

## Chapter 2

### ELIGIBILITY FOR PUBLIC ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

#### Acronyms Used in this Chapter

LDSS	Local department of social services
MGP	Matching Grant Program
RCA	Refugee Cash Assistance Program
RMA	Refuge Medical Assistance Program
R&P	Reception and Placement Program
SNAP	Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program
TANF	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

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, Iraqis and Afghans with special immigrant visas, Cuban/Haitian Entrants, victims of human trafficking, certain Amerasians, and unaccompanied refugee minors.

#### **A. Eligibility for Benefit Programs**

1. Refugees are entitled to apply for the same benefits and services 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 Programs, the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), Energy Assistance Program, General Relief Program, and any other benefit program administered by the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS).
2. Refugees who do not meet TANF or Medicaid 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; in person at a local department of social services (LDSS); or by phone. Refugees and agencies assisting refugees to apply for benefits are encouraged to use the on-line application.
4. Refugees apply for legal permanent residency (LPR) status after being in the U.S for one year. Afghan and Iraqis with special immigrant visa status arrive in the U.S. with LPR status. Whether obtained before or after U.S. arrival, refugee-eligible populations with LPR status are categorically eligible for SNAP, TANF, Medicaid, RCA, and RMA.

#### **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 must participate in the Virginia Initiative for Employment not Welfare (VIEW) if the refugee is not exempt from the TANF work requirements. 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. Newly arrived refugees children may not be in school due to situations over which the family has no control. For example, there may be a delay 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 D.
2. If a school-aged refugee child is not enrolled in school at the time of the initial TANF application, the reason is normally not truancy but due to a situation over which the applicant has no control. 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 VaCMS 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. When the child meets the school enrollment requirements, move the case to TANF if the family continues to meet other TANF eligibility requirements.
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 is a Department of State (DOS) funded program that provides initial resettlement services to newly arrived refugees. Local affiliates of national voluntary agencies, under contract with DOS, provide R&P Program services. 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, RMA, and 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. Local non-profit organizations provide Matching Grant Program (MGP) services. MGP services include 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 MGP cash payment

- a. Is not counted for RMA
- b. Is counted for Medicaid, TANF, and RCA.
- c. Is counted for SNAP if made as a direct payment to the client.
- d. Is not counted for SNAP if made directly to a vendor on behalf of a SNAP household member

Note: LDSSs 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

- a. If an RMA recipient is ineligible for Medicaid solely due to R&P and MGP payments, when the R&P or MGP payments end, the case is re-assessed for Medicaid eligibility. A new application is not required.
- b. If TANF or RCA is denied due to MGP Program payments, when the MGP payments end, a new TANF or RCA application is required.
- c. 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.
- d. In situations where a client is receiving both MGP payments and RCA or TANF payments, an assessment is made to determine whether a fraud investigation should be made.

#### **F. Eligibility for Foster Care Services**

Children in the Unaccompanied Refugee Minor 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.