many important rights under the program, **including the right to appeal DSHS decisions.**

### What is TANF?

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) is the welfare program that gives cash grants to needy families. The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) administers TANF.

### How can I apply to get TANF?

You can apply in-person at your local DSHS Community Service Office (CSO) or by mail, or by fax, or by internet at <https://www.washingtonconnection.org/home/>.

◆ **If you are disabled,** you can get special help from DSHS in applying for benefits under DSHS' Necessary Supplemental Accommodations (NSA) services. See our publications [DSHS Help for People with Disabilities: Necessary Supplemental Accommodations](#) and

[Applying for Public Assistance.](#)

### Who can get TANF?

You must be:

1. Low-income; AND
2. One of the following:
  - a U.S. citizen, or
  - have a green card, or
  - an American Indian born outside the U.S., or
  - a victim of trafficking, or
  - A Hmong or Highland Lao, or
  - be an eligible "qualified alien" (definition is [here](#)); AND
3. One of the following:
  - a pregnant woman with no other children in the home  
or
  - child(ren) under 18 and parent(s) who live together  
or
  - child(ren) who live with a relative or other custodial adult (also referred to as "in loco parentis")  
or
  - a child over 18, but under 19, who has not graduated from high school *and* who is a full time student at a secondary school or at a vocational or technical training  
or

- a disabled person over 19 and under 21 who is participating in a full-time secondary school program or the same level of vocational training;

AND

4. A Washington state resident.

Other eligibility requirements are:

- Your TANF time limits have not expired, or DSHS has granted you an exemption from the time limit. See our publication [Questions and Answers On The TANF Five-Year Time Limit](#);
- You must provide your social security number; and
- You must have a face-to-face interview at initial certification. (There are hardship exceptions to this rule.)

Most two-parent families can get TANF as long as they meet all other eligibility requirements.

### Who cannot get TANF?

You are not eligible for TANF if you are:

- Convicted of a felony and fleeing to another state to avoid punishment; or
- Violated probation or parole; or
- A worker on strike; or
- An undocumented immigrant; or
- A “lawfully present” alien who is ineligible for other reasons ([read here](#)); or
- Child(ren) who live with a parent or adult relative whose sixty- month life TANF time limit expired. See our publication called [Questions and](#)

### [Answers On The TANF Five-Year Time Limit.](#)

**You may be ineligible for TANF if you have been:**

- Convicted of a drug-related felony; or
- Convicted of welfare fraud.

**Once I am approved for TANF benefits, do I have to do anything else?**

Once DSHS finds you and your family eligible for TANF, you must do the following things in order to receive your grant:

1. Give DSHS the right to collect and keep child support as reimbursement for the TANF benefits you are awarded;
  2. Cooperate with DSHS in establishing paternity and child support for your children UNLESS you can show DSHS that cooperation will harm you or your children. This is called “good cause” for not cooperating;
  3. Cooperate with DSHS in a review of your eligibility at least once a year;
  4. Cooperate with DSHS in a quality assurance review process;
  5. Report to DSHS changes of circumstances;
  6. Ensure that your child attends school.
- If you have a child aged 16, 17, or under 19, that child must attend school in order to be eligible for TANF. If your child is not in school, his or her portion of the TANF grant may be taken away from your family’s grant until he or she returns to school. If this child is your only

child, both you and your child will lose TANF.

7. Participate in job search or work-related activities through the WorkFirst Program, unless you are exempt from this requirement. See our publication [Questions and Answers about WorkFirst](#).

### Who is Exempt from WorkFirst Activities?

- A person who is needed in the home to care for an infant.
- A caretaker relative (not a parent) who is 55 years or older
- A person with a severe and chronic disability
- A person who is needed in the home to care for a child with special needs or another related adult with a disability
- A person who is a victim of family violence. For more information, see our publication [WorkFirst and the Family Violence Amendment](#).

### I am a teen parent. Are there any special rules for me?

If you are under the age of 18 and unmarried and either pregnant or a parent, you must:

- Live in a DSHS-approved living situation
- This means that you must live with either of your parents, another adult relative, or any other “approved” adult. DSHS will presume that living with your parents is the best living situation, so in order to have a different living situation approved you must show DSHS that it is not in your best interests to live with your parents;
- and

- Be enrolled in high school or getting your GED (high school equivalency). See our publication [TANF for Teen Parents](#).

### How will DSHS decide whether I am financially eligible for TANF?

DSHS will usually count money you get each month (income) and property you already have (resources).

#### Income

DSHS has different rules for how they consider various kinds of unearned and earned income. For earned income, DSHS will count only 50% of your gross earned income toward your TANF grant.

Example: If you earn \$600 per month gross, DSHS will count 50% of that amount, or \$300. Therefore, \$300 will be considered in determining your eligibility for TANF and it will be deducted from the amount of your TANF grant.

◆ DSHS cannot count any SSI income your household gets when it is figuring out your TANF eligibility.

DSHS will not count the money you use to pay child support in determining your TANF grant.

#### **For some families, other people’s income may be considered:**

- If you are a sponsored alien, DSHS may consider your sponsor’s income. (There are exceptions. Read more [here](#).)
- If you are a teen parent living at home, DSHS may count your parent’s income.

## Resources

The following types of resources (property) will not be counted in determining whether you are eligible for TANF:

- A vehicle with equity value up to \$5,000 (any equity over \$5,000 does count).
- A vehicle used to transport a family member with a disability (such as a van with a wheelchair ramp).
- Your home and surrounding property.
- Your household furnishings and personal possessions.
- Any term or burial insurance up to \$1500.
- A burial plot.
- Up to \$1,000 in non-exempt resources.
- Trust accounts when not available. Trust accounts are not available if the funds cannot be withdrawn and turned into cash.

◆ If you are receiving TANF, your family may build up to \$3,000 more in savings accounts without losing your grant.

## **Can I get TANF benefits for as long as I need them?**

Probably not. Generally, there is a 60-month lifetime limit on families getting TANF benefits.

## **Are there any exceptions to the time limit?**

Yes. Our publication called [Questions and Answers On The TANF Five-Year Time Limit](#) has details.

## **What if DSHS denies TANF or makes a decision about my TANF benefits and I do not agree with that decision?**

**Anytime DSHS makes a decision - either verbally or in writing – that affects your TANF benefits, you have the right to request a fair hearing to dispute that decision.**

Examples: you may request a hearing if DSHS denies your application, imposes WorkFirst requirements that you disagree with, “sanctions” your family (reduces the amount of the grant), or stops your TANF grant. See our publications [How to Fight a Denial of DSHS Public Assistance](#); [How to Fight a Termination or Reduction of DSHS Public Assistance](#); and [WorkFirst Sanctions](#).

◆ If you get a notice saying DSHS is going to reduce or cut off your TANF grant, you are entitled to continued assistance if you ask for a hearing within 10 days of the date of the notice. You must specifically ask for continued assistance.

Most DSHS notices are on computer-printed forms. The forms have your fair hearing rights printed on the back.

To ask for a fair hearing:

- fill out a Fair Hearing Request at your local DSHS office; or

- write to the Office of Administrative Hearings, P. O. Box 42488, Olympia, WA 98504; or
- If it is an emergency, ask to have your hearing held as soon as possible by calling the Office of Administrative Hearings at (360) 664-8717 or 1-800-583-8271 to ask for an “expedited” or an emergency hearing. Otherwise, your hearing will probably be scheduled 20 days or more after you ask for it.

◆ You must ask for your hearing no later than 90 days after the date you were denied.

Once you have asked for a fair hearing, you may discuss your case with the designated Fair Hearing Coordinator at your local DSHS office. The Office of Administrative Hearings will set a date for fair hearing, which will be held in front of an administrative law judge. You have the right to present evidence and witnesses on your behalf. You will have the right, before the hearing, to see and to get copies of the papers in your hearing file. You may bring a lawyer or any other person to the hearing to represent you.

- ◆ Get legal advice and help before your hearing to get ready for your hearing. Call CLEAR or a legal services office with questions, and read our publication [\*Representing Yourself in a Fair Hearing\*](#).
- ◆ If you are low-income and live outside King County, call CLEAR at 1-888-201-1014. If you live in King County, call the King County Bar Association’s Neighborhood Legal Clinics at (206) 267-7070 between 9:00 a.m. and noon, Monday – Thursday, to schedule a free half-hour of legal advice.

**I have other questions this publication does not answer. What else can I do?**

Call CLEAR, or visit our website, [www.WashingtonLawHelp.org](http://www.WashingtonLawHelp.org). You may find other publications there that are helpful.

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