

Washington public assistance for immigrant victims of domestic violence

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Last Review Date

February 20, 2025

This tells you what public benefits you may be eligible for if you are an immigrant and a victim of domestic violence.

My spouse or relative abuses me. I don't have legal immigration status. I'm afraid to call the police. What can I do?

You may be able to apply for a green card for yourself and your children through the "Violence against Women Act" (VAWA) (<https://www.womenslaw.org/laws/federal/immigration/vawa-abuse-victims>).

VAWA applies to you if the person who abused you or your child **is a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident (LPR) and one of these is true:**

- The abusive person was your **spouse**
- You are **under age 21**
- Your child who was abused **is also the child** of the U.S. citizen or LPR parent

- The person who abused you **was your adult age U.S. citizen or LPR child** (who is over age 21)

You may be eligible to get other immigration relief even if you are not married or related to the person who abused you, or your abuser does not have legal status.

If you have questions about this, call the **Northwest Immigrant Rights Project**. They have different numbers depending on where in Washington you live:

- In **Western Washington**, call 800-445-5771
- In **Asotin, Benton, Columbia, Franklin, Garfield, Kittitas, Klickitat, Walla Walla Whitman & Yakima counties**, call 888-756-3641
- In **Adams, Chelan, Douglas, Ferry, Grant, Lincoln, Okanogan, Pend Oreille, Spokane & Stevens counties**, call 866-271-2084

Will my family and I be eligible to get benefits if we leave my abuser?

Probably, if you have one of these:

- An approved self-petition or notice of prima facie relief under the VAWA
- An approved I-130 visa petition filed by your abuser
- An approved application for suspension of deportation **or** cancellation of removal under the VAWA

If you meet other requirements, you and your family members may be eligible to get:

- Emergency Medicaid for treatment of emergency medical conditions in a hospital

- Treatment for cancer, benign life-threatening tumors, or dialysis
- Healthcare insurance through the new Apple Health expansion - Certain immigrants can apply for a special insurance called the Apple Health Expansion. Undocumented immigrants can apply. Lawfully present non-qualified immigrants can only apply if they are not in an employment authorized immigrant category. Lawfully present qualified immigrants can't apply. There are other eligibility requirements. **You should apply for these benefits as soon as possible** because the program is limited. Find out if the program is still accepting applications (<https://www.hca.wa.gov/free-or-low-cost-health-care/i-need-medical-dental-or-vision-care/apple-health-expansion>).
- You can buy medical and dental insurance through the state's Health Benefit Exchange (<https://wahealthplanfinder.org/>). If you have low income, you can get help to pay for insurance coverage.
- Medical Care Services (MCS) - medical assistance for persons who have a disability or are over 65
- All children up to age 19 who have low income are eligible for free medical coverage ("Washington Apple Health" (<https://www.hca.wa.gov/free-or-low-cost-health-care/i-need-medical-dental-or-vision-care/children>)) in Washington State. There are no immigration status requirements for this coverage.

- Low-income pregnant people are eligible for medical coverage, until one year after the pregnancy ends
- Pregnant Person Assistance (also known as Pregnant Women Assistance or “PWA”) (<https://www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/community-services-offices/pregnant-women-assistance-pwa-program>) - cash assistance
- State Family Assistance (SFA) (<https://www.dshs.wa.gov/food-cash-medical>) - cash assistance for families with dependent children
- Aged Blind and Disabled (ABD) (<https://www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/community-services-offices/aged-blind-or-disabled-cash-program>) - cash assistance for people with disabilities or who are over 65
- Cash for groceries through a Food Assistance Program (https://www.washingtonconnection.org/home/?locale=en_en) (if the program is federally funded)
- Working Connections subsidized childcare (<https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/earlylearning-childcare/getting-help>) (the state government helps pay for it)

You may also be eligible to get some federal benefits. You must wait **5 years after** the government grants your immigration petition or application to apply for:

- Non-emergency Medicaid if you have an income of 138% of the Federal Poverty Level or below.
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) - cash assistance for low-income families
- Cash for groceries through a Food Assistance Program (https://www.washingtonconnection.org/home/?locale=en_en) (if the program is federally funded)
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I have a U Visa. Am I eligible for any of these programs?

Maybe. If you have not yet adjusted to lawful permanent resident (“green card”) status, you and your family members may be eligible to get:

- Emergency Medicaid for treatment of emergency medical conditions in a hospital
- Treatment for cancer, benign life-threatening tumors, or dialysis
- Healthcare insurance through the new Apple Health expansion - Certain immigrants can apply for a special insurance called the Apple Health Expansion. Undocumented immigrants can apply. Lawfully present non-qualified immigrants can only apply if they are not in an employment authorized immigrant category. Lawfully present qualified immigrants can’t apply. There are other eligibility requirements. **You should apply for these benefits as soon as possible** because the program is limited. Find out if the program is still accepting applications (<https://www.hca.wa.gov/free-or-low-cost-health-care/i-need-medical-dental-or-vision-care/apple-health-expansion>).

Lawfully present non-qualified immigrants like U Visa immigrants **can** apply for the Apple Health Expansion because they are **not** in an employment authorized immigrant category.

- You can buy medical and dental insurance through the state’s Health Benefit Exchange (<https://wahealthplanfinder.org/>). If you have low income, you can get help to pay for insurance coverage.

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How do I apply for benefits?

Cash and food assistance: apply at your local DSHS office

(<https://www.dshs.wa.gov/office-locations>), call the Customer Service Contact Center at 877.501.2233 or **visit** [WashingtonConnection.org](https://www.washingtonconnection.org/home/?locale=en_en) (https://www.washingtonconnection.org/home/?locale=en_en).

Most medical programs, including insurance and subsidies: you can apply through [Healthplanfinder](http://www.wahealthplanfinder.org/) (<http://www.wahealthplanfinder.org/>). You can also apply by calling 1-855-923-4633 (1-855-WAFINDER), or by asking for a paper application at your local DSHS office (<https://www.dshs.wa.gov/office-locations>).

If you apply for benefits in person, take a copy of your immigration papers, if you have them. (This includes a copy of your receipt notice from USCIS.) If you do not have immigration papers yet, you may still be eligible for some help. If you do not have a social security number, leave that line blank, or put "not available." DSHS must accept emergency applications at any time. They may be able to help you soon with cash, medical coupons, and food stamps.

I don't speak English. How can I apply for public benefits programs?

You should write it on the application form if you have a hard time reading, speaking, or understanding English. You can put the language you prefer to use. DSHS must provide you with a free interpreter without delay.

DSHS and HCA **must** provide a free interpreter so you can talk with them about your application and benefits. They should also send you translated

notices about your benefits. DSHS should send you translated notices about your benefits so you can read about your rights and responsibilities in your own language. Keep copies of what they send you.

If you haven't gotten interpreters or notices in your own language and DSHS have stopped your benefits, you may be able to get the benefits turned back on. Try to talk to a lawyer (<https://nwjustice.org/get-legal-help>) if DSHS hasn't been providing you interpreters or translations.

What if I don't read or write, or have a hard time understanding information and following through?

When you apply for help, DSHS will ask if you need extra help, such as someone to help you fill out forms, or call you to explain your letters. If you do need any type of help, say so. Ask them to provide you Necessary Supplemental Accommodation (NSA). Ask for the help you need if you have a medical condition or disability that makes it hard for you to fill out the application, understand the notices or instructions, or communicate with DSHS or HCA.

Will DSHS tell my partner where I am?

No. DSHS usually asks for information about the parents of children who apply for assistance to make sure the parents pay child support for their children. This can mean your children get more money than DSHS will otherwise provide.

If you are afraid your child's other parent may try to find you and hurt you, tell DSHS not to collect child support for this reason. If your partner has been violent or threatened violence in the past, ask DSHS to keep your address confidential (secret from your partner).

My children and I do not have our green cards (lawful permanent residence) yet. Will getting assistance make it hard for us to get them later?

No. People who get their status through a self-petition or a grant of cancellation or suspension under the VAWA are not subject to the "public charge" ground of inadmissibility. You can get your green card even if you have used public benefits.

This is **also true if you have a U visa**. You can get your green card even if you have used benefits.

My abusive partner petitioned for me. They filled out an affidavit of support saying they will support my children and me. Can DSHS turn me down for assistance?

No. DSHS should not make you give information about your sponsor's income and resources if you are a domestic violence victim and your need for assistance stems from the domestic violence. DSHS may try to recover the assistance (get paid back for it) from your sponsor. They cannot turn you down for help because the abusive partner will not pay.

What if I need help getting public assistance for my children or myself?

If you have questions about your eligibility for public assistance, or if DSHS has ended or denied your benefits, try to talk to a lawyer. Public assistance rules are complicated. DSHS workers sometimes make mistakes because they do not know immigration law. A lawyer can try to get you and your family get the benefits you need to stay safe and healthy.

Depending on your immigration status, we have more information elsewhere on the site about public assistance for refugees and other humanitarian entrants, public assistance for non-U.S. citizens, public charge, and U visas.