

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF): The Basics

What is TANF?

This welfare program gives needy families cash grants. In the state of Washington, the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) runs the TANF program.

How do I apply?

By mail or [online](#) at www.washingtonconnection.org. If you have a disability, you can get help applying. Read [DSHS Help for People with Disabilities: Necessary Supplemental Accommodations](#) and [Applying for Public Assistance](#) at WashingtonLawHelp.org.

Can I get TANF?

Yes, **if** you have a low income, you live in the state of Washington, **and** you are

1. One of these:

- a U.S. citizen
- have a green card
- an American Indian born outside the U.S.
- a trafficking victim
- Hmong or Highland Lao
- an eligible “qualified alien”; **and**

2. One of these:

- Pregnant, with no other children in the home.
- A child under 18 living with your parents.
- A child living with a relative or other custodian.
- Age 18 - 19, you have not graduated from high school **and** you are a full-time student.
- A person with disabilities age 19 – 21, in school full-time.

Who cannot get TANF?

You cannot get TANF if you:

- Are fleeing the state after you were convicted of a felony.
- Have violated probation or parole.
- Are a worker on strike.
- Are an undocumented immigrant.
- Are a “lawfully present” alien and not eligible for other reasons.
- Are a child living with a parent or adult relative whose sixty-month TANF time limit has expired (ended).

I got approved for TANF. What will I have to do?

You must:

- 1.** Give DSHS the right to collect and keep child support to pay back the TANF they give you.
- 2.** Work with DSHS when they figure out parentage and child support for your children. They may excuse you from this if it would harm you or the children.
- 3.** Work with DSHS when they check if you are still eligible to get TANF.
- 4.** Tell DSHS if you move or get any money, or if your household size changes.
- 5.** Make sure your child age 16 - 18 goes to school. If not, DSHS can subtract the child from your grant until the child goes back to school. If this is your only child, you will both lose TANF.

❖ **Due to the pandemic, you do not have to meet Workfirst requirements.**
Read [COVID-19 \(Coronavirus\) and Workfirst in Washington State: You Do Not Need to Meet Your Participation Requirements](#) at
WashingtonLawHelp.org.

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

Yes. If you are under 18, unmarried, and pregnant or a parent, special rules apply to you. Read [TANF for Teen Parents](#).

How does DSHS decide if I am financially eligible for TANF?

DSHS usually counts money you get each month (**income**) and property you own (**resources**). DSHS has different rules for different kinds of income.

DSHS counts only half your gross earned income toward your TANF grant. **Example:** You earn \$600 a month gross. DSHS will count \$300 in deciding if you can get TANF and deduct (subtract) it from your TANF grant amount.

Can DSHS look at other people's income to decide if I can get TANF?

Maybe, if you are a sponsored alien. There are some exceptions to this. They can also look at your parents' incomes if you are a teen parent living at home.

What does DSHS not count in deciding if I can get TANF?

- Any stimulus payment you got due to the pandemic
- any SSI your household gets
- money you use to pay child support
- A vehicle with equity value up to \$10,000
- A vehicle you use to transport a family member with a disability
- Your home and surrounding property
- Your household furnishings and personal possessions
- Term or burial insurance up to \$1,500
- A burial plot

❖ If you get TANF, you can have up to \$6,000 in savings without losing your grant.

Can I get TANF benefits as long as I need them?

Probably not. Read [Questions and Answers on The TANF Five-Year Time Limit](#).

DSHS denied or made a bad decision about my TANF.

Anytime DSHS makes a verbal or written decision that affects your TANF, you can ask for an administrative hearing on that decision. You can ask for a hearing if DSHS denies your application, imposes WorkFirst requirements you disagree with, “sanctions” you (lowers the amount), or stops your TANF grant. Read [How to Fight a Denial of DSHS Public Assistance](#) and [How to Fight a Termination or Reduction of DSHS Public Assistance](#).

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- ❖ If you get a notice saying DSHS is going to lower or end your TANF, you can keep getting the same amount of TANF if you ask for a hearing within ten days of the date of the notice. **You must specifically ask for continued assistance.**
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How do I ask for a hearing?

Write the Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH), P. O. Box 42488, Olympia, WA 98504. If it is an emergency, ask them to hold the hearing as soon as possible. Call OAH at (360) 664-8717 or 1-800-583-8271. Ask for an **expedited** hearing. Otherwise, they will probably schedule your hearing 20 days or more after you asked for it.

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- ❖ You must ask for a hearing no later than 90 days after the date DSHS took the action you disagree with.
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Get legal advice and help before your hearing. Call CLEAR or a legal services office with questions. If you have a low income and live outside King County, call CLEAR at 1-888-201-1014. If you live in King County, dial 2-1-1 or 800-621-4636. Read [Representing Yourself in an Administrative Hearing](#).

Where can I learn more?

Call CLEAR, or visit our website, WashingtonLawHelp.org.

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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