

Washington public assistance for refugees and other humanitarian entrants

Author

Northwest Justice Project

Last Review Date

February 20, 2025

This tells you what public assistance programs there are for Refugees, Asylees, Persons Granted Withholding of Deportation, Cuban-Haitian Entrants, Special Immigrants from Iraq and Afghanistan, and other humanitarian entrants.

How can I tell if I'm a humanitarian entrant?

There are several categories of immigrants considered humanitarian entrants under immigration laws. They include:

- **Refugees**—persons who have fled their country due to fear of persecution because of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a social group.
- **Asylees**—persons who meet eligibility criteria for refugee status but apply within the U.S.
- **Persons granted Withholding of Deportation**—persons fleeing persecution who may or may not also meet requirements for asylee

status.

- **Special Immigrants from Iraq and Afghanistan**—persons who worked with the U.S. Armed Forces or under Chief of Mission authority in Iraq or Afghanistan.
- **Amerasian entrants**—children (and their families) fathered by U.S. citizens in the conflict in Southeast Asia.
- **Cuban-Haitian entrants**—includes Cubans and Haitians who have been granted parole, applied for asylum, or not received a final order of deportation.
- **Conditional entrants**—persons granted refugee status before 1980.
- **Other humanitarian entrants**- other humanitarian parolees like Ukrainian humanitarian parolees

If you are in one of these groups, you should have proof (called *documentation*) of your status from the Department of Homeland Security.

I'm in one of the groups listed above. I don't have the proof of status or documentation. What can I do?

Get legal advice from an immigration lawyer (<https://ailalawyer.com/>) or call the Northwest Immigrant Rights Project (<https://nwirp.org/>). They have different phone numbers depending on where you live.

If you need copies of immigration documents to show that you are eligible to get benefits, DSHS (Department of Social and Health Services) may be able to help you get copies of lost documents.

I'm a humanitarian entrant. Am I eligible to get benefits?

It depends. You may be eligible to get some federal benefits, including:

- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) - cash assistance for low-income families
- Low-income pregnant people are eligible for medical coverage, until one year after the pregnancy ends
- 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.
- Cash for groceries through a Food Assistance Program (https://www.washingtonconnection.org/home/?locale=en_en)
- 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.

You may also be eligible to get state benefits, including:

There are new federal limitations on certain benefits for certain immigrants.

Starting July 4, 2025, under the new federal law HR-1, many immigrants are no longer eligible to apply for Medicaid, Medicare or premium tax credits. Only these 3 categories of immigrants will continue to be eligible for those benefits:

- Legal permanent residents (called “green card holders”)
- Cubans and Haitians who entered the U.S. under a family reunification program
- People living in the U.S. under the Compacts of Free Association (citizens of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and Palau)

If you’re an immigrant who **isn’t** in one of the 3 eligible categories, and you currently get **Medicare**, you’ll lose your **Medicare** on January 4, 2027.

If you’re an immigrant who was planning to apply for **Medicare**, but you’re not in one of the 3 categories, **you’re no longer eligible** as of July 4, 2025. You **shouldn’t** apply. Even if you’ve lived in the United States and paid Medicare taxes for years, under H.R.1 you can’t get Medicare.

Starting October 1, 2026, if you’re an immigrant who isn’t in one of the 3 eligible categories above, you can’t get **Medicaid**. It’s possible that Washington state will keep immigrant children under age 21 and pregnant people eligible for Medicaid. [Learn more about these changes to eligibility.](#)

The only humanitarian entrants who are now eligible for Medicaid, Medicare or premium tax credits are those that have their LPR status (a green card), Cubans and Haitians who entered the U.S. under a family reunification program, and people living in the U.S.

under the Compacts of Free Association (citizens of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and Palau).

You may also be eligible to get state benefits, including:

- 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
- Housing and Essential Needs (HEN)
(<https://www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/community-services-offices/housing-and-essential-needs-referral-program>) - help with rent and essential items (such as toiletries) for seniors and people with disabilities.

Can I get SSI?

Maybe. Humanitarian entrants can get SSI during their first **7 years** in a humanitarian immigration status.

If you came to the U.S. **before August 22, 1996**, and have had your immigration status longer than 7 years, you may need to show you have a disability (even if you are already 65) to **keep getting** SSI. If you came to the U.S. **on or after August 22, 1996**, you probably need to become a citizen to keep being eligible to get SSI.

There are special eligibility rules for people who have a work history, survived severe human trafficking, or are in the armed

services. Talk to a [legal services lawyer](#) or call the [Northwest Immigrant Rights Project](#) (<https://nwirp.org/>).

Are there any benefits programs just for humanitarian entrants?

Yes. The [Refugee Assistance Program](https://www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/csd-office-refugee-and-immigration-assistance/basic-needs-assistance-programs) (<https://www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/csd-office-refugee-and-immigration-assistance/basic-needs-assistance-programs>) provides cash, medical, and other kinds of assistance to eligible low-income refugees and other humanitarian entrants. Humanitarian entrants are eligible to get these benefits for up to 8 months after entering the U.S., or 8 months after being granted asylum if you are an asylee. You apply at your local DSHS office. Search for local resources on the [Find A Resource Map](https://app.smartsheet.com/b/publish?EQBCT=8e7e2fd0641f4f1e90bbaa36a0bc232d) (<https://app.smartsheet.com/b/publish?EQBCT=8e7e2fd0641f4f1e90bbaa36a0bc232d>) from the [WA Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance](https://www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/office-refugee-and-immigrant-assistance) (<https://www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/office-refugee-and-immigrant-assistance>).

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) (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) (<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.

I have used public assistance. Can I still get a green card (lawful permanent residence) or become a citizen?

Yes. Refugees and humanitarian entrants may use public assistance, including cash, food, and medical, and still be eligible to get a green card or their citizenship. There is no “public charge” test for humanitarian entrants when they apply for their green card. **You might want to** talk to an immigration lawyer.

However, you should always give the government accurate and complete information when you apply for or get benefits. Immigrants who fraudulently get benefits may have trouble becoming citizens and may even face deportation if convicted of a crime.

You should also avoid traveling outside the U.S. for more than **6 months** if possible, especially if you are getting cash assistance. You may have trouble re-entering the country. Always tell DSHS before you leave the country if you may be gone for over **30 days**.

I have a sponsoring organization. Can I be turned down for assistance?

No. The rules on sponsor deeming don't apply to refugees with a sponsoring organization. You must still report any income you get, including actual income your sponsoring organization has given you.

What if the DSHS office turned down my application?

If they turn down (deny) your application and you believe you are eligible, tell your worker you want an administrative hearing or ask for a copy of the Hearing Request form, form #05-013 (<https://www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/forms-you-might-need>) to fill out. There is no fee or penalty for asking for an administrative hearing. You can always withdraw (cancel) your request later if you find out the DSHS office was right. Read about what to do if DSHS said you weren't eligible for benefits. Try to talk to a lawyer.