

A Quick Guide to Using CommonHelp



VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF
SOCIAL SERVICES

Introduction

CommonHelp is the Commonwealth of Virginia’s fast and easy way to apply online for many Virginia social services assistance programs. Through a single online site, you can find out what assistance you might be eligible for and submit one application saving you time and effort.

This guide is designed to help you use CommonHelp. When you go online and start working in CommonHelp, you will also find a quick 2-minute video introduction plus online help. Use these to prepare yourself and to find answers to your questions.

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About CommonHelp

CommonHelp is a self-service portal where Virginia citizens can go to apply for assistance.

Using CommonHelp, you will be able to submit a single application to apply for assistance from multiple Department of Social Services (DSS) programs such as:

- TANF – Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
- SNAP – Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
- MA – Medical Assistance
- EA – Energy Assistance
- Child Care – Assistance for Child Care services

This makes applying easier and more convenient.

Your Information Is Kept Private

CommonHelp is private and confidential. Information you enter online into CommonHelp is protected. Access to your information is secured by use of a User ID and password.






Each application also receives a unique tracking number which you should keep. Use this number if you ever need to call by phone or stop by an office to discuss your application.

Navigation Tips

Here are the basics for getting around in the system.

Buttons

Buttons are at the bottom of each CommonHelp page.

	Saves information entered on the page and takes you to the next page or tab
	Saves information entered on the page and takes you back to the previous page or tab.
	Enables you to include another item to the information you're entering, such as an additional person, another employer, a source of income, an additional expense, or an additional insurance policy.
	Saves your unsubmitted application and allows you to leave it to come back at a later time or date.
	Appears on summary pages; allows you to change information you entered earlier in CommonHelp.

Radio Buttons

Radio buttons allow you to choose only one option as shown below. Click on the circle to select it.

Yes No

Checkboxes

Checkboxes allow you to select and deselect by clicking in the box. In this example, the option "No one" is selected.

No one




Gus

Drop-down Menus

Drop-down menus allow you to select an option from a list. Drop-down menus are identified by a down arrow to the right of the box.

Name:

< click here to choose > 

< click here to choose >

Gus Tsoukis

Date Fields

Date fields allow you to enter a date. To type a date in, follow the pattern MM/DD/YYYY as shown in the example below.

08/07/1987 Ex: mm/dd/yyyy

Links

Links take you directly to another page within CommonHelp. Most links are identified by underlined text. Click on the underlined text to go to that page.

Am I Eligible?

Click the “Am I Eligible?” button on the CommonHelp home page to answer short questions and be told if you and the members of your household may or may not be eligible for assistance. It takes about 15 minutes to complete.

The Am I Eligible tool is not required. It’s an optional step, but it can help give you an idea of what to expect if you decide to complete and submit an application.

The Am I Eligible tool has 4 parts:

1. **Get Started** – Explains the process of screening for benefits.
2. **Household Information** – Collects information about yourself and all members of your household.
3. **Individual Details** – Prompts you to answer questions about each individual household member.
4. **Results** – Shows you the list of programs for which you may or may not be eligible for.

Apply for Benefits

Click the “Apply for Benefits” button on the CommonHelp home page to start an application for assistance.

It typically takes about 20-40 minutes to complete. If you need to stop, you can save and exit your application at any time and return to complete it later.

The online application includes the following:

1. **Getting Started** – Guides you through setting up an account to create a User Name and Password.



Be sure to write down your User ID and Password. You will need them to start your application. You will also need them to re-enter the system should you decide to save and stop the application and need to return to it later.

Next, this section collects basic information about you and your household. Prepare for this section by having the following information ready:

- Household income from jobs, child support and other income sources
- Social Security Numbers and birth dates of household members
- Current or recent health insurance information
- Housing and utility expense information
- Dependent care or disabled expense information, including day care and medical expenses
- Resource information, such as bank accounts, vehicles, homes, property, life insurance, etc. Please note: Some social services do not need resource information. Resource questions will


only be asked if this information is needed to determine eligibility

- If you are a U.S. citizen, you must declare citizenship and provide proof of identity (for example: birth certificate, driver's license or state ID)
 - Non-U.S. citizens must provide documentation indicating lawful residence in the U.S
 - For Food Assistance (SNAP), you must include children under age 22 and also include anyone else who eats with you
2. **Household** – Prompts you to answer information about you and all members of your household.
 3. **Benefits** – Asks you to choose which assistance programs your household is applying for.
 4. **Individual Details** – Asks details about the household and each individual member.
 5. **Income** –Collects information about your income and that of other members in your household.
 6. **Expenses** – Includes questions about the expenses of all household members.
 7. **Insurance** – Asks questions about the insurance held by members in the household.
 8. **Resources** – Collects information about resources held by you and other household members such as bank accounts, vehicles, homes, property and life insurance; potentially you may be asked to supply information about other members in your household.
 9. **Summary**– Asks you to review all the information you’ve entered in CommonHelp up to this point; provides you a chance to make additions or corrections.
 10. **Next Steps** -- Explains which programs you applied for and which offices will receive your submitted application.
 11. **Verification** – Tells you your options to submit your completed application. The simplest choice is to submit it electronically. Information on other options (mailing, faxing and personal drop-off to a local DSS office) is also provided.
 12. **Submit e-Application** – Takes you step-by-step through the electronic signature process so that you can submit your application online. You will receive a tracking number and confirmation that your application was successfully submitted if you choose to submit electronically.

Stopping Your Application to Come Back at a Later Time

With CommonHelp, you can stop your application and then come back to it at a later time or date.

To do this, click the **Save + Exit** button before closing your internet browser.

 If you close your internet browser without first clicking **Save + Exit**, you will lose information you entered. Always click **Save + Exit** before leaving CommonHelp.

Returning to Your Application

To come back to the application at a later time, go to the CommonHelp home page. Enter the User Name and Password you created during the setup of your account.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: How long will it take to apply for assistance using CommonHelp?

A: It takes most applicants between 20 to 40 minutes.

Q: Which programs can I apply to using CommonHelp?

A: Five programs are available through CommonHelp.

- **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families**
(Also called TANF) Provides temporary cash assistance or money payments to eligible low income families with children who meet other certain requirements
- **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program**
(Also called SNAP) Provides assistance in the form of an EBT (debit like) card, for eligible households to buy food
- **Medical Assistance**
(Also called MA) Helps to cover doctor visits, hospital visits, mental health, and prescriptions
- **Energy Assistance**
(Also called EA) Provides assistance to households with heating and cooling expenses and assists with some heating emergencies
- **Child Care**
Helps to cover costs of child care for work or other approved activities

Q: How long will my application be saved?

A: CommonHelp gives you 60 days to complete an application.

Q: Do I have to sign my application electronically?

A: No. You can print the application, sign it and then submit it either via mail, fax or personal drop-off to a local DSS office following the instructions CommonHelp gives you. If you submit your application electronically, then you will sign it electronically.

Q: After I submit my application and receive the confirmation, do I need to do anything else?

A: The local agency will contact you with further information on conducting an interview or returning verifications.

Q: Does information I enter in Am I Eligible show up automatically for me in Apply for Benefits?

A: No. Information you enter in the Am I Eligible tool does not carry over to Apply for Benefits. The questions in Am I Eligible are short and general on purpose, to quickly provide you an idea of the type of assistance you might be able to receive. To apply for assistance, CommonHelp needs details and so the short answers in Am I Eligible are not enough.

Still Have Questions?

Call 1-855-635-4370

*Staff are available to answer your questions
between 7:00 AM and 7:00 PM, Monday through Friday.*