

**3**<sup>rd</sup>  
EDITION

# Get the facts!

Public Benefits that Can Help You  
with Basic Living Costs

 CHICAGO JOBS COUNCIL



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# Acknowledgements

**Get the Facts** was first created in 1997 by the Chicago Jobs Council's Welfare-to-Work Group. A second edition in English and Spanish was developed in 1999. Group members are providers of employment services for people who receive public benefits. Some members are advocates for people who are poor. Together, the Chicago Jobs Council and its members work to ensure access to employment and career advancement opportunities for people in poverty.

The first and second edition of **Get the Facts** explained rules of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. TANF is the name of Illinois' welfare program. This third edition of **Get the Facts** includes basic information about TANF and other cash assistance programs, food stamps, medical assistance, and childcare programs in Illinois. It is based on information in the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) policy manual.

CJC thanks members of the **Get the Facts** Advisory Committee who shaped the third edition, with particular gratitude to Gina Guillemette and Wendy Pollack who contributed significant comment and expertise:

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This third edition of **Get the Facts** was guided by the work of volunteers on the previous editions and CJC staff members. Rose Karasti, Senior Policy Associate, is the principle author.

To get your own copy of **Get the Facts** go to the **Chicago Jobs Council's website, [www.cjc.net](http://www.cjc.net)**. If you would like to be alerted about PDF updates to this booklet please send your email address to **[rose@cjc.net](mailto:rose@cjc.net)**. For more information about CJC or this booklet contact Rose Karasti, 312-252-0460, ext. 309 or **[rose@cjc.net](mailto:rose@cjc.net)**.



# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	vii
<b>PART 1 – Questions about Public Benefits Eligibility, Application, and Your Rights</b> .....	1-1
<b>1. Can I get cash assistance?</b> .....	1-3
Eligibility Basics	
<i>Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)</i>	
<i>Aid to the Aged, Blind, and Disabled (AABD)</i>	
<i>General Assistance (GA)</i>	
Crisis Assistance	
Job Cost Assistance – Front Door Services	
<b>2. Can I get food stamps?</b> .....	2-1
Eligibility Basics	
Emergency or Expedited Food Stamps	
Work Activity Requirements	
<b>3. Can I get medical assistance?</b> .....	3-1
Eligibility Basics for Children and Pregnant Women	
<i>All Kids</i>	
Eligibility Basics for Adults	
<i>Medicaid</i>	
<i>FamilyCare</i>	
<i>Aid to the Aged, Blind, and Disabled (AABD)</i>	
<b>4. Can I get child care assistance?</b> .....	4-1
Eligibility Basics	
Finding and Paying a Child Care Provider	
<b>5. How do I apply for and get public benefits?</b> .....	5-1
The Application Process	
<i>At the IDHS Office</i>	
<i>With a Computer</i>	
<i>Meeting a Caseworker</i>	
Continued Food Stamps and TANF Cash Assistance	
Child Support Cooperation	
Cash and Food Stamps on the Link Card	
<i>Getting Cash</i>	
<i>Buying Food</i>	
Medical Cards	

**6. What do I need to know about my rights? ..... 6-1**

The Appeal Process  
Where to Get Help

**PART 2 — Questions about Receiving TANF Cash Assistance ..... 7-1**

**7. How much TANF cash assistance will I get? ..... 7-3**

TANF Cash Grant Amounts  
Differences in Grant Amounts

**8. How long can I get TANF cash assistance? ..... 8-1**

Time Limits  
*Months the TANF Counter Stops*  
*60 Month Exceptions*

**9. What do I have to know about keeping my  
TANF cash assistance? ..... 9-1**

Work Activity Requirements  
The Family Assessment  
The Responsibility and Services Plan (RSP)  
Good Cause Exemptions

**10. What things can I do to meet my TANF  
work activity requirements? ..... 10-1**

Work Activities  
*College*  
*Job Training*  
*Literacy, English as a Second Language (ESL), or GED Classes*  
*Work Programs*  
*Community Service*  
*Self-Employment Activities*  
*Job Search*  
*Counseling or Treatment Programs*

**11. Are there any times I don't have to meet the  
TANF work activity requirements? ..... 11-1**

*Exemptions that Do Not Stop the Counter*  
*Exemptions that Stop the Counter*

**12. Can I get assistance with costs like work  
uniforms and transportation? ..... 12-1**

Work and Education Supports



<b>13. How will getting a job affect the TANF cash assistance I get? .....</b>	<b>13-1</b>
Work Pays	
Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)	
<b>14. What happens if I can't or don't follow the rules? ....</b>	<b>14-1</b>
Sanctions	
Cancellation of TANF Cash Assistance	
<b>PART 3 — Questions about Benefits Rules for Different Situations .....</b>	<b>15-1</b>
<b>15. What if I move? .....</b>	<b>15-3</b>
<b>16. What do I need to know if I am a teen parent? .....</b>	<b>16-1</b>
Special TANF Eligibility Rules	
<i>Adult-Supervised Living Situation Requirement</i>	
<i>School or Work Requirements</i>	
<i>Getting Your Own Grant</i>	
Teen Parent Services Program	
Other Benefits	
<b>17. What do I need to know if I am an immigrant? .....</b>	<b>17-1</b>
Benefits Eligibility	
<i>Eligibility Exceptions</i>	
<b>18. What if I experience domestic violence? .....</b>	<b>18-1</b>
Domestic Violence Exclusion	
Child Support Enforcement Exception	
<b>19. What if I have a criminal record? .....</b>	<b>19-1</b>
Benefits Eligibility	
<i>Drug-Related Felonies</i>	
<i>Benefits Fraud</i>	
<i>Fugitive Felons or Probation/Parole Violations</i>	
<b>20. What if I am homeless? .....</b>	<b>20-1</b>
Benefits Eligibility	

**21. What if I, my spouse, or child has a disability or health problem? ..... 21-1**

Benefits Eligibility

- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)*
- Aid to the Aged, Blind, and Disabled (AABD)*
- TANF Cash Assistance*
- Other Benefits*

# Get the Facts

## INTRODUCTION

You know it can be hard to support yourself or your family. But do you know that **when you are not working** you may be able to **get help with some of your basic living costs?** Do you know that **even when you are working**, you may be able to **get help with some of your basic living costs?** You may qualify for help with your grocery costs. You may be able to get medical assistance, so that when someone in your family is sick they can see a doctor. You may be able to get help paying for child care.

This is the Chicago Jobs Council's 3rd Edition of **Get the Facts**. We wrote this booklet so that you and your family could learn what help you might be able to get. We wrote it to explain some of the most basic rules of Illinois' public benefits programs:

- **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)** - the state's cash assistance program for pregnant women and families with children.
- the **Food Stamp** program.
- medical insurance programs like **Medicaid, All Kids, and FamilyCare**.
- the **Child Care** program.

**These programs are complicated. You should know that we can't explain all the rules for public benefits programs in this booklet.** The Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) is the state agency that runs the cash assistance, Food Stamp, and childcare programs. The Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services (IDHFS) runs the medical assistance and child support enforcement programs. IDHS and IDHFS have more rules that may determine whether you can get help.

In **Get the Facts**, most of the things we talk about may be useful to you if you are pregnant or have children who live with you. Some of the things we explain may be useful to you if you are single and without children in your care. A part of this booklet explains benefits rules for different situations. Two of these situations are homelessness or domestic violence. We have also tried to include phone numbers or website addresses of places that have other helpful information.

The **Table of Contents** lists all the questions we have asked and answered. You can use it to find the information that is most important to you. We hope you will **get the facts** about programs that can help you with your basic living costs.



# **PART 1**

## **Questions about Public Benefits Eligibility, Application, And Your Rights**



# 1. Can I get cash assistance?

Cash assistance programs give low-income individuals and families a monthly cash grant to help pay for basic living costs.

## ELIGIBILITY BASICS

If you are pregnant or you have children in your care or custody, you might qualify for cash assistance from the **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)** program or the **General Assistance – Family and Children Assistance (GA-FCA)** program.

If you **do not have children** in your care or custody, you still might be able to get some cash assistance. Two different IDHS programs offer some cash assistance for adults only: **Aid to the Aged, Blind, and Disabled (AABD)** or **General Assistance - Transitional Assistance (GA-TA)**.

### Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

To get cash assistance in the TANF program you must have little or no income. You can only have a few assets. Assets are things like money in the bank or a car. One of the following things must also be true:

- You have custody of your children who are under age 18.
- Your 18 year-old child is living with you and attending school full-time.
- You are pregnant.
- You are the caretaker of a relative's children. For example, you might be a grandparent raising grandchildren.

Unless you get TANF cash assistance for your children only, you must meet work activity requirements. Work activities are things like paid work, school, and work preparation programs. There are other reasons you may be excused from work activity requirements. See Part 2 of this booklet for more information about rules of the TANF program.

### Aid to the Aged, Blind, and Disabled (AABD)

To qualify for cash assistance in the AABD program you must have little or no income. You can only have a few assets. Assets are things like money in the bank or a car. One of the following things must also be true:

- You are 65 years old or older.
- You meet a Social Security Administration (SSA) or Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) definition of blind.
- You meet a SSA or IDHS definition of disabled.

To get more information about AABD go to your local IDHS office.

**? HELP** Get help to find your local IDHS office from:

**Illinois Department of Human Services**  
**[www.dhs.state.il.us/officeLocator/](http://www.dhs.state.il.us/officeLocator/)**

**? HELP** Get legal help or information about AABD from:

**Health and Disability Advocates**  
**312-223-9600**

## **General Assistance (GA-TA or GA-FCA)**

To get cash from the Transitional Assistance program or the Family and Children Assistance program you must have little or no income. You can only have a few assets. Assets are things like money in the bank or a car. IDHS must also determine you are “not employable.” You are not employable if you:

- have a medical condition of your own or someone you care for has a medical condition;
- are homeless;
- are 18 years old and are in full-time school work; or
- are 55 years old or older and your income is below \$2000 a year.

The Transitional Assistance payment level in Illinois is \$100 a month. The Family and Children Assistance payment level is the same as the TANF payment level. For more information about GA-TA or GA-FCA go to your local IDHS office (see the top of this page).

## **CRISIS ASSISTANCE**

**In times of emergency** you can get cash assistance from the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) more quickly. IDHS calls this emergency money **Crisis Assistance**. You can get Crisis Assistance if you already receive TANF cash assistance. You can also get Crisis Assistance if you are applying for TANF cash assistance for the first time.



**Crisis Assistance can be given to you when you become homeless, or are in danger of becoming homeless** due to:

- a fire, flood, or other natural disaster;
- an eviction or court order to leave your home for any reason;
- abuse by a person who still lives in your home.



Crisis Assistance can also be given to you when you:

- need to buy your family things like furniture and clothes that you lost in a fire, flood, or other natural disaster;
- do not have food because of a fire, flood, or other disaster and your food stamps are not enough;
- cannot buy food or clothes you need because your money was lost or stolen. The Crisis Assistance you may get will not be more than the money that was lost. The help you may get will not be more than the amount of your TANF cash assistance.

-  **IMPORTANT** You can apply for TANF cash at the same time you ask for Crisis Assistance. If you are eligible, you should receive Crisis Assistance and TANF within five days after you ask for help.
-  **COMMON PROBLEM** You might have trouble when you apply for cash assistance. You may not get the cash assistance you ask for. You might not get your Crisis Assistance fast enough. Talk to your IDHS caseworker or a supervisor about any problems. If you don't get the cash assistance you think you should get, you have the right to file an appeal (see Question 6).

-  **HELP** Get legal help or information about any cash assistance program from:

**Public Benefits Hotline**  
1-888-893-5327 (Cook County)


**Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance Foundation**  
1-877-342-7891 (Southern and part of Central Illinois)

**Prairie State Legal Services**  
1-800-690-2130 (Northern and part of Central Illinois)

**Illinois Legal Aid**  
[www.IllinoisLegalAid.org](http://www.IllinoisLegalAid.org)

## **JOB COST ASSISTANCE – FRONT DOOR SERVICES**

Sometimes you only need some help with a job cost like a work uniform, public transit fare, or union dues. You may not want to get TANF cash assistance. An IDHS **Front Door Services provider** has money for costs that help you start or keep a job. You **must have a referral form** from IDHS before getting money from a Front Door Services provider. Ask an IDHS worker to refer you to a Front Door Services provider that can help you.

 **IMPORTANT** You do not have to accept a referral for Front Door Services help instead of TANF cash assistance. If you think you will need cash assistance to help you with basic living costs you should apply for TANF. **If you want TANF cash assistance IDHS must let you start an application with your name, address, and signature when you visit a local IDHS office.**

## 2. Can I get food stamps?

The Food Stamp program gives individuals and families a monthly grant to buy food.

### ELIGIBILITY BASICS


You may qualify for food stamps if you live in a family or are single. You may qualify even if you are working. Your income before taxes, called **gross income**, cannot be larger than limits set by the government. The chart below shows the highest gross income you can have in a month and still receive food stamps if you live in Illinois. These income amounts are different if you are aged 60 or older, or if you are disabled.

Number of People in Household	Highest Gross Monthly Income
1	\$1,107
2	\$1,484
3	\$1,861
4	\$2,238
5	\$2,615
6	\$2,992

To get food stamps your assets cannot be worth more than \$2000. Assets are things like a car or a bank account. If you or a member of your family is aged 60 or older your assets cannot be worth more than \$3000. The following things **do not count as an asset**:

- your home;
- clothing;
- furnishings;
- one car;
- retirement account.

How your eligibility for food stamps is figured out is very complicated. Other income and different living situations can change the amount of food stamps you may get. If you get food stamps, IDHS expects you to **report new employment income within 10 days of getting your job.**

 **IMPORTANT** You may get help with food stamps even if you work **full-time**. For every \$1 of increased income your food stamps will only go down about 30 cents.

## EMERGENCY OR EXPEDITED FOOD STAMPS

There are times when you need food stamps right away to help feed your family. You can ask for emergency or **expedited food stamps**. **If you are eligible you will get expedited food stamps within 5 days.** You are eligible for expedited food stamps if at least one of the following is true:

- your monthly income and bank accounts are less than your rent or house payment plus your utility costs;
- your monthly income is less than \$150 and your cash and bank accounts are not more than \$100; or
- at least one person in your household is a migrant farm worker and your cash and bank accounts are not more than \$100.

**!** **IMPORTANT** If you are eligible for expedited food stamps an IDHS worker must schedule you to complete an application the day you ask for this emergency help or the following day. At the time you apply, you only need some proof of your identity.

**!** **IMPORTANT** If you live in **DuPage, Kane, Lake, or Will County** you may apply for emergency food stamps at some food pantries. This is called **Express Stamps**. Even if you are not eligible for Express Stamps, you may still be eligible for food stamps and should complete an application (See Question 5).

## WORK ACTIVITY REQUIREMENTS

If you are **aged 18 – 49, you must register for work activity when you apply for food stamps**. You can register with an **IDHS Food Stamp Employment and Training Program**. You can also register in any other IDHS work activity program. In work activity programs you may be expected to go to classes that help you get ready for a job. **You may have to go to job interviews and accept a job offer. You must follow the rules of the work activity program in order to receive the full amount of your food stamps.**

You **do not have to be in a work activity program** if you are:

- already working 30 hours a week;
- pregnant
- responsible for the care of a child under age 18;
- already in a TANF work activity program;
- not able to work due to a mental or physical health condition;
- caring for a person unable to care for themselves;
- getting unemployment insurance or registered at the state unemployment insurance agency;
- in a drug or alcohol treatment program;
- a student in school at least part time.

**If you live in McLean or Sangamon County you have to do some work activity to get food stamps for more than 3 months in a 36 month period.**

**You can get food stamps for more than 3 months if:**

- you work 68 hours a month;
- you are in the IDHS Food Stamp Employment and Training program;
- you are in a work program sponsored by another government department; or
- you volunteer at a community-based organization, church or other community service agency. The number of required hours you must volunteer is your food stamp amount divided by \$6.50.

**? HELP** Get help or more information about food stamps from:

**Illinois Hunger Hotline**  
**1-800-359-2163**

Get legal help or information about the Food Stamp program from:

**Public Benefits Hotline**  
**1-888-893-5327** (Cook County)

**Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance Foundation**  
**1-877-342-7891** (Southern and part of Central Illinois)

**Prairie State Legal Services**  
**1-800-690-2130** (Northern and part of Central Illinois)


**Illinois Legal Aid**  
**[www.IllinoisLegalAid.org](http://www.IllinoisLegalAid.org)**



### 3. Can I get medical assistance?

Medical assistance programs help pay for health care. You may be able to get medical assistance for yourself or for your children if you do not have health insurance. You may also get medical assistance if you are aged 65 or older, are blind, or disabled. If you are a single adult and you get General Assistance, you may get some medical assistance.

Each of the different medical assistance programs in Illinois has different income limits and other qualifying rules. The medical assistance you can get is based on your family situation, work status, and income. The major medical assistance programs are explained below.

 **IMPORTANT** The tables used here give monthly income limits for medical assistance. **If you earn an amount that's more than the limit, but close to the limit, you should apply for medical assistance.** When your eligibility is determined, IDHFS allows different things to be subtracted from your income, like childcare costs. These things are called “deductions” or “disregards.” You may still be eligible for medical assistance, even if your income is higher than the limit, after allowable deductions.

## ELIGIBILITY BASICS FOR CHILDREN AND PREGNANT WOMEN

### Moms & Babies

If you are pregnant, you may qualify for medical assistance under Illinois' **Moms & Babies** program. You can get Moms & Babies assistance while you are **pregnant and 60 days after your baby is born.** The table below shows the income limits based on family size.

Family Size	Monthly Income Limit
1	NA
2	Up to \$2,282 per month
3	Up to \$2,862 per month
4	Up to \$3,442 per month
5	Up to \$4,022 per month

## **All Kids**

Your children may be able to get medical assistance under Illinois' **All Kids** program. KidCare and Medicaid are now part of All Kids. **Even if you are working**, you may get All Kids for your children. All Kids can also help you pay some of your cost of your employer's health insurance for your children. The table on the next page explains the eight levels of assistance under the All Kids program. **Co-payments and premiums** are the amount of money you have to pay.

Some children must be uninsured for 12 months to get All Kids. There are some exceptions to this rule. For example, your child may have lost insurance when a parent lost a job. You should call or visit your neighborhood IDHS office to determine your eligibility.



**Monthly Income Box**

Family Size	All Kids Assist	All Kids Share	All Kids Premium Level 1	All Kids Premium Level 2	All Kids Premium Level 3	All Kids Premium Level 4	All Kids Premium Level 5-7	All Kids Premium Level 8
1	\$1,132 or less	\$1,133 – 1,276	\$1,277 – 1,702	\$1,703 – 2,553	\$2,554 – 3,403	\$3,404-4,254	\$4,255 – 6,807	\$6,808 or more
2	\$1,517 or less	\$1,518 – 1,711	\$1,712 – 2,282	\$2,283 – 3,423	\$3,424 – 4,563	\$4,564 – 5,704	\$5,705 – 9,127	\$9,128 or more
3	\$1,903 or less	\$1,904 – 2,146	\$2,147 – 2,862	\$2,863 – 4,293	\$4,294 – 5,723	\$5,724 – 7,154	\$7,155 – 11,447	\$11,448 or more
4	\$2,289 or less	\$2,290 – 2,581	\$2,582 – 3,442	\$3,443 – 5,163	\$5,164 – 6,883	\$6,884 – 8,604	\$8,605 – 13,767	\$13,768 or more
5	\$2,674 or less	\$2,675 – 3,016	\$3,017 – 4,022	\$4,023 – 6,033	\$6,034 – 8,043	\$8,044 – 10,054	\$10,055 – 16,087	\$16,088 or more
<b>Cost Box</b>								
<b>Monthly Premium</b>	None	None	1 child: \$15 2 children: \$25 More children: \$5 each	\$40 per child	\$70 per child	\$100 per child	\$150 – 250 per child	\$300 per child
<b>Max Monthly Premium</b>	N/A	N/A	\$40 for 5 or more children	\$80 for 2 or more children	\$140 for 2 or more children	\$200 for 2 or more children	No Cap	No Cap
<b>Co-Payments for Physician Office Visit</b>	None	\$2	\$5	\$10	\$15	\$20	\$25	\$25

\*\* No co-payment when a child gets a regular check-up or shots. These are free for all children enrolled in All Kids.  
(Table adapted from the State of Illinois All Kids website, [www.allkids.com](http://www.allkids.com)).

## ELIGIBILITY BASICS FOR ADULTS

### Medicaid

**If you and your children get TANF cash assistance you also qualify for medical assistance.** You get a **Medicaid card** to use for many health care needs including:

- doctor visits;
- dentist visits;
- clinic visits;
- eye care;
- prescriptions, and
- emergency care.

### FamilyCare

**If your children get All Kids, (see page 3-2) you may qualify for FamilyCare medical assistance.** The table below explains the eight levels of FamilyCare. Co-payments and premiums are the amount of money you have to pay.

Family Size	FamilyCare Assist	FamilyCare Share	FamilyCare Premium	FamilyCare Rebate
	You pay only a \$2-\$3 co-payment for prescriptions and doctor visits if your monthly income is:	You pay only a \$2 co-payment for prescriptions and doctor visits if your monthly income is:	You pay a monthly premium of \$15-\$40 depending on family size, \$3-\$5 co-payment for prescriptions, and \$25 per doctor visit if your monthly income is:	You may get FamilyCare Rebate if you have insurance with your job and your monthly income is:
1	\$1,132 or less	\$1,133-1,276	\$1,277- 1,574	\$1,133- 1,574
2	\$1,517 or less	\$1,518-1,711	\$1,712- 2,111	\$1,518- 2,111
3	\$1,903 or less	\$1,904- 2,146	\$2,147- 2,647	\$1,904- 2,647
4	\$2,289 or less	\$2,290- 2,581	\$2,582- 3,184	\$2,290- 3,184
5	\$2,674 or less	\$2,675- 3,106	\$3,017- 3,720	\$2,675- 3,720
6	\$3,060 or less	\$3,061- 3,451	\$3,452- 4,257	\$3,061- 4,257
7	\$3,446 or less	\$3,447- 3,886	\$3,887- 4,793	\$3,447- 4,793
8	\$3,832 or less	\$3,833- 4,321	\$4,322- 5,330	\$3,833- 5,330



**HELP** Get more information about All Kids and FamilyCare from:

**All Kids Hotline**  
**1-866-255-5437**  
**www.allkidscovered.com.**

### **Aid to the Aged, Blind, and Disabled (AABD)**

You may get **AABD medical assistance** if you are aged 65 or older, blind, or disabled. Your income must be at or below limits set by the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services (IDHFS). The following table shows the income limits based on family size.

<b>Family Size</b>	<b>Monthly Income Limit</b>
1	\$851
2	\$1,141
3	\$1,431
4	\$1,721
5	\$2,011
6	\$2,301

**Your monthly income may be greater than the amounts in the table above. If your medical costs are large, you may still be able to get medical assistance.** The IDHFS will expect you to pay some of your costs and then they will cover other costs. The costs you must pay is called your “spend down”. Spend down rules are very complicated.



**IMPORTANT** If you are single or if you have children in your household and you need help to cover medical care, **you should apply for assistance.** There are many rules in Illinois’ medical assistance programs. It is hard to be sure if you are eligible for help. You and your family may qualify for medical assistance, even if another person or family similar to yours does not.

All programs except All Kids and FamilyCare will help with bills for medical care you got up to three months before your application.

**HELP**

Get legal help or information about medical assistance programs from:

**Public Benefits Hotline**

**1-888-893-5327** (Cook County)

**Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance Foundation**

**1-877-342-7891** (Southern and part of Central Illinois)

**Prairie State Legal Services**

**1-800-690-2130** (Northern and part of Central Illinois)

**Illinois Legal Aid**

**[www.IllinoisLegalAid.org](http://www.IllinoisLegalAid.org)**

## 4. Can I get child care assistance?

The state's child care assistance program helps low-income families pay for the child care they need to work, go to school, or be in an approved work activity.

### ELIGIBILITY BASICS

**You can get help with child care costs for your children who are younger than 13 years old. Child care assistance is also available for your 13 – 18 year-old child who needs adult care due to a health condition or court order. You must meet income eligibility limits.**

**You do not have to get TANF cash assistance to get child care help, but you must be in an approved work activity.** You can be approved for child care assistance if you are:

- a working parent;
- a teen parent, under the age of 20, in school or a GED program;
- a parent in a 2- or 4-year degree program and also working 10 hours a week;
- a parent in an adult basic education, English as a Second Language (ESL), GED, or vocational education program for up to two years;
- a parent in an education program for more than two years and working 20 hours a week; or
- on TANF and working or in an education, training, or some other program that is a part of your Responsibility and Services Plan (RSP)(see Question 9).

**You will have to pay some of the cost of childcare yourself.** Your share of the cost is based on your income, family size, and the number of children in child care. As your income grows, the amount of your child care cost that you must pay will increase. The amount you must pay is called your **co-payment**. The table below helps you understand the amount of money you can earn and still be eligible for childcare assistance.

Family Size	Monthly Income Limit
2	\$2,051
3	\$2,533
4	\$3,016
5	\$3,498
6	\$3,981


When you need cash assistance for childcare right away, IDHS may refer you to a **Front Door Services provider** (see Question 1). This kind of help might be necessary when you need childcare while you go to a meeting at your local IDHS office or go to a job interview.

## FINDING AND PAYING A CHILD CARE PROVIDER

You can choose your own child care provider. The provider can be a relative, friend or a child care program in your neighborhood or near your work place. IDHS will pay for approved providers, including:

- a licensed child care center;
- a licensed family or group day care home;
- a center or home that doesn't need licensing; or
- a provider who doesn't need licensing; like a relative, neighbor, or friend caring for three or fewer children including their own.


You can apply for child care assistance through **Child Care Resource and Referral agencies (CCR&R)**. You can also apply for childcare through a child care center that has a contract with the state of Illinois. Your Child Care Resource & Referral agency can give you a list of childcare providers if you need help finding one.

 **HELP** Apply for childcare or find your Child Care Resource and Referral agency at:

**Action for Children**  
773-687-4000 (Cook County)

**Illinois Network of Childcare Resource and Referral Agencies**  
1-877-202-4453  
[www.ilchildcare.org/parentsandpublic/findccrr](http://www.ilchildcare.org/parentsandpublic/findccrr)

Once you have been approved for child care assistance, **IDHS will pay your child care provider directly**. You are expected to pay your share, or co-payment, to the provider also.

 **COMMON PROBLEM** You may need to start using your approved child care provider before IDHS sends them a payment. You can get help from the Child Care Resource and Referral agency to explain the payment process to your child care provider.

## 5. How do I apply for and get public benefits?

### THE APPLICATION PROCESS

There are two primary ways to apply for TANF cash assistance, food stamps, and medical assistance:

- You can go to the IDHS office in the area you live or are staying, and ask to apply; or
- You can complete an application on a computer with Internet access, then send it on-line, by mail, or fax it to IDHS

#### At the IDHS Office

You can walk in the IDHS office in your neighborhood and apply for cash assistance, food stamps, or medical assistance (see Question 1 about finding your local IDHS office).

**!** **IMPORTANT** When you ask to apply, no one at IDHS should stop you from applying by telling you that you must come back another day. No one should stop you from applying by telling you to attend a meeting or look for work first. The IDHS office might be too busy to complete an application with you the day you are at the office. **You can still start your application with only your name, address, and signature.** IDHS must determine your eligibility for cash assistance within 45 days and food stamps within 30 days of your application date.


You can have someone else apply for you. The person who applies for you is called your **approved representative or representative payee**. This person must have your written permission and signature.

**IDHS is required by law to get someone who can translate for you when you apply if you do not speak English.**

**\* COMMON PROBLEM** You must be able to talk with and understand your IDHS caseworker whenever you have meetings. You are not expected to keep your child out of school to help you communicate. Ask your caseworker to provide a translator that speaks your language. If you do not get the assistance you need because IDHS did not help you with a translator, you can **file an appeal** (see Question 6).


#### With a Computer

You can also apply for TANF cash assistance, food stamps, and medical assistance using a computer that has Internet access.

-  **HELP** Get an application or apply on-line for cash assistance, food stamps, or medical assistance with a computer at

**Illinois Department of Human Services**  
**[www.idhslink.com](http://www.idhslink.com)**

There are directions on the website to follow about applying and how to find your nearby office.


-  **IMPORTANT** You must go to the IDHS office to give your signature after completing the online application if you are applying for cash assistance or medical assistance. You do not need to do this if you completed the on-line application for food stamps only.

-  **IMPORTANT** You can send your on-line application or paper application with only your name and address.

Throughout Illinois there are also community agencies that will help you with a computer application for public benefits. These agencies are often social service agencies or food pantries. Sometimes schools, churches, or hospitals and health centers are able to help with computer applications for food stamps, medical assistance, or TANF cash assistance. Many of these agencies are called **RealBenefits™ Users**. Ask the school or community-based organization you know if they are a RealBenefits™ user.

## **Meeting a Caseworker**

Someone from IDHS will contact you to complete the application after they get it in the mail or by fax. If you apply on-line, you will be emailed when the IDHS office receives your on-line application. IDHS will email you an e-confirmation number and tell you what office the application was sent to and what information they need.

-  **IMPORTANT** If no one from IDHS makes an appointment for a meeting with you after you get your application to the local office, call your local office to schedule a meeting.


In a meeting with an IDHS caseworker to get cash assistance you will be asked for information about:

- your family size and ages,
- where you live,
- your income,
- other things of value (assets) you own,
- family members' citizenship status,
- your employment history,
- your health and the health of each member of your family,
- the education or training you have completed,



- any domestic violence, substance abuse, or mental health treatment you may need or are receiving, and
- any parent not living with the children.

IDHS will ask you to provide documents that prove, or verify, some information on your application for cash assistance, food stamps, and medical assistance.

 **COMMON PROBLEM** Sometimes not having documents which prove your information can delay getting the assistance you need. When you meet with an IDHS caseworker try to have as many documents as you can with you. Try to have:


- your driver's license, state ID card, or birth certificate,
- utility bills,
- social security numbers or proof that you applied for a social security number,
- rent receipts, your lease, or mortgage statement,
- child care receipts,
- child support orders,
- health records, and
- check stubs.

**Always keep the original documents for yourself.** Let IDHS have copies of the documents they need. If you have problems getting some documents, like health records, tell your caseworker and ask them to help you.

## Continued Food Stamps and TANF Cash Assistance

After you have received **food stamps** or **cash assistance for 6 months**, IDHS will contact you. To continue getting food stamps or cash assistance you will have to schedule a review. This is called a **redetermination**. For **cash assistance**, you can do your review by mail or at an IDHS office. For **food stamps**, you can do your review by mail, at an IDHS office, or over the phone.

When your food stamps are almost ending, IDHS will send you information about the Phone System Interview. In order to do a phone interview you must do it by the date on your IDHS notice.

 **IMPORTANT** There are certain cases where you may not do a phone interview. You must go to the IDHS office for an interview. Contact your IDHS office to find out if you can do a phone interview.

**HELP**

To do a phone interview to continue receiving **food stamps** call:

**Illinois Department of Human Services**  
**Phone System Interview line:**  
**1-800-217-6070**

## **CHILD SUPPORT COOPERATION**

If you receive TANF cash assistance or Medicaid you must cooperate with child support rules. This means you must give IDHS and the state's **Division of Child Support Enforcement** (DCSE) information about your children's other parent.



**IMPORTANT** You do not need to give information about your children's other parent if:

- the child was conceived as a result of rape or incest;
- giving this information will cause you or your child to suffer emotional harm;
- giving this information will cause you or your child to suffer physical harm; or
- you fear domestic violence (see Question 18).

The Division of Child Support Enforcement uses the information you give them, and other records, to collect child support from the non-custodial parent. The non-custodial parent is the one without legal charge of the children. The DCSE also requires the non-custodial parent to pay for the children's health insurance offered by an employer. The DCSE helps establish paternity, too. Establishing paternity means getting a legal order that names the biological father as a parent. Paternity allows the biological father all the rights of a parent, such as the right to custody and the right to visitation.


**If you receive cash assistance, you will only receive up to \$50 of the monthly child support collected.** The State of Illinois keeps the rest of the child support in return for cash assistance and other benefits.

If your child support award is big enough, you may receive the whole amount and become ineligible for TANF cash assistance. You may still get food stamps or medical assistance.

## **CASH AND FOOD STAMPS ON THE LINK CARD**

Your TANF cash and your food stamps will be given to you once a month using the **Illinois Link Card**. This card is like a debit card a bank uses. IDHS should tell you how to use the Link Card. You will pick a four number code or personal identification number (PIN). This number will


allow you to get your money or make food purchases any time after your **benefit availability date**. Your benefit availability date is the day your cash and/or food stamps benefits are put in your Link Card account.

 **IMPORTANT** If your Link Card is lost, stolen, or damaged you should report this to IDHS. You will get a new Link Card and should change your PIN so that your money and food stamps are safe. **IDHS will not replace any money or food stamps in your account** that was taken out before you reported your problem with your Link Card.

## Getting Cash

You can get cash using your Link Card at stores where you buy food. **There is no charge to get cash at the same time that you buy food with your Link Card.** You can also get cash at automatic teller machines (ATMs). ATMs are found at banks and stores in and around your neighborhood. **You can get cash two times each month from an ATM without a charge.** Each time you get cash with your Link Card after the first two times, a \$1 charge will be taken from your cash assistance amount.

You can also use ATMs to find out how much cash you have on your Link Card. When you use an ATM to find out how much cash is on your Link Card it is called a balance inquiry. You are allowed two balance inquiries each month without a charge. For each **balance inquiry** over two, a 50¢ charge is taken from your cash amount.

 **HELP** There is no charge to find out your cash amount on your Link Card or the cash amounts you took from your account during the month if you call:

**Illinois Link Helpline  
1-800-678-LINK**

You must have enough money on your Link Card to take out the amount you want and cover any extra charge. If you do not have money to cover the charge, you will not be able to get the cash you want.

A bank **may not add their own charge** for use of their ATMs.

## Buying Food

You can use the Link Card to buy food at stores which accept the Link Card. At the store, you or the store clerk will run your card through a small machine called a point of sale terminal. The total cost of your food purchase will be subtracted from your food stamp amount.

**Food stamps are not combined with your cash amount on your Link Card. Your food stamps amount and cash amount are kept separate. Food stamps can only be used for food purchases.**

Some stores may have you sign a paper, called a voucher, for the amount of your food purchase. The store will have to call a state phone number to determine whether you have enough money to cover what you want to buy. A hold is then placed on your Link Card food stamp amount for the cost of your food purchase. There is a \$125 limit for a food purchase using a voucher.

## **MEDICAL CARDS**

You will get a medical card from the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services (IDHFS) if you qualify for:

- Medicaid;
- Transitional Medicaid;
- Aid to the Aged, Blind, and Disabled;
- General Assistance;
- All Kids; or
- FamilyCare.

If you are eligible for All Kids Rebate, you use your employee insurance card for medical care. You will receive the money that is your rebate amount back from the IDHFS by check.

 **HELP** To get help finding a doctor that accepts your medical card call:

**All Kids Hotline**  
**1-866-255-5437**

**IDHFS Helplines**  
**1-800-226-0768**  
**1-877-805-5312**

To get help finding a dentist that accepts your medical card call:

**Doral Dental Services of Illinois**  
**1-888-286-2447**

## 6. What do I need to know about my rights?

The rules that explain who can get public benefits like cash assistance, food stamps, and medical assistance are complicated. Sometimes these rules change during a year. Your caseworker may not be able to understand all the rules or keep up with the changes. Because your caseworker may make mistakes, **you need to understand your rights.**

If you do not agree with a decision your caseworker makes about your case, you should first try to talk with your caseworker about it. If you believe your caseworker is not following the rules for your case correctly, you should tell your caseworker. You may even want to show your caseworker this **Get the Facts** booklet. You may need to ask your caseworker's supervisor to help. If you still are not satisfied with the way things are worked out **you can file an appeal.** An appeal is a formal request to review an IDHS decision.

### THE APPEAL PROCESS

You can appeal any action that your caseworker takes against you. You can appeal any action that your caseworker does not take that could help you. You can appeal decisions about your benefits, your activity assignments in your Responsibility and Services Plan (RSP) (see Question 9), and other decisions.

There are **three basic steps in the appeal process:**

#### Step 1 – Notice of Appeal

To start your appeal you must complete a form called the **Notice of Appeal.** You can get the Notice of Appeal at your local IDHS office. **A copy of the Notice of Appeal is also in the back of this booklet.** You can give your written Notice of Appeal to your IDHS local office in person, in the mail, or by fax.




**HELP** To begin the appeal process **by phone** call:

**Bureau of Assistance Hearings**  
**1-800-435-0774**  
**1-877-734-7429 (TTY)**

**If you want to appeal a decision about your food stamps, you can start the appeal process just by telling your caseworker.**

The date you are informed of an IDHS decision or action is the date from which you count your appeal process time. This is called the

“date of notice.” **You can file a Notice of Appeal up to 60 days after a cash assistance or medical assistance decision or action you think is wrong. The time limit is 90 days if you want to appeal a decision about your food stamps. If IDHS delays or fails to make a decision about your benefits, you may appeal at any time.**

 **IMPORTANT** If you appeal an IDHS decision to cut or stop your benefits, you must file your appeal within 10 days of the date of notice, or by the “date of change,” to keep getting your benefits. The date of change is the date IDHS is scheduled to change your benefits amount.

### **Step 2 – Pre-Hearing Conference**

After you complete a Notice of Appeal form you will be called in to meet with your caseworker and a supervisor. This meeting is called a **Pre-Hearing Conference**. If you are able to work the problem out, you can decide to cancel your appeal. You will be asked to sign a **“Request to Withdraw Appeal.”** **Be sure you get your agreement with IDHS in writing.** If IDHS fails to follow the agreement, you will have a written record and your original right to appeal date. **If you are not able to work a solution out that satisfies you, you do not have to cancel your appeal.**

### **Step 3 – Hearing**

A **hearing** is a formal meeting where you and IDHS discuss the problem. A person called a **hearing officer** listens to you and IDHS talk about the facts. You have a right to have someone with you during the hearing, or any part of the appeal process. This person can be anyone you choose to support you or speak for you. You may want to ask a lawyer or someone who you believe understands IDHS rules. You may choose a friend, relative, or witness.

A hearing must be scheduled and a decision reached within 90 days of the Notice of Appeal. For food stamp problems, a hearing must be scheduled and a decision reached within 60 days of your Notice of Appeal.

## **WHERE TO GET HELP**

If you live in Chicago or Cook County and need legal help with an appeal you can call the **Public Benefits Hotline at 1-888-893-5327**. This call is free. The hotline worker can also help you solve problems with TANF, Medicaid, All Kids, FamilyCare, food stamps, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), child support, work programs, and Teen Parent Services.

The following table lists the names and numbers of other organizations that can help you understand public benefits rules and your rights. Most of these organizations are listed in other parts of this booklet.

<b>Problems with:</b>	<b>Who to Call</b>	<b>Phone Number or Website</b>
All public benefits	In Cook County – Public Benefits Hotline of the Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago  Outside Cook County – Illinois Legal Aid  Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law  In Southern and Part of Central Illinois – Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance Foundation  In Northern and Part of Central Illinois – Prairie State Legal Services	1-888-8WELFAR or 1-888-893-5327  www.IllinoisLegalAid.org  312-263-3830, ext. 229  1-877-342-7891  1-800-690-2130
Food stamps	Illinois Hunger Hotline	1-800-359-2163
All Kids, FamilyCare, and Medicaid	All Kids Hotline	1-866-468-7543
Medicaid, SSI, and SSDI	Health and Disabilities Advocates	312-223-9600
Childcare	In Cook County – Action for Children  Outside Cook County – Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies	773-687-4000  1-877-202-4453
Teen parent benefits	Illinois Caucus for Adolescent Health	312-427-4460 or www.icaah.org and click on Publications
Benefits for immigrants	Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights	312-332-7360 or www.icirr.org and click on Publications





## **PART 2**

# **Questions about Receiving TANF Cash Assistance**



## 7. How much cash assistance can I get?

### TANF CASH GRANT AMOUNTS

Cash assistance amounts depend on the size of your family and where you live in the state. Your cash assistance amount is also called your **payment level or grant amount**. If you live in **Cook, Boone, Champaign, DeKalb, DuPage, Kane, Kankakee, Kendall, Lake, McHenry, Ogle, Whiteside, Winnebago, or Woodford Counties** the table below lists your grant amounts.

Number of Persons	Case Includes an Adult	Case Includes Children Only
1	\$223	\$107
2	\$292	\$211
3	\$396	\$261
4	\$435	\$335
5	\$509	\$398
6	\$572	\$427

(For information about grant amounts for larger families or in other counties you can use a computer and go to the following web address: [http://163.191.134.21/pmwag/PDF\\_Files/WAG25/WAG%2025-03-05.PDF](http://163.191.134.21/pmwag/PDF_Files/WAG25/WAG%2025-03-05.PDF).)

In **Children Only** cases, the parent or caregiver is not included in the case. When a relative, like a grandparent, is the primary caretaker the children can get cash assistance. The relative does not need to have legal custody of the children. Only children can get cash assistance if their parent has been convicted of a Class 1 or Class X drug-related felony (see Question 19).

### DIFFERENCES IN GRANT AMOUNTS




There are things that can change the cash assistance your family can receive. Some of the most common reasons why your grant may not be the same as in the table above are explained here:

- **Work Pays** - If you get a job, IDHS will lower your grant by \$1 for every \$3 you earn. Your wage before taxes is used to figure out your Work Pays grant amount (see Question 13).


- **Sanctions** - If you do not cooperate with your Responsibility and Services Plan (RSP)(see Question 9) or child support enforcement (see Question 5) IDHS can **lower your cash assistance** with a **sanction** (see Question 14). You can also be sanctioned if you are a pregnant or teen parent without a high school diploma or GED and you do not meet the school attendance requirement (see Question 16).
  
- **Overpayment Recovery** - If IDHS makes an **overpayment** to you they will keep part of your future grant amounts until they get their money back. An overpayment is a grant amount that is bigger than the amount you are supposed to get. If you do not have a job, they will keep 10% of your TANF grant amount. If you do have a job, they will keep no more than \$75 each month. As soon as they finish collecting the amount of the overpayment, your payment level will go back up to your regular grant amount.
  
- **Family Cap** - If you had a child while you were getting TANF cash assistance between July 1997 and December 2003 your grant was not increased. The rule to stop a grant increase after the birth of a child was called the **family cap**. **As of January 1, 2004, if you are on cash assistance and you give birth to another child, you will get a small grant increase to help with costs of the new family member.**

## 8. How long can I get cash assistance?

### TIME LIMITS

-  **IMPORTANT** You are only allowed to receive TANF cash assistance as an adult for a total of 60 months (5 years) in your lifetime. After an adult member of your family has received cash assistance for 60 months, your whole family **will not be eligible** for TANF cash assistance.
-  **Each month that you receive TANF cash assistance will count toward your 60-month limit.** Months counted do not have to be in a row. Even months that you may have received TANF cash assistance in another state count toward your lifetime limit. Months that you got a grant before July 1997 do not count. IDHS often calls your 60-month time limit your **TANF counter or clock**.
-  **IMPORTANT** There are some times when months you get a cash grant do not count toward your 60-month limit. There are some reasons why your TANF counter might go past 60 months. These exceptions to the rule are described below.

### Months the TANF Counter Stops

-  Months that you receive cash assistance **will not count toward the 60 month limit when:**
  - You are working at a paid job for an average of 30 hours each week or more.
  - You attend college full-time to get a degree, and you keep at least a 2.5 grade point average (36-month limit).
  - You received cash assistance before you turned 18 years old.
  - Your cash grant is \$0 due to a sanction (see Question 14) or for any other reason.
  - You care full-time for a child or spouse with a medical condition (see Question 11).
  - You have a severely disabled child that has been approved for an IDHS Home and Community-Based Care waiver (see Question 11).
  - You are eligible for the Domestic Violence Exclusion (see Question 18).


### 60 Month Exceptions

You may be able to get a cash grant for extra time. This is called a **60-month exception**. You will not be considered for a 60-month exception until your TANF counter reaches month 57 or later. You may also be considered for a 60-month exception if you stopped getting cash assistance because you reached your 60-month limit. You may be approved for an exception if:

- You have applied for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and IDHS believes you will get SSI.
- You have a medical condition that you can prove prevents you from working full-time.
- You or a member of your family are receiving services through a program that prevents you from working full-time (like services from the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services; domestic violence and homeless services; and mental health, substance abuse, and vocational rehab programs).
- You are in an IDHS approved education or training program you will finish within 6 months after your TANF counter runs out.
- You care full-time for a child or spouse with a medical condition (see Question 11).
- You have a severely disabled child that has been approved for an IDHS Home and Community-based Care waiver (see Question 11).
- You are eligible for the Domestic Violence Exclusion (see Question 18).

To ask for a 60-month exception, **you must fill out a special IDHS 60 Month Exception Request form.** You can get this form from your local office. **A copy of this form is in the back of this booklet. Try to complete your exception request form 45 days before your 60th cash payment so that your TANF case is not cancelled.** IDHS can take up to 45 days to consider your request.

If you are given a 60-month exception, IDHS will tell you how long you can get a TANF cash grant. Your situation will be reviewed again after this time passes. **When the reason for your exception to the time limit no longer exists, you will be given a final three month extension of your cash grant.**

 **IMPORTANT** If IDHS does not allow you an exception and you think this is wrong according to the rules, you can file an appeal (see Question 6).

## 9. What do I have to know about keeping my TANF cash assistance?

### WORK ACTIVITY REQUIREMENTS

One of the rules of the TANF cash assistance program is that everyone who receives assistance has to be working, in training, or doing something else to get ready to work. Some people do not have a work activity requirement. They are given an **exemption** from the rule. Question 11 explains work activity requirement exemptions.

**If you are a single adult**, you are expected to be in a work, training, or other work-related activity an average of **at least 30 hours a week**.

**If you and your children's other parent live together**, you are expected to participate in work, training, or other work-related activities for **at least 35 hours a week combined**.

**If you are a young parent under age 20 and have not completed high school**, you must participate in **Teen Parent Services** (see Question 16).

### THE FAMILY ASSESSMENT

When you apply for cash assistance you must complete an interview with an IDHS caseworker called a **family assessment**. This conversation with many questions will help your caseworker learn about your job, education, and training experience. You will also be asked to talk about your childcare and transportation needs. You will be asked if your family has any problems that make it hard to work or get ready to work.

**Information from the family assessment is used to pick the work activities you need to do in order to get cash assistance. The information is used to pick the services IDHS may offer you.** You should think carefully about your past experiences, your interests, or anything that might be stopping you from getting or keeping a job. Think about the kinds of help you will need in order to work or prepare for work. Ask yourself:

- Is it hard to find childcare?
- Will some education or training help me get a job?
- Do I need help with my drug or alcohol problem?
- Do I need help dealing with domestic violence?

One part of the family assessment might be a test to see if you need to improve your reading or English skills before you can get a job. Sometimes this test is called a **literacy test**. One of these tests is called the TABE. Taking a literacy test can help you and your caseworker

decide if you could benefit from adult education, GED, or ESL classes. A literacy test can show that you have the skills to do well in a job training program. **If you think it is important for you to take a literacy test to see what skills you may need for the job you want, you can ask IDHS to test you.**


After the family assessment is done you will make a plan with your IDHS caseworker.

## **THE RESPONSIBILITY AND SERVICES PLAN (RSP)**

With information from the family assessment in mind, you and your caseworker will discuss the things you agree to do to get ready to work or to find work. The **Responsibility and Services Plan (RSP)** that you create together will list these activities and when they should be done.

**In order for you to receive cash assistance you must do the activities listed in your RSP.** If you do not do one of the activities in your RSP you may not receive your cash grant. If you do not do one of the activities in your RSP you may be **“sanctioned”**. **This means your grant will be cut** (see Question 14). You will not be sanctioned if you have “good cause” (see **Good Cause Exemptions** below).

Your RSP should be created with your input. Your IDHS caseworker has the final say. Think of your RSP as your plan for doing what needs to be done to help you get or keep a good job. Your RSP may also be your plan to get some other income. If you do not agree with something on your RSP talk to your caseworker. You can suggest a change that seems more helpful to you.

 **IMPORTANT** If you disagree with any activity in your RSP and your caseworker will not change it, you can appeal this decision (see Question 6).

You will be asked to meet with your caseworker to review your RSP on a regular schedule. Changes may be made to your RSP at these times, also.

## **GOOD CAUSE EXEMPTIONS**

There are often good reasons why you cannot do what is on your Responsibility and Services Plan (RSP). Sometimes there are good reasons that you cannot meet with your caseworker to talk about your progress on your plan. **You should not be sanctioned or your cash grant cut if you have “good cause” for not cooperating with IDHS.** Good cause reasons to get an “exemption” include:



- You couldn't find childcare or someone to be with an adult who needs your care.
- There was a death in your family.
- You were ill.
- You were required to appear in court or were temporarily in jail.
- There was severe weather.
- IDHS workers did not keep track of information you gave them.
- An IDHS appointment or your participation in a required work activity was at the same time as something else you were required to do.
- You had a job interview.
- You did not understand what was said or sent to you from IDHS.
- You didn't receive IDHS communication in the mail.
- What IDHS told you to do was not appropriate for you.
- You are homeless (see Question 20).
- Your rights were violated at your workplace.
- You fear or experience domestic violence (see Question 18).


Try to talk with your caseworker before your scheduled appointment if you cannot make it. Make sure to explain your reason for not being able to do an activity on your RSP. **If you believe you have “good cause” for not cooperating with IDHS but your caseworker sanctions you or cuts your grant, you can file an appeal** (see Question 6).



## 10. What things can I do to meet my TANF work activity requirements?

### WORK ACTIVITIES


The things that you can do to count for your work activity requirement are called **work activities**. **Paid work** counts for your work activity requirement and so do other activities described below.

 **IMPORTANT** Your caseworker will tell you how you must keep track of your work activity hours. You will also be told how to prove your work activity.


#### College


If you are college-ready you can register for a two- or four-year degree program.

- **Full-time Study-** If you go to **college full-time and keep at least a C average (2.5 on a 4.0 scale) you will not have a work activity requirement**. If you do not get a 2.5 grade point average you will have one marking period to get your grades up to 2.5 without having to work. Your TANF counter can be stopped for up to 36 months of full-time college education.

 **Your TANF counter stops if you go to college full-time and keep a 2.5 grade point average.**

- **Part-Time Study-** You can also go to college part-time, but you must keep a C or 2.5 grade point average. Your hours of college classes plus hours in other work activities must total 30 if you go to college part-time.

 **If you are a part-time student or your grade point average is less than 2.5 your TANF counter does not stop** unless you also work for wages for 30 hours a week.


 **COMMON PROBLEM** If you have not started a college degree before April 1, 2007, IDHS may tell you that you cannot start one. Sometimes IDHS makes it hard for you to count education for your work activity requirement. Be prepared to explain how you plan to succeed in college and get a job. Use this **Get the Facts** booklet to explain how you meet the work requirement rules. If you do not agree with an IDHS decision that stops you from going to school you can **file an appeal** (see Question 6).

## Job Training

If you need training to learn skills for a job, you may be in a job (vocational) training program. **You can be in the job training program up to two years without a paid job.** If you do not finish your training program in 2 years, IDHS may allow you to keep going. You will be expected to work 20 hours a week at the same time.

If job training is not a full-time activity then you must be working, or in another work activity, at least 20 hours a week. Your hours of job training and work, or other work activities, must total 30 hours a week.

 **Your TANF counter does not stop while you are in training** unless you also work for wages at least 30 hours a week.

 **COMMON PROBLEM** Sometimes IDHS makes it hard for you to count job training for your work activity requirement. Be prepared to explain how you plan to succeed in a job training program and get a job. Use this **Get the Facts** booklet to explain how you meet the work requirement rules. If you do not agree with an IDHS decision that stops you from getting job training you can **file an appeal** (see Question 6).

## Adult Education, English as a Second Language (ESL), or GED Classes

If you need to work on your reading or English skills, or you never finished high school, you can be in an adult education, ESL, or GED program. You can only count adult education, ESL, or GED programs for 10 hours of work activity. **You can be in these programs for up to two years without a paid job.** IDHS may also have you participate in community service or unpaid work experiences at the same time to reach a total of 30 hours per week.

 Your **TANF counter does not stop** while you are in adult education, ESL, or GED programs unless you also work for wages at least 30 hours a week.

## Work Programs

If you need to build up your job skills you may be assigned to a work program. Most of these work programs are run by agencies in your community that get funding from IDHS. Some of these programs offer you education or training. Other programs give you work experience. **If you are assigned to a program by IDHS you must participate to get your TANF cash assistance. In some work programs, if you do not participate in all assigned activities your cash grant may be reduced.**

You may be assigned to a work program if:

- You are an adult in a two-parent family without work.
- You have used 48 months or more of your 60-month TANF lifetime limit.
- You have no earnings.
- You are working less than 30 hours a week.

Make sure you understand what services these work programs offer and what you will be required to do. In most cases, these programs may be very helpful to you in getting the skills you need for a job and in getting a job. **If you do not think the work program you are assigned to is good for you, you should ask your program or IDHS caseworker to change your assignment.**



Your **TANF counter does not stop** while you are in a work program.

## **Community Service**

If you do not have much job experience, you may be assigned to do community service at a school, church, or community program to get experience. In some parts of Illinois, you may volunteer to do community service. You will also be expected to look for a job so that your work activity totals 30 hours a week. Your hours of community service may be combined with other work activity to total 30 hours a week.



Your **TANF counter does not stop** while you are in community service activities.

## **Self-Employment Activities**



If you have skills to be in business for yourself, self-employment activities can be a part of your 30 required hours of work activity. For example, you could attend a self-employment training program on starting a business. You could count meetings with a self-employment expert to make your business and budget plans.



Your **TANF counter does not stop** while you are in self-employment activities.



## **Job Search**

If you have some job experience you may be told to do a job search. You will be expected to make contacts with employers. You may also have to participate in other work activities. Your work activities must total 30 hours a week.


-  **IMPORTANT** Job search activity will only count as a work activity for **4 weeks in a row**. You can only count job search as work activity for **6 total weeks in a year**.
-  Your **TANF counter does not stop** while you are doing job search activities.

## **Counseling or Treatment Programs**

If you have personal or family problems like domestic violence, depression, or a drug or alcohol problem you can be in a counseling or treatment program. Depending on what you need, your treatment may be combined with other work activities to total 30 hours of work activity a week.

-  **IMPORTANT** You can only count counseling or treatment as work activity for **4 weeks in a row**. You can only count counseling and treatment for **6 weeks in a year**.
-  **IMPORTANT** You cannot be required to be in any domestic violence activity or program. Your cash assistance cannot be cut or stopped if you do not follow through with any domestic violence activity or program (see Question 18).

**You also do not have to participate in a “family formation” or “marriage promotion” activity suggested by IDHS.** Your cash assistance cannot be cut or stopped if you do not want to participate in these activities.

-  Your **TANF counter does not stop** while you are in counseling or treatment **unless you have qualified for an exemption** (see Question 11).

# 11. Are there any times I don't have to meet the TANF work activity requirements?

## WORK ACTIVITY EXEMPTIONS

There are several times when you are not required to work or to be in work activities. When IDHS does not require you to work or be in work activities they give you an **exemption**.


If you get a “**child only**” grant for the children in your household (see Question 1) **you do not have to participate in any work activities. Child only grants do not have a 60-month lifetime limit.**

### Exemptions that Do Not Stop the Counter

There are some times **when you are not able to work** and IDHS will not expect you to meet the work activity requirements.


You may qualify for a work activity exemption when:

- You are the **parent of a child under the age of one**. You can choose to participate in work activities if you would like to do so.


 **IMPORTANT** If you are under the age of 20 and have not completed high school you will have to participate in Teen Parent Services (see Question 16).

You may qualify for a work activity exemption when:

- You are age 60 or over. You can choose to participate in work activities if you would like to do so.
- It is six weeks before your baby's due date and up to 12 weeks after your baby's birth.
- You have a medical condition that prevents you from working or being in other work activities. Your medical condition may be present for a short or long time.

 **IMPORTANT** Your doctor must be willing to say that your medical condition prevents you from working or participating in other work activities. A special department in IDHS called the **Client Assessment Unit (CAU)** will decide whether or not you qualify for the work exemption. This decision is based on medical reports and other facts.


**IDHS may expect you to participate in your health care or other activities to keep getting your TANF cash assistance.** If your health problem prevents you from working at all, IDHS may tell you to apply for Supplemental Security Income or SSI (see Question 20).


-  Your **TANF counter does not stop** if you do not work because you have a child under one, you are age 60 or over, or you have a medical condition. Your **TANF counter does not stop** if you do not work 6 weeks before the due date and up to 12 weeks after the birth of your baby.

## **Exemptions that Stop the Counter**

You may get a **work activity exemption that stops your TANF counter** if:

- You have a **child living with you who is approved under the Home & Community-Based Care Program**. This program is run by the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services (IDHFS). The program allows severely disabled children to stay in their homes rather than be placed in state-run institutions;
- You must stay home to give **full-time care to your child under age 18 or your spouse living with you, due to their medical problem**. IDHS may ask you to choose other care plans and do some work activities. You do not need to do these other things if you are given an exemption. The Central Assessment Unit (CAU) of IDHS will decide if you qualify for this work exemption based on a doctor's information as well as other facts;
- You **care for a person not related to you and the Department of Rehabilitation Services (DoRS) or the Department of Aging (DoA) approves your services**. You may be paid by DoRS as this person's personal assistant. If your care for this person does not total 30 hours a week you will be required to do other work activity; or
- You are **eligible for the Domestic Violence Exclusion** (see Question 18).

-  Your **TANF counter stops** if you have been given a work exemption for one of the reasons described above.

-  **IMPORTANT** If you qualify for any of the exemptions described above, you can still volunteer to work or participate in other work activities. When you volunteer for work or work activities, your cash grant cannot be cut or stopped if you do not follow through.



## **12. Can I get assistance with costs like work uniforms and transportation?**

### **WORK AND EDUCATION SUPPORTS**

You can ask your IDHS caseworker for help with many costs that come up as you look for work or get a new job. IDHS will also help with some education or training program costs. See Question 4 about child care assistance. Other costs that IDHS may help you with are:

- uniforms or other special clothing needed for work or school;
- tools needed for work that your employer doesn't give you;
- fees for school not covered by financial aid, like application, registration, activities, lab, graduation, and testing fees;
- school books and supplies;
- things you need to be a licensed child care provider in your home;
- public transit, car pool, or gas costs for activities on the RSP until your first paycheck;
- auto license plate fees;
- auto liability insurance at the least costly rate;
- doctor exams or drug testing needed for work and not covered by insurance or the employer;
- eye glasses or dental care needed for work;
- things to start your own business, some costs you have if you move closer to a job, and auto repair costs (these things need a special IDHS okay).

Help with these things is available to you if you already receive assistance from IDHS, or if you need some assistance to keep a job (see **Front Door Services** under Question 1).

**IDHS has set limits on the amount of assistance you can get for any of the things listed above.**



## 13. How will getting a job affect the TANF cash assistance I get?

### WORK PAYS

When you get a job, you must report your new income to IDHS within 10 days.

**!** **IMPORTANT** You may be able to keep some of your cash assistance as you work. **When you work, IDHS figures out what your cash amount will be by lowering your grant just \$1 for every \$3 you earn at your job.** Another way to say this is that your grant is lowered by 1/3 of your monthly earnings. This rule is called “**Work Pays.**” IDHS will use your income before taxes, called your gross income, to figure out your grant amount.

Here’s an example of how it works:

- If you are a single mother with two children you get a grant of \$396. If you get a job that pays \$7.50 per hour for 30 hours a week you would earn \$900 a month. **Under the Work Pays rule, you keep all your earnings and still get \$96 of your TANF grant** ( $\$900 \div 3 = \$300$  and  $\$396 - \$300 = \$96$ ). So, your monthly income with work and your reduced grant totals  $\$900 + \$96$  or \$996.

(The grant amount used in this example is for Cook, Boone, Champaign, DeKalb, DuPage, Kane, Kankakee, Kendall, Lake, McHenry, Ogle, Whiteside, Winnebago, or Woodford Counties. See Question 7 for grant amounts in other counties.)

**!** **IMPORTANT** When you earn over 3 times your cash grant amount you will no longer get cash assistance. **You may still be eligible for medical assistance and food stamps.**


IDHS will find out if you don’t report your income. When employers hire you, they must report your income to the State of Illinois. IDHS compares the social security numbers of people who were hired with people on TANF. **If you don’t tell your caseworker you got a job, your cash grant will be stopped and you will have to pay the State back.** If you get some cash assistance while you are working, you must report your work income twice a year to IDHS.

If you lose your job, you should tell your caseworker right away. You may be able to get back on cash assistance or get an increase in your grant amount. You may be able to get an extra payment, called a “**supplemental payment**”, to help you out until your monthly grant starts or increases. You may also get help finding another job or going to school to get some new job skills.

## EARNED INCOME TAX CREDIT (EITC)

If you work anytime during a year, you may qualify for the **Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)**. This credit returns some amount of money to you after you file your federal and state income tax forms. The amount of money you may get is based on your income and family size. The following chart shows you the most income you can earn in a year at your family size and get the Earned Income Tax Credit.

<b>Family Size</b>	<b>Income Limit Per Year</b>
1 adult	\$12,120
Married couple	\$14,120
1 adult + 1 child	\$32,001
Married couple + 1 child	\$34,001
1 adult + 2 or more children	\$36,348
Married couple + 2 or more children	\$38,348


 **HELP** You can get **free help to do your income taxes** during the months of January and February from the:

**Tax Counseling Project**  
**Center for Economic Progress**  
**312-252-0280**  
**[www.centerforprogress.org](http://www.centerforprogress.org)**

## 14. What happens if I can't or don't follow the rules?

### SANCTIONS

If you get TANF cash assistance and you do not cooperate with your caseworker, you may be “sanctioned”. This means that the cash grant your family gets will be cut or even stopped. Missing an appointment or not doing something that you agreed to do on your Responsibility and Services Plan (see Question 9) are examples of not cooperating. You may have “good cause” for not cooperating (see Question 9).

 **IMPORTANT** Before you receive a sanction, IDHS must let you know you may be sanctioned. If you do not cooperate with your caseworker you should be contacted within 14 days. In a face-to-face or phone meeting you and your caseworker should talk about what prevented you from doing what you were expected to do. This meeting is called the **Reconciliation or Pre-Sanction Process**.

If you have “good cause” for not cooperating **you will not receive a sanction** (see Question 9). If you know you have a good reason for not cooperating with your caseworker or your Responsibility and Services Plan (RSP), you should contact your caseworker to discuss this as soon as you can. **If you do not agree with a sanction decision you can file an appeal** (see Question 6).

If you do not have “good cause” for not cooperating and you still don't agree to cooperate after talking with your caseworker, IDHS can cut your cash grant. There are three levels of sanctions.

#### **Level 1 Sanction**


**The first time you do not cooperate, your family's cash assistance is cut in half until you begin to cooperate again.** As soon as you cooperate, your family can get your full grant payment . If you still don't cooperate after 3 months, then your family's cash assistance will be stopped.


#### **Level 2 Sanction**

**The second time you do not cooperate, your family's cash assistance is cut in half for 3 full months.** Even if you start to cooperate during those 3 months, your cash assistance will not go back to the full amount until the 3 months are up. If you still don't cooperate by the end of the third month, then your family's cash assistance will be stopped.

### Level 3 Sanction

**The third (or more) time you don't cooperate, your full cash grant is stopped for 3 months.** If you cooperate, you will get your grant again after the third month. If you still do not cooperate, your cash assistance will not be started again.


 **COMMON PROBLEM** If you prove “good cause” (see Question 9) during the reconciliation or pre-sanction process, your caseworker must take the sanction off your record. If you win an appeal your caseworker must take the sanction off your record. **Make sure your caseworker takes an incorrect sanction off your case record so that your cash grant amount is not unfairly cut or stopped another time.**

 **IMPORTANT** If your cash grant is sanctioned there is no increase in your Food Stamps. You will continue to get Food Stamps, Medicaid, or KidCare/FamilyCare.

### CANCELLATION OF TANF CASH ASSISTANCE

**If you tell your caseworker you will not cooperate with IDHS rules or your Responsibility and Services Plan (RSP) your full cash grant will be cancelled.** There will not be a three step sanction process.

**Your cash assistance may also be cancelled if IDHS assigns you to a work program and you do not cooperate.** If you know there is a reason why you will not be successful in a work program you should tell your caseworker. Talking about any problems may lead to changes that are better for you.

 **COMMON PROBLEM** Sometimes an IDHS worker will ask you if you are “refusing” to cooperate. What might really be true is that you cannot cooperate, but you would if you could. For example, a caseworker may tell you that you must go to a job interview. You try, but cannot find childcare on the day of the interview. You would be willing to go to the job interview if you had childcare. This is not a “refusal” to cooperate, but a “good cause” reason for not cooperating (see Question 9).

# **PART 3**

## **Questions About Benefits Rules for Different Situations**





## 15. What if I move?

If you already get cash assistance or other public benefits, you are still eligible for them when you move anywhere in Illinois.

When you move out of Illinois, you must tell IDHS. Your benefits will be cancelled. You will have to apply for benefits in your new home state. Each state has different TANF, food stamp, medical assistance, and childcare rules. You should make sure to learn about the rules in your new home state.

 **IMPORTANT** Any state will contact IDHS to see how many months of your TANF counter you have used up in Illinois.

**When you move anywhere in Illinois you must tell your caseworker your new address.** Your caseworker at your old IDHS office must change the address on your case and send your records to your new IDHS office. Your old caseworker should make a phone call to the new office with your name, address, and phone number. Your new IDHS office is responsible for your case after this phone call is made and your case records have been sent to them.

Moving to a different county may make a small change in your cash grant amount (see Question 7). A change in your living costs, like rent, may change your food stamp amount.

You may move to a short-term living situation, like a 90-day housing shelter or domestic violence shelter. You can choose to keep your case at your local office. You can decide to change your IDHS office to the one closer to the shelter. This could be a good idea if the IDHS office near the shelter has a good relationship with the shelter. IDHS offices near shelters may have a better understanding of special rules to help you. For example, caseworkers may offer you Crisis Assistance (see Question 1) or tell you about the Domestic Violence Exclusion (see Question 18).



# 16. What do I need to know if I am a teen parent?

## SPECIAL TANF ELIGIBILITY RULES

TANF eligibility rules for teen parents are based on the age of the teen. **The months that you get cash assistance do not count toward your 60-month lifetime limit until you turn 18.**

### Adult-Supervised Living Situation Requirement

**Pregnant teens and teen parents under age 18 must live in an adult-supervised situation** to get a TANF grant. There are some reasons you do not have to follow this rule (see below).

An adult-supervised living situation includes:

- living with a parent or legal guardian;
- living with any relative older than 18 related by blood or adoption; or
- living in a foster home, maternity home, or other adult-supervised setting.

 **IMPORTANT** You can get TANF cash assistance for up to 6 months while you and your IDHS caseworker work out your living situation. There are times you may be given an “exemption” so that you do not need to have adult supervision.

You **do not have to live in an adult-supervised situation if:**

- You are or have ever been married.
- Your parent or legal guardian is dead or you don't know where they are.
- You have lived apart from your parents for at least one year before your child's birth or before applying for TANF.
- You or your children's health or safety would be in danger if you lived with your parent or guardian.
- Your parent or guardian will not allow you and your children to live with them.
- You have one of the following “good cause” reasons to live apart from your parent or guardian:
  - Your parent or guardian lives out-of-state, is in an institution, or is addicted to drugs or alcohol.
  - Your return to your parent's or guardian's home would go against their lease or local health or safety standards.
  - You are in a licensed substance abuse treatment program that you could not be in if you returned to your parent's or guardian's home.

## School or Work Requirements

If you are pregnant or a teen parent under age 20, you must attend high school or GED classes full-time in order to get TANF cash assistance. Your classes become part of your Responsibility and Services Plan (see Question 9).

In some cases, you may also choose or be assigned to other work activities or training that is right for you.

 **IMPORTANT** You do not have to be in school or work activities for the six weeks before your baby's due date or the 12 weeks after your baby is born.


## Getting Your Own Grant

You can get your own TANF grant if you are a teen parent and one of the following things is true:

- You are a pregnant teen or a teen parent over age 18.
- You are a pregnant or a teen parent under age 18 and you:
  - are married or live with the legal father of your child while you live with your parents who get TANF;
  - live with your parents who don't get TANF, and you are income eligible;
  - live with your parents and they are ineligible for TANF; or
  - don't live with your parents, but you have an approved reason not to be in an adult-supervised living situation.

## TEEN PARENT SERVICES PROGRAM

You may be assigned to the **Teen Parent Services Program** if you do not have your high school diploma or GED. In the Teen Parent Services Program you will have a special caseworker. Your caseworker will help you make your Responsibility and Services Plan (see Question 9). Your caseworker will help you get education and health information. You will also receive support services like childcare and transportation to help you reach your goals.

 **IMPORTANT** You can be sanctioned if you do not cooperate with your caseworker or do what is on your Responsibility and Services Plan (see Question 14).

## OTHER BENEFITS


The rules for food stamps and medical assistance are different for teen parents than for adult parents.

**If you live at home with your parents, you must be in the same food stamp case with your parents until you turn 22.** This is true even if you are 18 and you get your own TANF grant. A teen parent living at home can get a separate food stamp case only if your living quarters are totally separate, with no shared living space.

When you apply for KidCare for your children, you only have to use your income to determine if your children are eligible (see Question 3).

Your eligibility for medical assistance is based on your parents' income until you turn 18.

Because these rules are very complicated, it is a good idea for you to talk with an IDHS caseworker about your need for assistance.

 **HELP** You can also get helpful information from:

**Illinois Caucus for Adolescent Health**  
**312-427-4460**  
**[www.icaah.org/publications.html](http://www.icaah.org/publications.html)**



# 17. What do I need to know if I am an immigrant?

## BENEFITS ELIGIBILITY


Since 1996, the law has limited public assistance for legal immigrants in the United States who are not citizens. The U.S. government created a list of “**qualified immigrants**”. **Qualified immigrants may get cash, food stamps, and medical assistance.** The list of qualified immigrants includes:

- People who have been honorably discharged from the U.S. military. People who are active in the U.S. military. This includes a spouse and children.
- Certain American Indians born in Canada.
- Refugees.
- People who have political asylum.
- People from Cuba or Haiti.
- Amerasians from Vietnam and their close family members.
- People whose deportation is being withheld.
- People who are victims of trafficking. The federal Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) must identify you as a victim.
- Members of a Hmong or Highland Laotian tribe that helped the U.S. military during the Vietnam war (1965 – 1975). This includes a spouse, a widow or widower who has not remarried, and unmarried dependent children.
- People who have been granted conditional entry before April 1, 1980.
- People paroled at least one year before August 22, 1996.
- Legal permanent residents who have been living in the U.S. since before August 21, 1996.
- Legal permanent residents who entered the U.S. on or after August 22, 1996 and have lived in the United States for 5 years after being legally admitted to the U.S.
- People who are legal permanent residents and are victims of domestic abuse. You are eligible if you are the spouse, child or widow of a U.S. citizen or legal permanent resident and that person abused you. You are also eligible if a member of that person’s family who lived with you abused you.


### Eligibility Exceptions

Even if you are not on the list of qualified immigrants you may still get some assistance. You may qualify as an “exception” and get the assistance described below.

- **Elderly and disabled refugees and asylees** can get Aid to the Aged, Blind, and Disabled (AABD). If you lost your Supplemental Security Income (SSI) when a 7-year time limit to become a U.S. citizen passed, you can get up to \$500 a month from IDHS. This is a new law passed in July 2004.
- If you are **not a citizen** you can get All Kids medical insurance **for your children** (see Question3). This is not true if your children are undocumented.
- **If you are pregnant**, you can get medical assistance during your pregnancy. It does not matter if you are a legal immigrant or undocumented.
- **If you need emergency medical services**, you can get care. It does not matter if you are a legal immigrant or undocumented.
- **Non-citizen victims of domestic violence and their children** may be able to get TANF cash or medical assistance. Your family must also meet all other eligibility rules (see Questions 1, 3, and 9). A victim of domestic violence without children may qualify for AABD or General Assistance (GA) (see Question 1).

 **COMMON PROBLEM** When you apply for admission or residency, the U.S. government considers whether you may become a “public charge.” A public charge is someone who depends on the government for their basic needs. **Getting cash assistance is one of many things the government considers when you apply for admission or residency.** Getting food stamps or medical assistance should not affect the government’s decision about your application. If you are a victim of domestic violence and get cash assistance this should not affect the government’s decision about your application.

The rules for getting public benefits if you are an immigrant are complicated.

 **HELP** If you need help to understand what public benefits you may get you can contact the:

**Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights**  
**312-332-7360**  
**[www.icirr.org](http://www.icirr.org)**



## 18. What if I experience domestic violence?


Many of the rules for getting public benefits are different if you experience violence in your home.

If your family does not already get TANF cash assistance and you experience domestic violence, **you can apply for Crisis Assistance** (see Question 1). **You may be getting a cash grant but are not able to cooperate with IDHS rules due to domestic violence. You can still get assistance.**

You may not feel comfortable telling your caseworker about the violence in your home. If you decide not to talk about your abuse with your caseworker, IDHS will expect you to follow all rules to get benefits (see Questions 5 and 9).

Sometimes the abuse you experience keeps you from doing the activities in your Responsibility and Services Plan (RSP). If you tell your caseworker about the abuse you will have **“good cause”** for not cooperating with IDHS (see Question 9). **You should not be sanctioned** (see Question 14). Your caseworker will expect some proof of the violence you experience or the threat you face.

After you talk with your caseworker you may decide to change your RSP. You may choose to do things to deal with the violence you experience. For example, domestic violence counseling or going to get an Order of Protection may be counted as work activities. IDHS will expect you to do at least 20 hours of other work activities a week.

 **IMPORTANT** If the domestic violence you experience stops you from getting or keeping a job, you should ask for a **“domestic violence exclusion.”** You should ask for a domestic violence exclusion if the violence you experience stops you from doing other work activities.

### DOMESTIC VIOLENCE EXCLUSION

If you get TANF cash assistance you may be excused from work activity requirements. **You can get a domestic violence exclusion when:**

- **You cannot participate in work or work activities for 30 hours per week.**
- **It is unsafe for you to participate in work or work activities.**


You can ask your caseworker for this exclusion. You must give some proof of the violence you experience. Your proof can include:

- a written statement from anyone who knows about your domestic violence;
- a police report, government agency record, or court record;
- a statement from a domestic or sexual violence program or rape crisis center where you got services;
- a statement from a lawyer, minister, doctor, nurse, or other professional who gave you help or advice;
- other proof, like marks of abuse on your body; or
- any other proof that supports your claim of violence.


 **IMPORTANT** IDHS does not have to, and should not, contact your abuser to prove your claim.

**You can be given a domestic violence exclusion for up to 2 months after you first apply.** Your exclusion from work activity requirements can be extended month by month for as long as necessary. These months do not count toward your 60-month lifetime TANF limit.

During the time you have an exclusion from work activity requirements you will need to create a Responsibility and Services Plan (RSP). Your RSP will list what you are going to do to deal with your domestic violence situation. Your RSP may include work or training activities if they are appropriate for you.

 **IMPORTANT** You do not need to be getting services from a domestic violence program to get a domestic violence exclusion. IDHS may refer you to a domestic violence program in your community for help. You do not need to participate in a domestic violence program to keep getting your benefits.

## **CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT EXCEPTION**

 **IMPORTANT** You do not need to help IDHS or the Child Support Enforcement Program contact the other parent of your child if:

- your child was conceived as a result of incest or rape;
- you plan to let the child be adopted;
- giving this information will cause you or your child emotional or physical harm; or
- you fear domestic violence.

IDHS will expect you to prove your reason for not cooperating with the Child Support Enforcement Program. You might use documents like past reports of abuse or medical records for proof. You can also use statements from people who know about your experience of violence.

**If you feel you want to get child support for your children there are ways to cooperate with the Child Support Enforcement Program and stay safe.**

**?** **HELP** To get help cooperating with the Child Support Enforcement Program if you fear domestic violence contact:

**Public Benefits Hotline**

**1-888-893-5327** (Cook County)

**Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance Foundation**

**1-877-342-7891** (Southern and part of Central Illinois)

**Prairie State Legal Services**

**1-800-690-2130** (Northern and part of Central Illinois)

**Illinois Legal Aid**

**[www.IllinoisLegalAid.org](http://www.IllinoisLegalAid.org)**



## **19. What if I have a criminal record?**

### **BENEFITS ELIGIBILITY**

If you have been convicted of one of the crimes below, you will not be able to get some public benefits.

#### **Drug-Related Felonies**

If you have been convicted of a Class 1 or Class X drug-related felony committed after August 22, 1996 you **can never get TANF cash assistance. You can still get TANF for your children.**

If you are convicted of any other drug-related felony, you **cannot get TANF cash assistance for 2 years. This is not true if you have completed or are in a treatment or aftercare program.**

If you cannot get TANF, **you can still be included in your family's food stamps and medical benefits.**


#### **Benefits Fraud**

If you have been convicted of using a false address in 2 or more states to get public benefits you **cannot get Aid for the Aged, Blind, or Disabled (AABD), TANF, or Transitional Assistance for 10 years.** This period starts with the date of the conviction. This applies to persons convicted on or after August 22, 1996. For TANF, this applies to people convicted on or after July 1, 1997.

**You will not be eligible for food stamps for 10 years** if you are convicted of making a false claim about who you are or where you live to get more food stamps.

#### **Fugitive Felons or Probation/Parole Violations**

**You are not eligible for cash assistance or food stamps** if you are considered a probation or parole violator, or a fugitive felon. A fugitive felon is a person fleeing to avoid prosecution, to avoid giving testimony, or to avoid imprisonment because of their involvement in a felony case.

 **COMMON PROBLEM** If you have ever been arrested it is sometimes hard to understand what stays on your record and what does not. It is important for you to be clear about what is on your record when you apply for public benefits or jobs.

 **HELP** If you want to learn how to get a copy of your arrest record contact:

**Cabrini Green Legal Aid Clinic**  
[www.cgla.net](http://www.cgla.net)

**Illinois Legal Aid**  
[www.IllinoisLegalAid.org](http://www.IllinoisLegalAid.org)

## 20. What if I am homeless?

### BENEFITS ELIGIBILITY

If you are homeless you may qualify for cash, medical, or food stamp benefits, as long as you meet other eligibility requirements (see Questions 1, 2 and 3). **You do not need to have a permanent or fixed address to get benefits.** When you apply for benefits you should tell IDHS that you are homeless and use the address of a shelter, church, or community agency that you know. You may also use the IDHS office as your address.

If you get TANF or are applying for TANF you can also get **Crisis Assistance** (see Question 1) if you become homeless or are in danger of becoming homeless due to:

- a fire, flood, or other natural disaster;
- an eviction or court order to leave your home for any reason; or
- physical abuse by a person who still lives in your home.

If you get TANF or live in Chicago and get General Assistance, IDHS may also refer you to an **Emergency Shelter program**. Your benefits case will not be transferred unless you request this.

You may also be able to get emergency food stamps if you become homeless. IDHS calls these **expedited food stamps** (see Question 2).



**HELP** If you are homeless and need help getting public benefits you can call:

**Public Benefits Hotline**  
1-888-893-5327 (Cook County)

**Chicago Coalition for the Homeless**  
1-800-940-1119

**Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance Foundation**  
1-877-342-7891 (Southern and part of Central Illinois)

**Prairie State Legal Services**  
1-800-690-2130 (Northern and part of Central Illinois)

**Illinois Legal Aid**  
[www.IllinoisLegalAid.org](http://www.IllinoisLegalAid.org)





## 21. What if I, my spouse, or child has a disability or health problem?

### BENEFITS ELIGIBILITY

#### Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)


If you worked and paid some of your wages into the Social Security System, then you might qualify for **Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)** if you become disabled. Your spouse or children may also get SSDI benefits. SSDI is not an IDHS program. How you qualify for SSDI is not covered in this booklet.

 **HELP** To find out more about SSDI contact the :


**Social Security Administration (SSA)**  
1-800-772-1213 or TTY 1-800-325-0778  
<http://s3abaca.ssa.gov/pro/foi/foi-home.html>

#### Supplemental Security Income (SSI)

If you have not worked and paid some of your wages into the Social Security System, but you or your child has a severe disability you may qualify for **Supplemental Security Income (SSI)**. SSI is not an IDHS program. How you qualify for SSI is not covered in this booklet.

 **HELP** To get SSI for you or your child you must apply with:

**Social Security Administration**  
1-800-772-1213 or TTY 1-800-325-0778  
<http://s3abaca.ssa.gov/pro/foi/foi-home.html>

 **IMPORTANT** If you qualify for SSI you may also be able to work and still keep some of your benefits. There is a program called **Ticket to Work** that can help you get a job.

 **HELP** For more information about Ticket to Work call:

**Ticket to Work**  
1-800-795-9973  
[www.yourtickettowork.com](http://www.yourtickettowork.com)

If you are not eligible for SSI, you may be eligible for other public benefits.

## **Aid to the Aged, Blind, and Disabled (AABD)**

You may qualify for AABD cash and medical assistance (see Question 1) if your age, blindness, or disability meets the SSI eligibility requirements and you:


- have been getting SSI;
- have been denied SSI due to income; or
- are not a citizen and you:
  - are 65 years of age or older;
  - meet the citizenship/immigration requirements for medical assistance;
  - legally lived in the U.S. on August 22, 1996; and
  - was denied SSI due to a finding of “not disabled;”
- are an elderly or disabled refugee or asylee who lost SSI when your 7-year time limit to become a U.S. citizen passed (see Question 17).

The cash payment you get is the difference between your income and the AABD Cash Assistance Standard determined by IDHS. **If you get AABD, you will also get a medical card.**

## **TANF Cash Assistance**

**TANF work activity requirements do not apply to you if you have a medical condition that keeps you from working** for a time (see Question 9). A special department in IDHS called the **Client Assessment Unit (CAU)** will decide if you qualify for a work exemption. This decision is based on medical reports and other facts.

You may also qualify for a **work exemption that stops your TANF counter** (see Question 11).

 **IMPORTANT** When you apply for cash assistance make sure the IDHS caseworker knows that a family health problem makes it hard for you to work or keep a job. Talk to your caseworker whenever a family health problem makes it hard for you to follow your Responsibility and Services Plan.

## **Other Benefits**

You and your family may also qualify for food stamps and medical assistance. The eligibility rules for these programs are complicated (see Questions 2 and 3). If your income is limited, you should apply for these programs (see Question 5).



**State of Illinois  
Department of Human Services**

**TIME LIMIT EXCEPTIONS**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Case Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
Local Office Stamp:

You have used \_\_\_\_\_ of your 60 lifetime TANF months. **Your Cash Benefits Will STOP in \_\_\_\_\_ UNLESS an adult in your case meets one of the exceptions below or your TANF clock stops.**

**EXCEPTIONS TO THE 60-MONTH LIMIT**

**To qualify for an exception, you or another adult in your case must:**

- have a pending SSI application and be determined disabled by us; or
- be determined unable to work at least 30 hours per week due to a medical condition; or
- be in an intensive program that prevents working at least 30 hours per week (includes DCFS, domestic violence, homeless services, mental health, substance abuse, and vocational rehabilitation programs); or
- be in an approved education or training program that will be finished within 6 months after the end of the 60 months; or
- be approved to care for a related child under 18 or spouse due to their medical condition; or
- have a disabled child who is approved for a Home and Community-based Care waiver.

**If you think you may qualify and want to apply for an exception, you must file a written request.** Complete the Request for Exception on the back of this notice, and mail it to DHS, Bureau of Policy Development, PO Box 19176, Springfield, IL 62794-9176. If you have questions, contact your caseworker at the local office listed above.

**Your TANF clock will stop if:**

- Your case number above starts with 04 or P4 and
  - you work at least 30 hours per week or
  - we approve your attendance in a full-time college degree program and you have at least a 2.5 grade point average on a 4-point scale.
- Your case number above starts with 06 or P6 and you and the children's other parent work a combined total of at least 35 hours per week.
- You have a disabled child approved for a Home & Community-based Care Program waiver.
- We approve you to care for a child under age 18 or your spouse due to their medical condition.
- We approve you for a Domestic Violence Exclusion.

**When your time runs out and you have not been approved for an exception:**

If you are the parent of the children in your case, you can only get medical and food stamps for yourself and the children. If you are not the children's parent, the children can still get cash.



State of Illinois
Department of Human Services

REQUEST FOR EXCEPTION

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Case Number: \_\_\_\_\_
Address: \_\_\_\_\_
\_\_\_\_\_
\_\_\_\_\_

Instructions: To request cash assistance beyond the 60-month limit, complete and sign this form and mail it to

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
BUREAU OF POLICY DEVELOPMENT
PO BOX 19176
SPRINGFIELD, IL 62794-9176

I am requesting TANF assistance beyond the 60-month lifetime limit because I believe I am (or another adult on my case is):

(check all that apply)

- probably eligible for SSI Disability and an application is pending;
unable to work at least 30 hours per week due to a medical condition;
in an intensive program that prevents working at least 30 hours per week (includes DCFS, domestic violence, homeless services, mental health, substance abuse, and vocational rehabilitation programs);
in an approved education or training program that will be finished within 6 months after the end of the 60 months;
needed in the home to care for a related child under 18 or spouse due to their medical condition;
living with a disabled child who is approved for a Home and Community-based Care waiver.

The reason for my request is \_\_\_\_\_
\_\_\_\_\_
\_\_\_\_\_
\_\_\_\_\_
\_\_\_\_\_
\_\_\_\_\_

I understand that I am entitled to written notice of a decision on my request within 45 days of the date the request is filed. I understand that I have the right to appeal an adverse action taken on my request or any failure to provide written notice within this 45-day period and to be given a fair hearing on my appeal.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Phone number \_\_\_\_\_



NOTICE OF APPEAL- Financial Assistance - Medical Assistance - Food Stamps

I, \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_
Appellant's Name Street or RFD

City County State Zip Telephone Number

am asking for a fair hearing because: (Please state the action or inaction of the Local/Central Department Office that you believe is wrong and why you think it is wrong).

FOR FINANCIAL/MEDICAL ASSISTANCE:

- I want to continue receiving the assistance benefits I now receive until a decision on my appeal is rendered. I understand that I may owe the value of any financial assistance overpayment I receive while awaiting the decision.
I do not want to continue receiving the assistance benefits I now receive until a decision on my appeal is rendered.

FOR FOOD STAMPS:

- I want to continue receiving the amount of food stamps I now receive until a decision on my appeal is rendered. I understand that I may owe the value of any overissuance I receive while awaiting the decision.
I do not want to continue receiving the amount of food stamps I now receive until a decision on my appeal is rendered.

Your Case Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Type of Program: \_\_\_\_\_

My Representative, if any, is: \_\_\_\_\_

Appellant's Signature Date

FOR AGENCY OFFICE USE: TO BE COMPLETED BY THE LOCAL OFFICE OR ASSISTANCE HEARINGS

Date this Notice of Appeal was received: \_\_\_\_\_
Date of postmark, if mailed: \_\_\_\_\_ (Attach envelope).
Date of written request for this hearing, if preceding this form: \_\_\_\_\_
Date of Decision being appealed: \_\_\_\_\_
Case Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Case Number: \_\_\_\_\_

NOTE: The local office will help you fill out this form. Upon completion, file this notice with the local office, or with Assistance Hearings, 401 S. Clinton Street, 6th Floor, Chicago, Illinois 60607. You are entitled by law to a final decision on your appeal and to full implementation of a decision favorable to you within 90 days from the time you requested the appeal, unless you have requested a delay of your hearing. For the Food Stamp Program only, you are entitled by law to a final decision on your appeal within 60 days and full implementation of a decision favorable to you within 10 days of the receipt of the hearing decision.







**Chicago Jobs Council**

29 E. Madison Street, Suite 1700

Chicago, IL 60602

p. 312.252.0460

f. 312.252.0099

[www.cjc.net](http://www.cjc.net)

**To print your own  
copy of Get the Facts  
go to the Chicago Jobs  
Council website  
[www.cjc.net](http://www.cjc.net)**

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