

Washington Public Assistance for Refugees and Other Humanitarian Entrants

(Includes Refugees, Asylees, Persons Granted Withholding of Deportation, Cuban-Haitian Entrants and Special Immigrants from Iraq and Afghanistan)

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- ❖ Read this only if you live in the state of Washington.
 - ❖ You can find all the fact sheets we link to here at WashingtonLawHelp.org.
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Should I read this?

Read this to learn what benefits you may be eligible to get if you are a humanitarian entrant.

How can I tell if I am a humanitarian entrant?

There are several categories of immigrants considered humanitarian entrants under the immigration laws. They include:

- **Refugees** – persons who have fled their country due to fear of persecution because of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a social group.
- **Asylees** – persons who meet eligibility criteria for refugee status but apply within the U.S.
- **Persons granted Withholding of Deportation** – persons fleeing persecution who may or may not also meet requirements for asylee status.
- **Special Immigrants from Iraq and Afghanistan** - persons who worked with the U.S. Armed Forces or under Chief of Mission authority in Iraq or Afghanistan.
- **Amerasian entrants** – children (and their families) fathered by U.S. citizens in the conflict in Southeast Asia.



- **Cuban-Haitian entrants** – includes Cubans and Haitians who have been granted parole, applied for asylum, or not received a final order of deportation.
- **Conditional entrants** – persons granted refugee status before 1980.

If you are in one of these groups, you should have documentation (proof) of your status from the Department of Homeland Security. If you do not, talk to an immigration lawyer, or call the Northwest Immigrant Rights Project. They have different phone numbers depending on where you live.

- **in Western Washington**, call 800-445-5771
- **in Asotin, Benton, Columbia, Franklin, Garfield, Kittitas, Klickitat, Walla Walla Whitman & Yakima counties**, call 888-756-3641
- **in Adams, Chelan, Douglas, Ferry, Grant, Lincoln, Okanogan, Pend Oreille, Spokane & Stevens counties**, call 866-271-2084

DSHS may be able to help you get copies of immigration documents you have lost if you need them to show you are eligible to get benefits.

I am a humanitarian entrant. Am I eligible to get benefits?

It depends. You may be eligible to get some federal benefits, including:

- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) - cash assistance for low-income families.
- Medicaid – medical coverage for low-income persons, including pre-natal and children’s health programs.
- Children’s Health Insurance Program.
- Federal Food Stamps.
- Tax credit and subsidies to help with out-of-pocket costs for health insurance purchased through the state Health Benefits Exchange (“Healthplanfinder”).

❖ **Note:** Most humanitarian entrants are required to carry health coverage. If you don’t have coverage, you may have to pay a tax penalty (fine). Read [Requirement to Get Coverage](#).

You may also be eligible to get state benefits, including:

- Aged Blind & Disabled (ABD) - cash assistance for seniors and people with disabilities.
- Housing and Essential Needs (HEN) –help with rent and essential items (such as toiletries) for seniors and people with disabilities.

Can I get SSI?

Maybe. Humanitarian entrants can get SSI during their first 7 years in a humanitarian immigration status.

If you came to the U.S. **before August 22, 1996** and have had your immigration status longer than 7 years, you may need to show you have a disability (even if you are already 65) to keep getting SSI. If you came to the U.S. **on or after August 22, 1996**, you probably need to become a citizen to keep being eligible to get SSI.

There are special eligibility rules for people who have a work history or are in the armed services. Talk to a legal services lawyer.

❖ **COVID-19 alert:** if you are trying to reach your local Social Security office during the pandemic, use [COVID-19: How do I reach my local Social Security Office?](#)

Are there any special benefits programs for humanitarian entrants?

Yes. The **Refugee Assistance Program** provides cash and medical assistance to eligible low-income refugees and other humanitarian entrants. Humanitarian entrants are eligible to get these benefits for up to 8 months after entering the U.S. (or 8 months after being granted asylum if you are an asylee.)

How do I apply for benefits?

Cash and food assistance: apply at your local office of DSHS (Department of Social and Health Services.)

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- ❖ **COVID-19 alert:** During the pandemic, local DSHS offices may be closed. To apply for DSHS benefits, you may need to call the Customer Service Contact Center at 877-501-2233 or visit [WashingtonConnection.org](https://www.washingtonconnection.org).
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Most medical programs, including insurance and subsidies: you can apply through Healthplanfinder online at www.wahealthplanfinder.org, by calling 1-855-923-4633 (1-855-WAFINDER), or by asking for a paper application from Healthplanfinder or your local DSHS office. If you go online, make sure you use www.wahealthplanfinder.org.

I need welfare benefits. I do not speak English. What should I do?

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- ❖ The welfare office must provide you with a free interpreter without delay. You should say on the application form if you have a hard time reading, speaking, or understanding English. The welfare office should send you translated notices about your benefits so you can read about your rights and responsibilities in your own language. Keep copies of what they send you. If you have not gotten interpreters or notices in your own language and they have cut off your benefits, you may be able to get them back.
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I have used public assistance. Can I still get a green card (lawful permanent residence) or become a citizen?

Yes. Refugees and humanitarian entrants may use public assistance, including cash, food, and medical, and still be eligible to get a green card or their citizenship. There is no “public charge” test for humanitarian entrants when they apply for their green card.

However, you should always give the government accurate and complete information when you apply for or get benefits. Immigrants who **fraudulently** receive benefits may have trouble becoming citizens and may even face deportation if convicted of a crime.

You should also avoid traveling outside the U.S. for more than six months if possible, especially if you are getting cash assistance. You may have trouble re-entering the

country. Always tell DSHS before you leave the country if you may be gone for over 30 days.

To learn more, talk to an immigration lawyer, or read [The New Public Charge Rule: What You Need to Know](#).

I have a sponsoring organization. Can I be turned down for assistance?

No. The rules on sponsor deeming do not apply to refugees with a sponsoring organization. You must still report any income you get, including actual income your sponsoring organization has given you.

What if the welfare office denied my application?

If they deny your application and you believe you are eligible, tell your worker you want an Administrative Hearing **or** ask for a copy of the Hearing Request form to fill out. There is no fee or penalty for asking for an administrative hearing. You can always withdraw (cancel) your request later if you find out the welfare office was right. You should also contact a legal services office for advice.

Get Legal Help

Outside King County, call the CLEAR Hotline at 1-888-201-1014 weekdays between 9:15 am - 12:15 pm.

In King County, call 2-1-1 weekdays between 8:00 am - 6:00 pm. They will refer you to a legal aid provider.

Seniors (age 60 and over) can also call CLEAR*Sr at 1-888-387-7111, statewide.

You can also **apply online** with CLEAR*Online: nwjustice.org/get-legal-help.

This publication provides general information concerning your rights and responsibilities. It is not intended as a substitute for specific legal advice.

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