

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

Rules and Eligibility

Should I read this?

This explains

- who is eligible for TANF
- what the law requires of people who get TANF

You have many important rights under the program, **including the right to appeal DSHS decisions.**

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- ❖ You can read related publications, such as [What are My Rights Dealing with DSHS?](#)
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What is TANF?

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

How do I apply for TANF?

- in-person at your local DSHS Community Service Office (CSO)
- by mail
- by fax
- [online:](https://www.washingtonconnection.org/home/)

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- ❖ **If you have a disability**, you can get special help from DSHS in applying for benefits under their Necessary Supplemental Accommodations (NSA) services. See [DSHS Help for People with Disabilities: Necessary Supplemental Accommodations](#) and [Applying for Public Assistance](#).
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Can I get TANF?

Yes, if you are:

1. Low-income AND
2. **One** of these:
 - a U.S. citizen
 - have a green card
 - an American Indian born outside the U.S.
 - a trafficking victim
 - A Hmong or Highland Lao
 - an eligible “qualified alien” (see [WAC 388-424-0006](#)); AND
3. **One** of these:
 - Pregnant, with no other children in the home.
 - Child (ren) under 18 and parent(s) who live together.
 - Child (ren) living with a relative or other custodial adult.
 - a child over 18, but under 19, who has not graduated from high school *and* is a full-time student at a secondary, vocational, or technical training school.

- A disabled person age 19 - 21 in a full-time secondary school program or the same level of vocational training.

AND

4. You live in Washington state.

Other eligibility requirements are:

- Your TANF time limits have not expired, or DSHS has granted you an exemption from the time limit. See [Questions and Answers On The TANF Five-Year Time Limit](#)
 - You must give your social security number.
 - You must have a face-to-face interview. Some hardship exceptions apply.
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- ❖ Most two-parent families can get TANF if they meet all other eligibility requirements.
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- You **must** take part in a WorkFirst orientation if DSHS considers you a mandatory participant in WorkFirst. Some exemptions apply.

Who cannot get TANF?

You cannot get TANF if you:

- Have a felony conviction and are fleeing the state to avoid punishment.
- Have violated probation or parole.
- Are a worker on strike.
- Are an undocumented immigrant.
- Are a “lawfully present” alien and ineligible for other reasons. ([Read here http://apps.leg.wa.gov/wac/default.aspx?cite=388-424-0006](http://apps.leg.wa.gov/wac/default.aspx?cite=388-424-0006))
- Are a child living with a parent or adult relative whose sixty-month life TANF time limit has expired. (See [Questions](#)

[and Answers on the TANF Five-Year Time Limit.](#))

You **may not be able to get TANF if you have a conviction for:**

- a drug-related felony
- welfare fraud

Once they approve me for TANF, what else do I have to do?

You must:

1. Give DSHS the right to collect and keep child support as reimbursement for the TANF they give you.
2. Cooperate with DSHS in establishing paternity and child support for your children. If you can show DSHS that cooperation will harm you or the children, you have “good cause” for not cooperating.
3. Cooperate with DSHS in reviewing your eligibility at least once a year.
4. Cooperate with DSHS in a quality assurance review process.
5. Tell DSHS about any changes in your circumstances, such as when you move, get any money, or the number of people in your household changes.
6. Make sure your child age 16 - 18 goes to school. If not, DSHS may deduct the child’s portion of the TANF grant from your family’s grant until the child returns to school. If this is your only child, both you and your child will lose TANF.
7. Take part in job search or work-related activities through the WorkFirst Program, unless you are exempt from this requirement. See [Questions and Answers about WorkFirst.](#)

Am I exempt (excused) from WorkFirst Activities?

Yes, if:

- You must be at home to care for an infant.
- You are a caretaker relative (not a parent), age 55 or older.
- You have a severe and chronic disability. (DSHS may require you to do some other things.)
- You must be at home to care for a child with special needs or an adult relative with a disability.

What if I am a teen parent?

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

- Live in a DSHS-approved living situation. You must live with a parent, another adult relative, or any other “approved” adult. DSHS will presume that with your parents is best. If you want DSHS to approve a different situation, you must show DSHS it is not in your best interests to live with your parents;

AND

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

How does DSHS decide I am financially eligible for TANF?

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

Income

DSHS has different rules for treating different kinds of unearned and earned income. DSHS counts only half your gross earned income toward your TANF grant.

Example: You earn \$600/month gross. DSHS will count half of that, or \$300. DSHS will

consider \$300 in determining your TANF eligibility and deduct it from your TANF grant amount.

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- ❖ DSHS cannot count any SSI income your household gets when figuring out your TANF eligibility.
 - ❖ DSHS will not count money you use to pay child support in determining your TANF grant.
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For some families, DSHS may consider other people’s income:

- If you are a sponsored alien, DSHS may consider your sponsor’s income. (There are exceptions. Read more here: <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/income-table-contents/allocation-and-deeming>)
- If you are a teen parent living at home, DSHS may count your parent’s income.

Resources

DSHS will **not** count these types of resources (property) in determining your eligibility for TANF:

- A vehicle with equity value up to \$5,000 (equity over \$5,000 **does** count)
- A vehicle you use to transport a family member with a disability
- Your home and surrounding property
- Your household furnishings and personal possessions
- Any term or burial insurance up to \$1,500
- A burial plot
- Up to \$1,000 in non-exempt resources
- Trust accounts, when not available (if you cannot withdraw the funds and turn them into cash)

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- ❖ If you get TANF, your family may build up to \$3,000 more in savings accounts without losing your grant.
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Can I get TANF benefits as long as I need them?

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

Are there exceptions to the time limit?

Yes. [Questions and Answers on The TANF Five-Year Time Limit](#) has details.

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

Anytime DSHS makes a decision - verbally or in writing – that affects your TANF benefits, you can request an administrative hearing to dispute that decision.

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

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- ❖ If you get a notice saying DSHS is going to lower or end your TANF, you can get continued assistance 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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Most DSHS notices are on computer-printed forms. Your administrative hearing rights are on the back.

How do I ask for an administrative hearing?

- Fill out an Administrative Hearing Request at your local DSHS office OR
- Write the Office of Administrative Hearings, P. O. Box 42488, Olympia, WA 98504 OR
- If it is an emergency, ask them to hold your hearing as soon as possible. Call the Office of Administrative Hearings at (360) 664-8717 or 1-800-583-8271 to ask for an “expedited” or emergency hearing. Otherwise, they will probably schedule your hearing 20 days or more after you ask for it.

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- ❖ You must ask for your hearing no later than 90 days after the date DSHS denied you.
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What happens after I ask for an administrative hearing?

You can discuss your case with the designated Hearing Coordinator at your local DSHS office. The Office of Administrative Hearings will set a date for administrative hearing, in front of an administrative law judge.

What are my administrative hearing rights?

You have these rights:

- To see and to get copies of the papers in your hearing file before the hearing date.
- To bring a lawyer or someone else to represent you at the hearing.
- To present evidence and witnesses on your behalf at the hearing.

Get legal advice and help **before** your hearing to get ready for it. Call CLEAR or a legal services office with questions. Read *Representing Yourself in an Administrative 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 King County 2-1-1. Dial 2-1-1 or 800-621-4636.

Where can I get more info?

Call CLEAR, or visit our website, www.WashingtonLawHelp.org. You may find other helpful publications there.

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

This information is current as of February 2018.

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