

ERIE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

GUIDE TO APPLYING FOR BENEFITS



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This guide was assembled with the hope that it will help you navigate through the sometimes challenging array of public benefit programs available through the Erie County Department of Social Services.

Additional information can be obtained at the department's website at <http://www2.erie.gov/socialservices/> or by calling our general information number, 716-858-8000.

SPECIAL NOTE: New York State's public benefits website, <https://www.mybenefits.ny.gov/> is a great place to start! This website is very user-friendly and easy to navigate, and will help you determine what benefits you may be eligible for before you ever come down in person to apply. ***In addition, you can apply for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as Food Stamps) right online, without ever having to come down at all!***

TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE (TA)

Temporary Assistance is temporary help for needy men, women and children. If you are unable to work, can't find a job, or your job does not pay enough, TA may be able to help you pay for your expenses.

The goal for all recipients of Temporary Assistance is self-sufficiency. All applicants for and recipients of Temporary Assistance must participate in work or work-preparation activities assigned by ECDSS in accordance with state and federal regulations, up to 40 hours per week. Failure to participate as assigned without good cause may result in a denial of benefits for applicants, or a reduction of benefits for recipients of assistance. Exemptions from the work and work activity requirement include:

- medically verified physical or mental disability or incapacitation
- age 60 or older
- needed in the home to care for an incapacitated household member when no other member of the household is appropriate to provide care

All income, whether earned or unearned, is budgeted against the household's needs according to budgetary formulas. The eligibility worker will be able to tell you whether your income is within the limits to receive Temporary Assistance.

Requirements to receive Temporary Assistance include:

- Cooperation with Employment services
- Compliance with drug and alcohol screening and treatment if indicated
- Cooperation with providing medical documentation if an exemption is claimed
- Cooperation with the Office of Child Support Enforcement if required

MAXIMUM TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE GRANTS

The following chart shows the MAXIMUM Temporary Assistance grant an applicant can receive under normal circumstances (i.e. not living in a specialized shelter or congregate care living facility). Please note that this assumes the most expensive heating fuel (electricity), and no income or subsidized rent. **Most applicants will receive LESS than these amounts.**

Number in Case	Maximum Grant (eff. 10/1/12)
1	\$499
2	\$612
3	\$797
4	\$951
5	\$1112
6	\$1234
7	\$1356

1. Application Guidelines

- Applications can be obtained in several ways:
 - in person at 158 Pearl Street, Buffalo
 - by calling the Application Support Unit at 858- 2876
- The application must be signed by all individuals age 18 and over

2. Process to Submit an Application

- An application for Temporary Assistance should be submitted in person at 158 Pearl Street, Buffalo, NY.
- Applicants who mail in an application to ECDSS will be mailed an appointment letter to appear in person.

3. Orientation and Screening

- All applicants for Temporary Assistance will be screened for emergency needs, barriers to employability, and expedited SNAP (formerly Food Stamps) benefits. Applicants that come late in the day may be asked to return the next day for screening.
- SNAP eligibility will be determined within 30 days of the application, even if the TA application is denied. TA applicants do not need to apply separately for SNAP.
- Applicants will be given a time to appear for a mandatory Orientation session.
- Following Orientation, applicants will be assessed by an Employment Counselor, and given an appointment time to appear for their Certification Interview.

4. Certification Interview

- All adults in the household, aged 18 and over, must appear for the certification interview.
- If the appointment date and/or time must be changed, applicants must contact the number on the appointment letter to reschedule no later than the close of business on the date of the appointment.

5. Providing Requested Documentation

- If possible, applicants should be prepared to submit all supporting documentation at their certification interview: ID, birth certificates, landlord forms, utility account numbers, and wage stubs (see list on p. 10 for ideas for acceptable verification).
- Applicants required to submit more documents after the interview will be given 10 days to provide it.

6. Waiting Time

- Eligibility for Temporary Assistance benefits begins on the date all eligibility documentation is received for cases eligible for **TANF** (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families). Eligibility for Temporary Assistance benefits begins on the 45th day from the date of application for cases eligible for **Safety Net Assistance** (cash or non-cash benefits for single adults, childless couples, or families who have exhausted their 60 month lifetime TANF limit.)
- Eligibility determinations will be made within 30 days (TANF) or 45 days (Safety Net) of application date.

7. Benefit Cards

- To access Temporary Assistance benefits, a benefit card and Personal Identification Number (PIN) are required. Electronic Finger Imaging is also required.
- A benefit card and PIN will be mailed to the applicant.
- PINs can be changed by calling the Customer Service number on the back of the benefit card, or in person on the 3rd floor reception area of 158 Pearl Street.

EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE

An emergency is an urgent need or situation that has to be taken care of right away. Some examples of an emergency are:

- **You are homeless**
- You have little or no food
- Your landlord has told you that you must move or has given you eviction papers
- You do not have fuel for heating in the cold weather period
- Your utilities are shut-off or are about to be shut-off, or you have a 72-hour disconnect notice
- You or someone in your family has been beaten, abused or threatened with violence by a husband, wife, partner or other member of the household
- You have a pest infestation

Applications for emergency assistance must be submitted help **in person** at 158 Pearl Street, Buffalo, NY. (NOTE: The location of the Emergency Assistance Unit (other than the homeless unit) will be relocating to 478 Main Street in the near future. This guide will be revised to reflect that change once final). You do not need to be eligible for ongoing Temporary Assistance in order to receive Emergency Assistance.

Some examples of emergency assistance include, but are not limited to:

- Payment of shelter arrears
- Payment of utility arrears
- Payment of fuel and/or cost of fuel delivery
- Payment of Domestic Violence Shelter costs
- Assistance with temporary housing

SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM* (SNAP)

*** SNAP was formerly known as the Food Stamp Program**

SNAP provides low income households with benefits to purchase food in order to reduce hunger and improve nutrition and health. Households must meet certain income guidelines in order to be eligible to receive SNAP. These guidelines are higher than for Temporary Assistance.

PLEASE NOTE: Applicants for Temporary Assistance do not need to apply separately for SNAP.

MAXIMUM SNAP BENEFIT LEVELS

The following chart shows the *maximum* SNAP allotment an applicant can receive. Depending on your income and circumstances, the amount you are eligible to receive may be LESS than the amounts show.

Number in Case	Maximum Grant (eff. 10/1/12)
1	\$200
2	\$367
3	\$526
4	\$668
5	\$793
6	\$952
7	\$1052
8	\$1202
Each additional	+ \$150

1. Application Guidelines

- Paper applications can be obtained in several ways:
 - in person at 158 Pearl Street, Buffalo
 - by calling the Application Support Unit at 858- 2876
- The application must be signed by the head of the household.
- A SNAP household consists of all individuals in the home who claim to purchase and prepare meals together.
- Spouses and their children up to age 22 *must be* in the same SNAP household

2. Process to Submit an Application

- An application for SNAP benefits may be submitted to our agency in various ways:
 - Through the internet at www.mybenefits.ny.gov
 - by US mail:

Erie County DSS
P.O. Box 120
Buffalo, New York 14201
ATTN: SNAP Division
 - FAX : 716-858-6834
 - in person on the first floor of the Rath Building where a receipt will be given.
 - By filing an electronic application using the kiosk on the 3rd floor of 158 Pearl Street, Buffalo.

3. Expedited SNAP Benefits

- SNAP applications are screened for expedited eligibility on the day the application is received by ECDSS.
- Households deemed eligible for expedited processing will receive their benefits within five (5) calendar days following the date the application was received.
- Notification will be sent to the applicant. Households not eligible for expedited processing may still be eligible for the regular SNAP program, and will receive an eligibility determination within 30 days of applying.

4. Certification Interview

By Telephone:

- A telephone interview appointment will be scheduled by the worker. Notification of the appointment will be mailed to the applicant.

In Person:

- If no telephone is available, or if requested, a certification interview can be conducted in person. An appointment letter will be mailed to the applicant.
- If the appointment date and/or time must be changed, applicants must contact the number on the appointment letter to reschedule as soon as possible.
- Failure to keep a scheduled appointment will result in the application being denied on the 30th day from the date of the application.

5. Providing Requested Documentation

- If possible, applicants should submit all supporting documentation with their application: ID, birth certificates, landlord forms, utility account numbers, and wage stubs (see list on p. 10 for ideas for acceptable verification).
- Applicants required to submit more documents after the interview will be given 10 days to provide it.
- Once all the required documents are received, the examiner will process the case within 30 days of the application date.
- If required documentation is received within 30 days of the application date, SNAP eligibility will begin from the application date.
- If required documentation is received between the 30th and 60th day from the application date, the case will be opened, but eligibility will begin the first of the month in which the documents were received.
- If eligible, applicants will be notified of the amount of their SNAP allotment, and period of time they are certified for, the name and number of their worker, and when benefits will be available.
- After a case has been opened, the applicant's pick-up day each month is the same as the last number of their case number. For example, F1233456 FF has a pick up day on the 6th of each month.

6. Benefit Cards

- To access SNAP benefits, a benefit card and Personal Identification Number (PIN) are required.
- A benefit card and PIN will be mailed to the applicant.

- PINs can be changed by calling the Customer Service number on the back of the benefit card, or in person on the 3rd floor reception area of 158 Pearl Street.

MEDICAID

Medicaid is the state and federally funded health insurance program designed to assist low-income individuals and families in obtaining medical care for themselves and their children. Medicaid covers hospital, doctor, emergency room visits, prenatal care, pharmacy, lab services, and other treatments.

There are many different Medicaid options covering individuals of varying circumstances. A Medicaid interview is optional, not required.

PLEASE NOTE: Applicants for Temporary Assistance do not need to file a separate application for Medicaid.

1. Completing the Application

- Community agencies can assist clients in filling out applications and other forms. It is expected that an application that is filled out with the assistance of a community advocate will be filled out completely and accurately.
- It is crucial that the application be signed by all applying adults in the household.
- Anyone 21 years of age or older (other than the applying spouse) must have their own, separate **signed** application and supporting documentation.

2. Submit Application to ECDSS

- Applications can be mailed in using the standard return address envelopes provided, or addressed to:

**Erie County DSS
P. O. Box 120
Buffalo, NY 14201
ATTN: Medicaid Division**

- Applications can also be dropped off in person at the 4th floor desk of the Rath Building. A detailed receipt will be provided to the client dropping off applications or other documents *if requested*.

3. Application is Received and Registered

- Applicants who drop off their application have the option of being interviewed immediately.
In many instances this is the most expeditious method of applying.
- Applications that are just dropped off or mailed in without the client being seen will be reviewed by an eligibility worker. A letter will be mailed to the client within 2 weeks listing what documentation must be provided, with a due date by which the items must be received.
- Any applicant who wishes to be interviewed in person should indicate that when submitting their application, so that an appointment can be given. Representatives that drop off the application may request an appointment.
- Applications are cleared and registered on WMS

4. Providing Requested Documentation

- A detailed receipt will be given upon request for any documents dropped off to the 4th floor reception window in person.
- It is a federal requirement that ALL clients must appear in person to show original proof of citizenship, if their citizenship is other than the US (which can be verified automatically through the Social Security Administration). A photocopy will be made of the document, and will be labeled “ORIGINAL SEEN” and forwarded to the worker handling the case. A receipt can be given for this upon request.
- ***If requested items are not received by the due date, the application will be denied.***

5. Case is Processed

- Every effort is made to make an eligibility determination as soon as possible after all required documentation is received, however ECDSS has 45 days from the date of application to make a determination on a case.
- Coverage can be issued retroactively for 3 months from the date of application if the client was eligible.
- Cases WILL BE DENIED if required documentation is not received by the due date. Applicants that are denied must REAPPLY with a new application and signed consent forms.
- Documentation received after a case was denied will be accepted and imaged for future reference. Applicants must still reapply.

6. Inquiries re: Status of an Application

- Community agencies have been provided with instructions and a link to ECDSS’s electronic Information Request and Compliant System (IRC)
- All requests for information should be submitted electronically through this email system. System is checked throughout the day, and requests distributed to team managers to respond to.
- Individuals calling on their own behalf should call the worker assigned to their case, or to the **Medicaid Intake phone number (858-4919)**.

7. Emergency Medical Needs

- ECDSS does not have the ability to waive eligibility requirements and provide medical coverage for any person who has not provided the required documents. If any applicant is in need of emergency medical care they should go to an emergency room or a Federally Qualified Health Center.
- A Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) has the ability to determine if a child under the age of 19 is presumptively eligible for Medicaid. Presumptive Medicaid Eligibility for Children (PE) provides immediate Medicaid coverage for a limited period of time for all Medicaid covered care and services to children who screen as eligible. This screening and determination can only be done by a Qualified Entity (QE) at an FQHC. If the applicant screens eligible for PE, the applicant must complete and sign an application for Medicaid before presumptive eligibility is authorized. A signed application and required documentation are necessary for the LDSS to determine ongoing Medicaid eligibility, as well as to authorize any Medicaid coverage. The responsibility for requesting and compiling necessary documentation is delegated to the QE.
- Presumptive Eligibility is only for children under the age of 19. While it may address a child’s immediate need for care, if the family does not follow through with the Medicaid application the presumptive eligibility will end and the child will have no coverage. Presumptive eligibility can only be issued once in a 12 month period.
- Federally Qualified Health Centers with Qualified Entities

155 Lawn Avenue
Buffalo, NY 14207

Community Health Center of Buffalo
34 Benwood Avenue
Buffalo, NY 14214

CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT

The Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) helps to enhance the well-being of families by assisting custodial parents with obtaining financial and medical support for their children. This is accomplished by locating absent parents, establishing paternity, establishing support obligations, and monitoring and enforcing those obligations.

Individuals applying for Temporary Assistance of Medicaid may be required to cooperate with the Office of Child Support Enforcement as a condition of eligibility.

Individuals not in receipt of Temporary Assistance or Medicaid may also utilize the services of the Office of Child Support Enforcement. The OCSE is located on the 7th floor of the Rath Building, 95 Franklin Street, Buffalo, NY. To contact the Office of Child Support Enforcement, call (888)208-4485.

New York State's Child Support website is an excellent resource for all child support issues, including what to do if you are paying child support and your income changes. The website can be found at:

<https://www.childsupport.ny.gov/dcse/home.html>

HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (HEAP)

HEAP is a federally-funded program designed to assist eligible households with the costs of heating their homes. The HEAP season typically runs from November- May of each year, but is subject to change depending on funding. HEAP can provide a basic benefit to eligible households, as well as an emergency benefit to households at imminent risk of shutoff. Limited funds are available to assist with furnace repairs and weatherization.

Income guidelines for the 2012-2013 HEAP program are as follows:

Household Size	Maximum Gross Monthly Income
1	\$2,138
2	\$2,796
3	\$3,453
4	\$4,111
5	\$4,769
6	\$5,427
7	\$5,550
8	\$5,673
9	\$5,797
10	\$5,920
11	\$6,346
Each additional	Add \$495

Applying for HEAP:

To obtain an application, contact the HEAP Hotline at (716) 858-7644, or the HEAP Application Line at (716) 858-1969.

In Person:

Applications for HEAP may be submitted in person at 478 Main Street, 1st floor, Buffalo, NY.

By Mail:

Applications can be submitted by mail to:

**Erie County HEAP Program
478 Main Street, 1st Floor
Buffalo, NY 14202**

DOCUMENTATION

When you are applying for, or getting, help for yourself or for someone else, you will be asked to provide proof of certain things, such as those listed below. Your worker will tell you which of these things you **must** provide. If you bring proof with you when you first come in to apply for assistance, you may be able to get help sooner.

If you drop documentation off at the Department of Social Services, you should ask for a receipt to prove what documentation you left. The receipt should have your name, the specific documentation that you dropped off, the time, date, county name and the name of the social services worker who provided the receipt.

If you cannot get the proof you need, ask your worker to help you. If the Department of Social Services already has proof of the things that do not change, such as your social security number, you do not need to provide them again.

NOTE: This list is applicable to ALL program areas: TA, SNAP, Medicaid, and HEAP. Each program area has different verification requirements, however. Not all programs require verification of each item on this list.

What you Need to Verify:	What You Can Use to Provide Verification:
Who You Are	Photo ID, driver's license, U.S. passport
Age of Each Applying Household Member	Birth or baptismal certificate, hospital records, driver's license
Where You Live	Current rent receipt, mortgage records, statement from non- relative landlord
Shelter Expenses	Current rent receipt, current lease, mortgage records, property and school bills, telephone bills, tax records, sewer and water bills, fuel bills, utility bills
Social Security Numbers	Social Security Card or proof that you have applied for Social Security numbers for everyone in your household who is applying for help
Citizen or Immigrant Status	Birth certificate, U. S. passport, military service records, naturalization certificate, and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services documentation
Whether you are Drug/Alcohol Dependent	Alcohol/drug screening and assessment which may include a drug test
Earned Income	Current pay stubs, statement from employer, tax records, business records, statement from roomer or boarder of amount paid for lodging
Child Support or Alimony	Statement from person paying support
Social Security Benefits	Current benefit check or current award letter
Veteran's Benefits	DD-214, Current benefit check, current award letter, official correspondence from U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Unemployment Insurance Benefits	Official correspondence from New York State Department of Labor
Interest and Dividends	Statement from bank, credit union or broker
Educational Grants and Loans	Statement from school or bank, current award letter
Worker's Compensation	Current award letter or check stubs
Bank Accounts	Bank books or credit union records
Checking Accounts	Bank statements
Burial Trust or Fund	Bank statement or copy of funeral agreement
Burial Plot or Agreement	Statement from cemetery, funeral director or church, copy of funeral agreement
Life Insurance	Insurance policy
Real Estate Other Than Where You Live	Deed, appraisal/estimate of current value by real estate broker
Motor Vehicle	Registration, title, financing information
Stocks and Bonds	Stock certificates, bonds
School Attendance of Those Attending School	School records, statement from school
Health Insurance	Insurance policy, insurance card, statement from provider of coverage, Medicare card
Unpaid Rent or Utilities	Copy of each bill, statement from landlord or utility company
Paid or Unpaid Medical Bills	Copy of each bill and proof of payment if a paid bill
Noncustodial Parent	Death certificate, survivor's benefits, divorce papers, veteran's assistance or military records
Disabled/Incapacitated/Pregnant	Statement from medical professional, proof of Social Security Disability or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits
Other Expenses/Dependent Care Expenses	Cancelled checks or receipts, statement from child care provider, court order, statement from aide or attendant

The documents listed above are the most commonly used. This list is not complete because there are other documents you can use.