



# Washington Public Assistance for Refugees and Humanitarian Entrants

(Includes Refugees, Asylees, Persons Granted Withholding of Deportation, Cuban Haitian Entrants and Persons Granted Conditional Entrance)

This brochure will tell you what benefits you may be eligible for if you are in one of the groups above. If you have a different immigration status please read one of the brochures listed below.

- **Washington Public Assistance for Public Interest Parolees**
- **Washington Public Assistance for Family Visa Beneficiaries**
- **Washington Public Assistance for Legal Residents (Permanently Residing Under Color of Law)**
- **Washington Public Assistance for Undocumented Immigrants**
- **Washington Public Assistance for Immigrant Victims of Domestic Violence**
- **Washington Public Assistance for Immigrants Who Legalized Under the Immigration Reform and Control Act**

## How can I tell if I am a refugee or humanitarian entrant?

Your immigration documents should list your status either by name or with a code. If you don't have a document that shows your status, consult an immigration lawyer or call Northwest Immigrant Rights Project at (206) 587-4009 or (509) 854-2100 for advice. You may also be able to get assistance from DSHS to help you obtain copies of immigration documents you have lost.

Here is a brief description of the immigration groups covered by this brochure:

- **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
- **Conditional entrants** – persons granted refugee status prior to 1980
- **Asylees** – persons found to meet refugee criteria but who have applied for status in the U.S.
- **Persons granted Withholding of Deportation** – similar to asylee status but granted in a deportation hearing

- **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 have not received a final order of deportation.

### **I am a refugee or humanitarian entrant. What benefits can I receive?**

You may be eligible to receive federal benefits such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Medicaid (including, emergency, pre-natal and children's health programs), federal Food Stamps, and social services. You may also be eligible for state benefits like General Assistance-Unemployable, food assistance (if not eligible for the federal program) and health care programs for emergency costs. You may also be eligible for the Basic Health Plan and Hospital Charity Care. Of course, you must have low income and few resources and meet other program requirements.

### **What should I do if I need welfare benefits and I don't speak English?**

The welfare office is required to provide you with a free interpreter without delay. Be sure to mark on the application form if you have difficulty in reading, speaking or understanding English. The office should also send you translated notices about your benefits so that you can read about your rights and responsibilities in your own language. Keep a copy of the letters the welfare office sends you. When you take information to the office, ask them to make a copy for you to keep and stamp the date on both copies. If you have not received interpreters or notices in your own language and the welfare office has cut off your benefits, you may be able to get your benefits back.

### **Are there any special programs for refugees?**

Yes. The Refugee Assistance Program provides cash assistance and medical coupons to eligible low-income refugees and persons paroled as refugees for up to eight months after they enter the United States. This program also provides cash and medical assistance to eligible asylees for eight months starting from the date they were granted asylum.

### **Am I eligible for SSI?**

Possibly, since immigrants in this category can get SSI to the same extent as citizens during the first seven years that they have that immigration status. However, if you came to the United States before August 22, 1996 and have had your immigration status longer than seven years, you may need to show you are disabled (even if you are already 65) in order to keep receiving SSI. In addition, if you came to the United States on or after August 22, 1996, you will probably need to become a citizen if you wish to continue to be eligible for SSI. For more information, especially about special eligibility rules for people who have a work history or are in the armed services, consult a legal services lawyer.

## **Can receiving cash assistance prevent me from getting a green card (lawful permanent residence) or becoming a citizen?**

No. Refugees and humanitarian entrants may receive cash benefits and still be eligible to get a green card or their citizenship, with two exceptions. First, immigrants who **fraudulently** receive public assistance may have trouble becoming citizens and may even face deportation if convicted of a crime. Second, immigrants who have green cards, who spend more than six months outside the U.S. and are dependent on **cash** assistance for support may also have trouble reentering the country. Receiving non-cash benefits like medical coupons or food stamps – except for medical benefits for persons institutionalized for long term care – is not a problem. Consult an immigration attorney for questions or read our brochure *New INS Guidance on “Public Charge”: When is it Safe to Use Public Benefits?* for more information.

## **Can I be denied assistance because I have a sponsor?**

No, refugees who may have a sponsoring organization are not subject to the rules on sponsor deeming even though you must report any **actual income** your sponsoring organization has given you. The sponsor deeming rules only apply to immigrants who have immigrated to the United States with an affidavit of support (Form I-864) filled out on their behalf.

## **What if the welfare office denies my application?**

If the welfare office denies your application or terminates your benefits it may be because you are no longer eligible. It may also be because the rules are complicated and the welfare office has made a mistake. If you believe you are eligible or would like another person to review your case, you should either tell your worker that you want a Fair Hearing or ask for a copy of the Hearing Request form to fill out. There is no fee or penalty for requesting a fair hearing and you can always withdraw your request later if you believe the welfare office was correct. You should also contact a legal services office for advice.

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*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 the date of its printing, May 2001.*

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