

Washington Public Assistance for Immigrant Victims of Domestic Violence

Who is this publication for?

This publication will tell you what benefits you may be eligible for if you are an immigrant and a victim of domestic violence.

If you have a different immigration status, please read one of the publications listed below.

- ◆ [Washington Public Assistance for Refugees and Humanitarian Entrants](#)
- ◆ [Washington Public Assistance for Public Interest Parolees](#)
- ◆ [Washington Public Assistance for "Lawfully Present" Residents](#)
- ◆ [I am Undocumented. Can I get Public Assistance?](#)
- ◆ [Washington Public Assistance for Family Visa Beneficiaries](#)
- ◆ [Washington Public Assistance for Immigrants Who Legalized Under the Immigration Reform and Control Act](#)
- ◆ [Washington Public Assistance for Victims of Trafficking](#)
- ◆ [New Citizenship Eligibility Requirements for Basic Health](#)

◆ [Apple Health for Kids Program](#)

I do not have any papers. My husband makes me afraid. He says he will call USCIS if I complain to anyone. What can I do?

You may be able to apply for a green card for yourself and your children under the "Violence Against Women Act" (VAWA) if:

- you are married to a citizen or legal permanent resident; and
- you are the victim of domestic violence.

If you have questions about your immigration status and are a domestic violence victim, call the [Northwest Immigrant Rights Project](#) (NWIRP) at 206-587-4009 or 509-854-2100 to see if they can help you.

How can NWIRP help me?

They can advise you on how to apply for immigration status on your own. Or, if you already have a green card that will expire after two years, they may be able to help you get a permanent card. Their services for low-income domestic violence victims are free or affordable. Everything you say to them is confidential. (They will not tell anyone else what you say.) NWIRP's publication called "[Questions and Answers for Immigrant and Refugee Women](#)" has more information about immigration questions.

Will my family and I be eligible for benefits if we leave my abuser?

Probably! It depends on your immigration status.

Many families are a mixture of citizens, legal residents and undocumented people. Here is a list of what each might be eligible for. These programs require that you have low income and few resources (bank accounts and property).

Undocumented family members:

- **Medical benefits.** Undocumented residents of Washington State can get emergency medical help, and undocumented children and pregnant women can get some medical coverage. In some situations, you may be eligible for the Basic Health Plan, which has premiums and co-payments based upon your income. (Our publication called [New Citizenship Requirements for Basic Health](#) has more information.) Immunizations, testing and treatment of communicable disease are also available from the health department. You may also want to read about the [New Washington Health Program](#).
- **Emergency cash assistance.** A program called Consolidated Emergency Assistance Program (CEAP) is sometimes available to families once a year, depending on funding. (The amount can be up to the amount of a one-month welfare grant.)

US Citizens and Legal Residents (including individuals with a case under VAWA or with family visa petition approved but not living with spouse or parent due to domestic violence):

- **Medical benefits.** Washington State has both federal and state programs that provide emergency medical care for adults and medical coupons to disabled individuals, families, pregnant women and children. NOTE: Families who are legal residents will not be eligible for medical coupons unless they have a status known as “qualified.” Even some “qualified” immigrants may have to wait for five years before they can get non-Emergency Medicaid. If you have been denied, call your local legal services office for advice.

- **Cash Assistance.**

For families--Washington State has Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF--a federal program available to citizens and certain immigrants) and State Family Assistance (SFA - a state program available to other immigrants who have some legal status or whom USCIS does not intend to deport).

For persons who are disabled or 65 and over - A Federal program called Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is available to citizens and certain immigrants.

Food Stamps. Washington State has both federal Food Stamps (for citizens and certain immigrants) and the Food Assistance Program (for immigrants who have some legal status).

How do I apply for help?

Go to the DSHS office nearest you. Fill out an application for benefits. Look in your phone book to find out which office serves your zip code. Take a copy of your immigration documents, if you have them. (This includes a copy of your receipt notice from USCIS.) If you do not have

immigration documents yet, you may still be eligible for some help. If you do not have a social security number, leave that line blank, or put “not available.” DSHS must accept emergency applications at any time. They may be able to help you soon with cash, medical coupons, and food stamps.

What if I do not speak English?

DSHS must give you an interpreter. DSHS must also translate the letters that it sends to you. When you fill out an application, check the box that says that you have a hard time speaking, reading or writing English. DSHS should also get you an interpreter if you have to call your worker on the phone or if she calls you back with a question.

What if I do not read and write, or have a hard time understanding information and following through?

When you apply for help, DSHS will ask you whether you need extra help, such as someone to help you fill out forms, or call you to explain your letters. If you do need this help, say so. Ask that they provide you Necessary Supplemental Accommodation (NSA). For more information on the services provided to someone who needs NSA see our publication entitled “DSHS Help for People with Disabilities: Necessary Supplemental Accommodations (NSA).”

If I get public benefits for myself and my children, will welfare tell my husband where I am?

No. DSHS usually asks for information about the fathers of children who apply for assistance so that they can make sure the

fathers pay child support for their children. This can mean that your children get more money than DSHS will provide.

If you are afraid that your child’s father may try to find you and hurt you, tell DSHS that it should not collect child support for this reason. If your husband has been violent or threatened violence in the past, ask DSHS to keep your address confidential.

My children and I do not have our green cards (lawful permanent residence) yet. Will getting assistance make it hard for us to get our green cards later?

- **Non-cash assistance is ok.** No matter what your immigration status, you and your family **can** get any **non-cash benefit** for which you are eligible, including food stamps, medical coupons (except for institutionalized medical care), child care, and job training, **and still get your green cards later.**
- **Cash assistance** such as TANF, SSI, or the state funded programs of State Family Assistance gotten by U.S. citizens, legal permanent residents, and some immigrants is also ok.
- Cash assistance gotten by immigrants other than those listed above may be a problem if USCIS thinks you are likely to become a public charge. If you do not yet have permanent residence and the cash assistance is the only support you have for your family, talk to an attorney about what you can do to show USCIS that you will be able to support yourself in the future.

◆ If you or your child is a victim of domestic violence and you have petitioned under the Violence Against Women Act, consular officers and USCIS officers cannot hold against you any benefits you have gotten in order to escape the domestic violence. However, they may consider other factors described below.

What proof will USCIS look at in deciding whether I am not likely to become a public charge?

You may need to show that your health, prior work history, age and education make it likely you will go back to work as soon as you have work authorization and have arranged for your family's needs. For VAWA applicants, USCIS cannot look at cash benefits gotten in deciding whether you are likely to become a public charge. If you do not yet have your green card and you need cash assistance to take care of your family, you should show USCIS that the cash assistance was temporary to help you escape from domestic violence.

Other things you can do to get support for yourself and your family include:

- ask DSHS for help getting child support to help pay for your children's needs;
- ask for training and ESL classes to help you get a job.

Our publication called [*Public Charge: When is it Safe for Immigrants to Use Public Benefits?*](#) has more information on public charge.

My abusive husband has sponsored me and my children and filled out an affidavit of support saying he will support us. Can DSHS deny me assistance?

No. DSHS should not make you provide information about your sponsor's income and resources if you are a victim of domestic violence and your need for assistance is related to the domestic violence. DSHS may try to recover the assistance from your sponsor, but they cannot deny you help because he will not pay.

What if I need help getting public assistance for myself or my children?

If you have questions about your eligibility for public assistance or if DSHS has cut off or denied your benefits, get legal advice. Public assistance rules are complicated. DSHS workers sometimes make mistakes because they do not know immigration law. Often a lawyer or advocate can help make sure that you and your family get the benefits you need to keep you safe and healthy. You can:

- **Apply online with CLEAR*Online** - <http://nwjustice.org/clear-online>
or
- Call CLEAR at 1-888-201-1014

CLEAR is Washington's toll-free, statewide intake, advice and referral service for low-income people looking for free legal help with civil legal problems.

- **Outside King County:** Call 1-888-201-1014 weekdays from 9:10 a.m. until 12:25 p.m. CLEAR works with a language line to provide free

interpreters as needed. If you are deaf or hard of hearing, call 1-888-201-1014 using your preferred TTY or Video relay service.

- **King County:** Call 211 for information and referral to a legal services provider Monday through Friday from 8:00 am – 6:00 pm. Or call (206) 461-3200, or the toll-free number 1-877-211-WASH (9274). 211 works with a language line to provide free interpreters as needed.

If you are deaf or hard of hearing, call 1-800-833-6384 or 711. You will be connected to a relay operator at no cost, who will then connect you with 211. You may also find information on King County legal service providers on 211's website: www.resourcehouse.com/win211/.

- **If you are age 60 or Over:** Call CLEAR*Sr. at 1-888-387-7111, regardless of your income.

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