

How to File for Welfare Benefits

In order to qualify for cash assistance, food stamps and medical assistance, a person or family must meet both non-financial and financial criteria.

TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) has a 5 year limit (with some exceptions) and time-outs (periods of time when the 5 year clock stops - e.g. for some victims of domestic violence). The non-financial criteria includes that the family must have dependent children living with them or with other blood relatives, usually where one parent is absent and children are deprived of parental support. Parents can receive TANF even if their child is on SSI.



The financial criteria are that the family must have income below a prescribed family size allowance*. Families can receive partial TANF benefits if there is countable income in the household that is not over the limit. Countable resources must be below \$1,000 for the family.



GA (General Assistance) is a cash assistance program for individuals and families who don't qualify for TANF. GA was largely eliminated from the state budget beginning in August, 2012. The amount of people who qualify is very small, but non-financial criteria for those who remain eligible include:

1. Those who are pregnant;
2. Those living with a child who is related to them;
3. Those who are blind.

The financial criteria are that a family/individual must have income below the family size allowance*, but the earned income deductions are not as generous for GA. Countable resources must be below \$250 for a single person and \$1,000 for two or more people.

Food Stamps – Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program or SNAP. Eligibility is limited for certain groups such as some legal immigrants. Food stamp rules require that groups of people buying and preparing their meals together must apply as one household.



Some people must apply as one household even if not buying and preparing their meals together (e.g. parents with children under the age of 22). Shelter costs (rent/mortgage and utilities) are factored into the food stamp calculation.

The financial criteria – applicant household must have gross income below 130% of the Federal Poverty Income Guidelines** unless the household contains an elderly or disabled member. Household size and net income determine the monthly food stamp allotment.

MA - Medical Assistance – a variety of programs with different eligibility and resource criteria –

NOTE: resources are not counted if there is a child in the home under age 21:



1. Healthy Beginnings – for pregnant women and children up to age 19;
2. Healthy Horizons – for elderly (age 65 and up) and disabled individuals;
3. TANF related MA for families with dependent children;
4. GA-related MA for others – includes qualification for taking health sustaining medications and all of the following non-financial criteria:
 - a. Permanently or temporarily disabled (most used);
 - b. Domestic violence victims – 9 months per lifetime;
 - c. Individuals under 21 years old in high school or vocational school full time;
 - d. Caring for a child or disabled person;
 - e. Undergoing drug/ alcohol treatment which precludes employment -9 month lifetime;
 - f. Pregnant if not eligible for TANF;
 - g. Some two parent budget groups.
5. MAWD – Medical Assistance for Workers with Disabilities – minimal work requirements;
6. SSI (Supplemental Security Income) related MA;
7. Spend Down – for over-income people who have paid/unpaid medical bills;
8. MNO -Medically Needy Only – 6 month determination; often used for already incurred, unpaid medical bills; no prescription coverage.

Notice Requirements:

Applicants: For all benefits an application must be submitted to the County Assistance Office which has up to 30 days to interview an applicant, gather verification and provide written notice of decision. The application can be filed in person, by mail or online at www.compass.state.pa.us. If the application is denied or the applicant does not agree with the amount of benefits listed on the notice, the applicant may appeal and ask for a fair hearing.

Recipients:

If an individual/family is receiving a benefit and the Welfare Office sends notice to decrease or terminate that benefit, the recipient may appeal. If the recipient appeals within 15 days of the date of the notice, benefits should continue pending the outcome of the appeal. This can create an overpayment if the appeal is lost.

Appeal Time Limits:

- 30 days from date of notice for MA or Cash Assistance;
- 90 days for food stamp notices.

The notice packet contains an appeal form which must be completed and submitted to the Welfare Office by mail or fax. Although an oral appeal may be filed for any notice, for cash and MA, a written appeal must be submitted within 3 business days of the date of the oral appeal/call to their caseworker.

Verification:

Documents are the best form of verification of income, resources, disability, shelter costs, citizenship, immigration, identity, etc. Clients are not to be penalized if a failure or delay to provide verification is due to a third party (e.g. former employer, landlord). Alternative verifications or client’s statements should be accepted in these instances. Benefits can be approved even if the verification is provided after an appeal is filed.

County Assistance Offices:

- Adams:** 225 S. Franklin St., Gettysburg - 1-800-638-6816
- Bedford:** 150 North St., Bedford – 1-800-542-8584
- Berks:** 625 Cherry St., Reading – 1-866-215-3912
- Blair:** 110 Green Ave., Altoona -1-866-812-3341
- Centre:** 2580 Park Center Blvd., State College -1-800-355-6024
- Clearfield:** 1025 Leonard St., Clearfield – 1-800-521-9218
- Cumberland:** 33 Westminster Dr., Carlisle - 1-800-269-0173
- Dauphin:** 2432 North 7th St., Harrisburg -1-800-788-5616
- Franklin:** 620 Norland Ave., Chambersburg - 1-877-289-9177
- Fulton:** 539 Fulton Drive, McConnellsburg - 1-800-222-8563
- Huntingdon:** 7591 Lake Raystown Shopping Ctr., Huntingdon, 1-800-237-7674
- Juniata:** 100 Meadow Lane, Mifflintown - 1-800-586-4282
- Lancaster:** 832 Manor St., Lancaster - 717-299-7411
- Lebanon:** 625 South 8th St., Lebanon – 1-800-229-3926
- Mifflin:** 1125 Riverside Dr., Lewistown – 1-800-382-5253
- Perry:** 100 Centre Dr., New Bloomfield – 1-800-991-1929
- Schuylkill:** 2640 Woodglen Rd., Pottsville – 1-877-306-5439
- York:** 130 North Duke St., York – 1-800-991-0929



Fair Hearings have to be held and hearing decisions made within 90 days of the date the appeal was filed for cash and MA; 60 days for food stamp only appeals. These hearings may be conducted by phone or face-to-face in Harrisburg.

Representation: The MidPenn Legal Services' (MPLS) public benefits advocate tries to see all clients with Welfare denials, terminations or reductions. Due to time constraints, frequently clients are asked to file their own appeals and MPLS enters its appearance later in the process. The advocate will advise clients as to the merit of their appeals, will try to negotiate with the Welfare office if warranted, will attend the hearing or withdraw the appeal if necessary. Requests for services from MPLS may be made by calling the local office of MPLS. MPLS does not charge for its representation.

MidPenn Legal Services serves residents of: Adams, Bedford, Berks, Blair, Centre, Clearfield, Cumberland, Dauphin, Franklin, Fulton, Huntingdon, Juniata, Lancaster, Lebanon, Perry, Mifflin, Schuylkill & York Counties.

Altoona

171 Lakemont Park Boulevard
Altoona, PA 16601
800-326-9177

Gettysburg

123 Baltimore St., Ste. 301
Gettysburg, Pa 17325
800-326-9177

Lewistown

3 W. Monument Sq., Ste. 303
Lewistown, PA 17044
800-326-9177

Bedford

232 E. Pitt St.
Bedford, PA 15522
800-326-9177

Harrisburg

213-A N. Front St.
Harrisburg, PA 17101
800-326-9177

Pottsville

315 N. Centre St.
Pottsville, PA 17901
800-326-9177

Carlisle

401 E. Louther St.
Carlisle, PA 17013
800-326-9177

Lancaster

38 N. Christian St., Ste. 200
Lancaster, PA 17602
800-326-9177

Reading

35 N. Sixth St.
Mezzanine Ste. 101
Reading, PA 19601
610/376-8656

Chambersburg

230 Lincoln Way E., Ste. A
Chambersburg, PA 17201
800-326-9177

Lebanon

1150 Chestnut St., Ste. 1
Lebanon, PA 17042
800-326-9177

State College

3500 E. College Ave. Ste. 1295
State College, PA 16801
800-326-9177

Clearfield

211 East Locust St.
Clearfield, PA 16830
800-326-9177

York

29 N. Queen St.
York, PA 17403
800-326-9177

Visit us on the web: www.midpenn.org



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