

Chapter 2 ELIGIBILITY FOR PUBLIC ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

Refugees are qualified aliens who are exempt from the five year wait on eligibility for receipt of public benefits. The term refugee-eligible populations refers to refugees, asylees, Cuban/Haitian Entrants, victims of human trafficking, certain Amerasians, and Iraqis and Afghans with special immigrant visas

A. Eligibility for Benefit Programs

1. Refugees are entitled to apply for the same benefits and service programs that are available to U.S. citizens. If they meet the financial and non-financial requirements of those programs, they are eligible for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Medical Assistance Program including Medicaid and FAMIS, the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), Energy Assistance Program, General Relief Program, and any other benefit program administered by the Department of Social Service.
2. Refugees, who do not meet TANF, Medicaid, or FAMIS income requirements, may be eligible for time limited refugee cash assistance (RCA) and refugee medical assistance (RMA). The rules for these programs are contained in Chapters 3 and 4 of this manual.
3. The process to determine a refugee's eligibility for any of the public assistance programs, including RCA and RMA, begins with the Application for Benefits which is completed on-line at <https://commonhelp.virginia.gov/access/>; in person at a local department of social services <http://www.dss.virginia.gov/localagency/>; or by phone at 855-635-4370.
4. Some refugee eligible populations enter the U.S. with legal permanent residency (LPR) status. Others obtain this status after living the U.S. for one year. Refugee eligible populations with LPR status, whether obtained before or after U.S. arrival, are eligible for TANF, Medicaid, RCA and RMA.
5. Social Security Numbers

SSNs are not required for RCA or RMA. When processing TANF or Medicaid applications for refugees, if the only disqualification is the lack of a SSN or proof the person has applied for a SSN, the individual is to be approved for RCA and RMA. When the SSN or proof of application for an SSN is provided, the case is moved to TANF and Medicaid if the client continues to meet the requirements of those programs.

B. SNAP Work Requirements

Refugees who are able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWD) are required to meet the ABAWD SNAP work requirement unless the refugee is participating in the Refugee Social Services Employment Program (described in Chapter 5).

C. TANF Work Requirements

A refugee who is receiving TANF and is not exempt from the TANF work requirements, must participate in the Virginia Initiative for Employment not Welfare (VIEW). Participation in the Refugee Social Services Employment Program (described in Chapter 5) is not a TANF work requirement exemption

D. TANF Mandatory School Attendance and Immunization Requirements

1. A TANF application should not be denied solely on the basis of truancy. A school-aged refugee child may not be enrolled in school at the time of the initial TANF application for a reason other than truancy or for other reason over which the applicant has no control. For example, newly arrived refugees may not be in school due to delays in obtaining the required school medical examination or the child may arrive with medical conditions that prevent immediate school enrollment. In these instances, develop a plan as described in the TANF Manual, Section 201.3 C. & D.
2. If the application is made in the summer, there may be no record of school attendance if the family recently arrived in the Virginia. Follow the TANF guidance at 201.3 regarding applications made during the summer months. If the household is otherwise eligible, approve the case. Set an alert in ADAPT for the month school is scheduled to begin.
3. If the TANF school enrollment requirements cannot be met following the TANF rules above, approve the case for Refugee Cash Assistance until the child meets the requirement. Then, if the family continues to meet TANF eligibility requirements, move the case to TANF.
4. If the household is otherwise eligible, the TANF application can be approved without verification of immunization. Verification of the completed immunization must be provided at the time of TANF redetermination.

E. Counting Special Payments to Refugee-Eligible Populations

1. The Reception and Placement (R&P) Program provides initial resettlement services to newly arrived refugees. The services include assistance with shelter, clothing, food, and transportation. These services are delivered in a variety of ways. Some are direct services, some are vendor payments, and some are minimal cash payments. These payments are generally for 30 days

from the date of arrival in the U.S. Direct (non-cash) services may be for 30 to 180 days

- a. For TANF, Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA), and Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA), the R&P cash payment is not counted in determining eligibility.
 - b. For Medicaid, cash payments made to the assistance unit are counted as unearned income. Payments provided directly to vendors on behalf of the assistance unit or in-kind contributions (food, clothing supplies, etc.) are not counted as income.
 - c. For SNAP, a one-time only R&P payment is excluded because it meets the definition of “an infrequent/irregular stream of money; a lump sum payment...” Whether other payments are counted as income is dependent upon (i) when the payments are issued and (ii) if the payments are provided directly to the individual household members. Payments provided directly to vendors on behalf of SNAP household members or provided as an in-kind benefit generally are not counted as income. Payments may be excluded as income if they are an infrequent/irregular stream of money; a lump sum payment; or a payment from a charitable group that is less than \$300 in a calendar quarter. Income provisions are addressed in Part 11 of the SNAP Certification Manual
2. The Matching Grant Program (MGP) provides initial employment and cash assistance to newly arrived refugees determined to be immediately employable. The MGP is an alternative to TANF and RCA. The goal is the attainment of economic self-sufficiency without accessing TANF and RCA. MGP services are available to the refugee for four to six months from date of arrival into the U.S. The program is administered by local non-profit organizations, not by the Virginia Department of Social Services.
- a. For RMA, the MGP cash payment is not counted.
 - b. For Medicaid, TANF, and RCA, the payment is counted.
 - c. For SNAP, the MGP payments represent on-going income for the four months they are issued and must be counted; however, any part of an MGP payment made directly to a vendor on behalf of a SNAP household member is excluded.
 - d. Local departments of social services are to notify the local refugee service provider when a refugee is determined eligible for TANF or RCA. If the person is receiving MGP assistance, the resettlement agency is required to remove the person from the MGP.

3. Special Considerations for Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA)

- a. If an applicant is found ineligible for Medicaid solely due to R&P payments, the application is rescreened for RMA.
- b. When the R&P or MGP payment stops, the RMA case is moved to Medicaid if the RMA recipient is otherwise eligible. A new application is not required.
- c. If an applicant is ineligible for TANF or RCA due to MG Program payments and the person leaves the MG Program and requests TANF or RCA, a reapplication is required.
- d. In rare situations, a refugee-eligible person may apply for TANF or RCA prior to learning of their eligibility for the MG Program. In these situations, the person may request that his or her application be withdrawn or the TANF or RCA case be closed.
- e. In situations where the a client is receiving both MG Program payments and RCA or TANF payments, an assessment is to be made to determine whether a fraud investigation should be made.

F. Eligibility for Foster Care Services

Children in the Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Program (URM) receive, through the Commonwealth Catholic Charities Foster Care Program, the full range of services and benefits for which all Virginia's Foster Care Program children are entitled. The Medicaid eligibility determination process and procedures for children in the URM program are the same as for all other foster care children. URM youth who age-out of foster care are eligible for Medicaid under the Former Foster Care category until they reach the age of 26.