



Public benefits

Public benefits in the USA help provide support for food, cash assistance, medical care, and more for low-income individuals and families. If you are a refugee or immigrant, there are specific programs available to help meet your basic needs. Here's a simple guide on how to apply for public benefits in the USA.

Determine Your Eligibility

Public benefits are typically based on income and family size, so before you apply, it's important to assess if you meet the eligibility criteria. For refugees and immigrants, some programs might have different rules.

Gather the Required Documents

Before applying for public benefits, make sure you have all the necessary documents. These may include:

1. **Proof of Immigration Status:** Example: I-94 (Arrival/Departure Record) for refugees and Visa Foil for Special Immigration Visa (SIV) holders.
2. **Social Security Number (SSN) or Proof of Application for SSN:** Both refugees and Special Immigration Visa holders need to apply for an SSN if they have not received one within 14 days of arrival. You will need either proof of application or the actual SSN.
3. **Proof of Address:** This could be a utility bill, lease agreement, or a signed statement if you do not have a rental agreement.
4. **Photo ID for Each Family Member:** A valid photo ID such as a passport or a state-issued ID.
5. **Proof of Income:** Provide details about any current income such as wages, benefits, etc. If you don't have a bank account, include a statement about cash on hand.
6. **School Enrollment for Children:** For families with children, include proof of school enrollment.
7. **Vaccination Records:** Proof of vaccinations, especially for children.
8. **Statements Regarding Special Circumstances:** For example, if you don't have a rental contract, provide a signed and dated statement about your current living situation and the cost to stay.

Choose Your Public Benefits Program

There are different public benefits programs available, including cash assistance, food support, medical care, and more. The main programs are:

1. **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)**
 - Provides cash assistance for basic needs like food, housing, home energy, and child care.
 - Find your local TANF program: [TANF State Directory](#)
2. **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**
 - Provides monthly food benefits through an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card.
 - Find your local SNAP program: [SNAP State Directory](#)
3. **Medicaid**
 - Offers free or low-cost health care for low-income individuals, covering primary care, hospital visits, prescription medications, dental, and vision.
 - Find more about Medicaid: [Medicaid State Directory](#)
4. **Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA)**

Those not eligible for SSI or TANF may receive RCA. Counting from their date of eligibility, individuals may receive up to 12 months of RCA to help meet their most basic needs, such as food, shelter, and transportation. RCA is linked to programming that provides family self-sufficiency planning and employment services to help clients assess their needs, plan how to meet these needs, and immediately find and maintain employment. Find out more: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/programs/refugees/cma>
5. **Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA)**

RMA provides short-term (12 months from date of arrival) medical coverage to refugees ineligible for Medicaid. The benefits are generally similar to Medicaid. Find out more <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/programs/refugees/cma>

6. **Supplemental Security Income (SSI)**

SSI provides monthly payments for individuals with a disability or blindness who have income and resources below specific financial limits. SSI payments are also made to qualifying individuals (including refugees) aged 65 and older without disabilities who meet the financial qualifications. To learn more visit:

<https://www.ssa.gov/pubs/EN-05-11051.pdf> To apply, visit your local Social Security Administration Field Office. Social Security Administration Office Locator <https://www.ssa.gov/locator/>

7. **Women, Infants and Children (WIC)**

WIC provides federal grants to states for supplemental foods, health care referrals, and nutrition education for low-income pregnant, breastfeeding, and non-breastfeeding postpartum women, infants, and children up to age five who are found to be at nutritional risk. To apply, contact your nearest [USDA Food and Nutrition Service \(FNS\) regional office](#) for information on the WIC program in your state. For additional WIC information and application assistance: <https://www.feedingamerica.org/need-help-find-food/wic>

Apply for Benefits

There are two main ways to apply for public benefits.

Option 1: Apply Online

- **Create an account:** Visit the official website of the program you wish to apply for. Each program has an online portal where you can apply and upload required documents.
- **Complete the application:** Fill out the online application form. Provide accurate information regarding your income, family size, and other details.
- **Submit required documents:** Upload scanned copies of the required documents.
- **Confirmation:** After submission, you will receive an email confirming your application.

Option 2: Apply In-Person or By Mail

- **Visit your local office:** Find your nearest benefits office using the links below.
- **Complete the application:** You can either fill out the forms in person or take them home and complete them.
- **Submit documents:** Submit the completed forms with all required documents in person or by mail. Be sure to keep copies for your records.

Follow Up on Your Application

- After submitting your application, you may be asked to provide additional documentation or information. It's important to follow up regularly to ensure your application is being processed.
- If your application is approved, you will begin receiving benefits. If your application is denied, you may have the option to appeal the decision.

Maintain Your Benefits

- **Report changes:** You must report any changes in your income, family size, address, or other circumstances to your local benefits office to continue receiving benefits.
- **Recertification:** Most programs require you to recertify your eligibility. Depending on your state, the recertification process could happen every six months or every year. Be sure to complete the recertification on time.

Helpful Links to Apply for Public Benefits

- **TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families):** [TANF State Directory](#)
- **SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program):** [SNAP State Directory](#)
- **Medicaid:** [Medicaid State Directory](#)
- **Social Security Administration (SSI):** [SSA Office Locator](#)
- **WIC (Women, Infants, and Children):** [WIC Program Information](#)

Determine Your Eligibility

Important Tips for a Successful Application:

- **Accuracy:** Be sure to fill out all forms accurately and completely.
- **Timely Submission:** Submit your application as soon as possible to avoid delays.
- **Keep Copies:** Always keep copies of your application and documents for your records.
- **Be Prepared:** Some programs may require follow-up paperwork, so be ready to provide additional information when requested.