

CHAPTER 8: CASH ASSISTANCE (also known as WELFARE)

§8.1	Cash Assistance Overview	8-1
§8.2	Eligibility for Cash Assistance	8-2
§8.2a	—Income Limits for Eligibility	8-3
§8.2b	—Resource Limits for Eligibility	8-4
§8.3	Work Requirements	8-4
§8.4	Time Limits on TANF Eligibility	8-7
§8.4a	—Extended TANF	8-7
§8.5	Applying for Cash Assistance	8-8
§8.6	Child Support and Cash Assistance	8-11
§8.7	Teens and Cash Assistance	8-12
§8.8	Burial/Cremation Expense Payments	8-13
§8.9	Appeals	8-13
§8.10	Re-Opening of Benefits	8-14

§8.1 Cash Assistance Overview

Cash Assistance is what most people think of as “welfare” – cash grants from the Department of Human Services (DHS – formerly DPW). Effective August 2019, Pennsylvania eliminated its state-funded **General Assistance** program for disabled adults. Clients previously receiving GA may still be eligible for Medical Assistance, (Chapter 5) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), (Chapter 7). SSI recipients receive a **State Supplementary Payment (SSP)** through the DHS. Clients may also have other benefits paid by DHS: **Burial/Cremation Expense Payments** (§8.8)

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF): This is the only cash grant program DHS currently administers. These grants are available for families with children. Federal and state rules govern eligibility.

Cash grants are issued by DHS twice a month. The maximum amount depends on family size (the number of people on the grant) and the county of residence. For example, the maximum grant for one person in Philadelphia county, is \$205 per month; for two people, \$316 per month; and for three people, \$403 per month. **Chart 8-1** sets forth these levels for all family sizes:

Chart 8-1: Philadelphia TANF Benefit Levels (2020)	
Family Size	Benefit Level
1	\$205
2	\$316
3	\$403
4	\$497
5	\$589
6	\$670
7	\$753
8	\$836
Each Add'l	\$83

A list of the cash amounts for each PA county can be found at:

http://services.dpw.state.pa.us/oimpolicymanuals/cash/index.htm#t=168_Determining_Eligibility_and_Payment_Amount%2F168_Appendix_B.htm

Cash assistance grants are paid by DHS through the electronic benefits transfer (EBT) system, which is also used for SNAP grants. Recipients are issued an “ACCESS” card that can be used to access funds in the recipient’s account at an automated teller machine (ATM). Account balances can be obtained at ATMs or by calling EBT Customer Service: **1-888-EBT-PENN (1-888-238-7366)**.

§8.2 Eligibility for Cash Assistance

Cash assistance is available to adults and children under Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). TANF categories include:

- Pregnant women
- Families with related children (dependent children and their specified relative)

There must be a TANF dependent child in the home for the family to receive TANF. Adults living with a child under their *care and control* can get TANF benefits for the child without regard to who has legal custody of the child. The adult has the option of choosing to be on the cash grant with the child. Adults who choose

to be on the cash grant are subject to work requirements (§8.3) and the TANF month time limit (§8.4).

TIP: To speed the application process for children who are cared for by someone other than a parent, provide a letter to the welfare office from someone like a case manager or social worker verifying that the adult has physical custody and is taking care of the child. DHS often tells children’s caregivers that they have to get a custody order. There may be other good reasons to get a custody order, but one is not required to get TANF.

§8.2a Income Limits for Eligibility

Income eligibility for cash assistance depends on the number of people in the household, and the type of income. DHS counts gross income before taxes or anything else is taken out, not what the recipient takes home. The deductions available for already-approved recipients are more generous than the deductions available for clients at the application stage. Expenses incurred from self-employment or rental property can be deducted from earned income. From unearned income, the client can deduct expenses in receiving or obtaining the income (e.g., check cashing fees, transportation expense to get the check). Unemployment compensation, veteran’s benefits, and social security benefits all count as unearned income.

To be eligible for TANF cash assistance, the household’s net income after deductions must be less than the benefit level for the household’s family size (see §8.1).

TIP: A TANF recipient’s family or friends can help with expenses, but it is important that they follow certain rules in doing so. Money given directly to the household counts as income and will reduce the household’s grant. However paying a bill directly to the recipient’s creditor, such as their landlord or utility company, is called a “vendor payment, and does not count as income to the household. Similarly, purchasing items such as such as groceries, clothing, or furniture is considered an “in-kind payment,” and does not count as income or reduce the household’s benefits purchased will not be counted.

TIP: loans which are clearly documented as such do not count as income for TANF purposes.

§8.2b Resource Limits for Eligibility

The resource limit for TANF is \$1,000 regardless of the size of the family. Resources are property that recipient owns, such as rental properties, a second car, cash, stocks, bonds, or similar assets.

Resources which are excluded for TANF purposes:

- A house that the TANF household lives in, clothing, and household furnishings don't count as resources. (Special rules apply if a recipient can't live at home because of health problems, or for some other reason, like problems with upkeep of the house).
- One car per TANF household does not count as a resource.
- The cash value of a life insurance policy does not count as a resource, unless the recipient cashes in the policy.
- Educational Savings Account that can be used only for tuition, books, and other expenses for college or vocational school do not count as a resource.
- One prepaid burial space for each person receiving Cash Assistance does not count as a resource. A client can also set aside up to \$1,500 per family member for burial costs in the form of a prepaid agreement with a funeral service provider or in a special account that cannot be used for other purposes. Such arrangements, however, may affect eligibility for DHS burial/cremation expense payments (§8.8).

§8.3 Work Requirements

Under federal and state law, adult Cash Assistance recipients are required to be in “work activities” unless they are exempt. Exemptions from the work requirements apply if the recipient is disabled, is taking care of a child under age 1 (for a maximum lifetime period of 12 months), is under age 18 and pursuing a high school diploma or GED equivalency, or is the victim of domestic violence. Being exempt from the work requirements does not extend the five-year lifetime limit on TANF benefits.

Road to Economic Self-Sufficiency through Employment and Training

(RESET): RESET is designed to help adult TANF recipients prepare for employment in order to achieve self-sufficiency for themselves and their families. RESET offers education, job skills training and other support. This program is open to TANF and Extended TANF recipients.

“Work activities” requirements can be satisfied by working a job, or by participating in education or job skills training. The federal government has defined the types of activities that count toward the Work Participation Rate (WPR). There

are two types of activities: (1) core activities and (2) non-core activities.

Core activities are required for all individuals who are mandated to participate in RESET and include the following activities:

- Unsubsidized Employment: full or part-time employment including self-employment
- Subsidized Public or Private Sector Employment
- On-the-Job Training
- Job Search and Job Readiness Assistance
- Community Service (unpaid work for the federal, state or local government, including AmeriCorps, VISTA, or a non-profit organization)
- Vocational Educational Training: specific training provided by a contracted employment and training vendor, accredited educational provider or accredited internet-based educational institution intended to prepare an individual for a specific occupation
- Providing Child Care for an Individual in Community Service
- Caring for the child(ren) of another TANF individual, without payment, while the TANF individual is participating in community service
- Attendance in Secondary School or GED Program
- Paid Work Experience

Non-core Activities: time spent on non-core activities can be used to meet the minimum work requirement after the required core activity hours are met. Non-core activities include the following:

- Vocational skills training directly related to employment
- Education directly related to employment
- English as a second language (ESL), Literacy (including Move-Up), and
- On-going job search and job search preparation training

Individuals with disabilities, whether temporary or permanent, are exempt from participation in the RESET program. Physical or mental disability can be verified by a doctor using the PA 635 Medical Assessment Form found at http://services.dpw.state.pa.us/oimpolicymanuals/cash/PA_635.pdf

While a recipient is in a work activity, DHS should pay for **Special Allowances for Supportive Services**, which include child care; care of an ill or incapacitated adult; transportation; vehicle purchase or repair; relocation expenses; meals/lodging for overnight travel; clothing, tools, equipment, books and supplies; test fees, professional fees or union dues; registration fees; motor vehicle operator fees; and education/training registration fees. TANF participants should be sure to ask their case workers for these allowances for supportive services as long as the recipients are in compliance with the work requirements. If the recipient is in an education or training program that lasts longer than 12 months which DHS approved, the recipient is permitted to retain benefits while finishing the program.

TIP: People who have a disability and are exempt from TANF work requirements still have the right to voluntarily participate in work activities and ask DHS to pay for child care, transportation, or other expenses. Contact the AIDS Law Project for help.

Sanctions for Failure to Meet Work Requirements. If the DHS caseworker determines that a TANF recipient is willfully not participating in required work activities, is not exempt, and does not have good cause not to participate, a “sanction” may be imposed:

- During the first 24 months of receiving TANF benefits, DHS can only cut off the recipient’s part of the grant; the household children will retain benefits.
- If the recipient has already received 24 months of TANF benefits, DHS can cut off the grant for the entire family.

CAUTION! Sanctions are extremely detrimental for clients and their families. If your client has been sanctioned or threatened with a sanction, you should act immediately. Often, with effective advocacy, sanctions can be prevented, even after DHS has attempted to impose them.

The first time the recipient is sanctioned, benefits will stop for 30 days or until the recipient cooperates, whichever is longer. The second time, benefits will stop for 60 days or until the recipient cooperates, whichever is longer. The third time the recipient fails to cooperate, TANF benefits for that individual are stopped permanently.

TIP: If DHS sanctions your client with a reduction or termination of benefits, your client should appeal right away. If the client has a good reason for not cooperating in meeting work requirements (for example, family or personal illness, lack of child care or transportation, or the work was unsafe), the client can claim “good cause.” The client can also challenge a finding of failing to cooperate. Contact the AIDS Law Project for help.

§8.4 Time Limits on TANF Eligibility

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) benefits have a five-year (i.e., 60 months) lifetime limit. Once any adult member of the family has received a total of 60 months of TANF benefits, then the entire family is ineligible, including the children. The 60-month limit does not apply if a parent is on SSI. A non-parent caretaker can choose to be excluded from TANF benefits and thereby exempt the children in their custody from the 60-month limit. There are options for continuing TANF benefits beyond the 60-month limit (§8.4a).

Note: The 60-month lifetime limit does not apply to the household’s SNAP benefits or Medical Assistance benefits.

§8.4a Extended TANF

Individuals at the end of their 60-month TANF limit have several options to continue benefits under DHS’s Extended TANF program. In order to continue benefits, recipients should be sure to keep their appointments with DHS and comply with the rules regarding participation in Extended TANF programs. Households that reach the 60-month limit will not have to apply separately for Extended TANF. Extended TANF has no time limit.

The following individuals are placed in the extended TANF program after DHS has verified their status:

- Individuals who are excused from the TANF work requirements because of a disability (§8.6) will be placed in a **Maximizing Participation Project (MPP)**. They will undergo a “Work Capacity Assessment” and should receive help in getting work, consistent with their ability to work within the limitations resulting from their disability. Recipients already in MPP before reaching the 60-month limit will not have to undergo another Work Capacity Assessment. Individuals who are not satisfied with the Assessment results have the right to request a second opinion.

- Individuals who are not excused from the TANF work requirements (§8.3), but

who have been unable to find work, or are not working for the required hours, will be placed in DHS' **Work Plus Program** (WPP), which will provide the required 30 hours per week in a work or work-related activity.

- Individuals who have experienced domestic violence may continue benefits by establishing a "Domestic Violence Plan" with the local DHS office.
- Individuals who have a temporary situation which makes an immediate referral to WPP or MPP inappropriate (example, taking care of a disabled family member). Good cause delays are limited to 30-days.
- Individuals who are currently enrolled in an approved Employment and Training Program.
- Individuals working 20-29 hours per week and participating in job retention activities.
- Individuals employed for 30 or more hours per week.

Child care, transportation, and other special allowances are provided by DHS for families in Extended TANF so that they can participate in MPP, WPP, other work activity, or a domestic violence plan.

§8.5 Applying for Cash Assistance

TANF applications may be made at County Assistance Offices (DHS's local offices) or online via COMPASS at <https://www.compass.state.pa.us/Compass.Web/Public/CMPHome>. Households with open SNAP or Medical Assistance cases can add cash assistance to their benefits. A face-to-face interview is required for cash assistance. Home visits can be arranged for homebound applicants or if there are good reasons why they cannot get to the DHS office.

DHS is required to decide on an initial application and verify information within 30 days of the application date. A statewide list of DHS offices (County Assistance Offices) can be found here: <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/Services/Assistance/Pages/CAO-Contact.aspx>

Applicants will need proof of identity, residence, and income. DHS may also ask applicants to get forms signed by neighbors, employers and/or landlords. DHS should provide assistance in getting documents that are not readily available to applicants.

Note: Caseworkers often want a specific document, but under DHS' rules if the applicant can provide other proof, DHS must accept it (for example, a hospital birth record rather than a birth certificate). If an otherwise eligible client has cooperated in trying to obtain verification and unable to get it, DHS contact the appropriate third party (called a "collateral contact") and obtain the verification.

Cash benefits are payable from the date all required documentation has been submitted to the CAO, so applicants should submit all required verification as soon as possible.

If the applicant's legal spouse is living in the household with the applicant, the spouse must be on the grant with their income and resources counted, unless the spouse is receiving SSI. An adult who is not legally married to the applicant, but sharing the household does not need to be on the grant, and their income and resources do not count.

If applying for TANF benefits for a child, generally that child's parents and siblings (including biological half-siblings, but not step-siblings) who are living in the same household also must be on the grant and their income is counted. The rules don't apply if the household member is on SSI, or if a sibling is 19 or older.

People in the household who aren't the child's parents, step-parent, or siblings are not required to be on a child's grant, and their income and resources don't count.

An adult household member leaving a job to care for a child who receives TANF can be added to the household TANF grant. Their income or resources would then be counted, and they will be subject to the 60-month lifetime limit and work requirements, if applicable.

Immigrants must include the income of their US Citizen sponsor in their household income regardless of whether the sponsor lives in the household. The length of time the sponsor's income will be counted depends on when the client entered the United States.

If a teen parent under the age of 18 applies for benefits and is living with their parents (who are also their child's grandparents), the grandparents' income will be counted until the teen parent reaches the age of 18. The income of grandparents is counted only if the teen parent and the baby are both living with the grandparent, and if the grandparent is the teen parent's parent. So if a teen mother and her baby live with the baby's paternal grandparents without the baby's father, the grandparents' income isn't counted.

Required documentation: DHS requires completion of several forms. If an applicant doesn't sign these forms, DHS will deny the application or terminate benefits. Some of these forms include:

- A form permitting DHS to get information about income and resources;
- A form allowing DHS to refer the recipient to SSA for SSI/SSDI benefits;
- A form allowing DHS to get reimbursed if the recipient gets SSI benefits or wins a personal injury lawsuit;
- An "Agreement of Mutual Responsibility" (AMR) setting forth what DHS wants the recipient to do, like work activities, education, training, drug treatment, or keeping children in school. Recipients should be sure to ask DHS to include things the welfare department will do to help, like paying for transportation and child care. Sample AMRs ("Plan for Self-Sufficiency") can be found here:
http://services.dpw.state.pa.us/oimpolicymanuals/cash/PA_1661_9-15_UF.pdf

TANF recipients should appeal immediately if they don't agree with the AMR. If a recipient is already getting a grant and appeals within 10 days of receiving the notice, benefits should continue until the appeal is resolved.

If a TANF applicant refuses to sign the AMR, they will not be entitled to benefits until the appeal is resolved. In that case, it is advised to sign the AMR and then immediately appeal its contents, so that benefits can begin and continue during the appeal.

§8.6 Child Support and Cash Assistance

As long as a child is getting TANF, all child support rights for that child have to be assigned to DHS. This is the "Child Support Pass-Through." Families may keep the first \$100 per month of support paid for a family with one child, and the first \$200 per month of support paid for a family with two or more children. The law also requires that child support arrears collected after the family has gone off TANF be paid to the family first. The law does *not* require the family to sign over their rights to any support owed to the family from the period before the family was approved for TANF assistance.

When a child stops receiving TANF, DHS should notify Family Court to stop sending current child support to DHS, and start sending it to the family beginning the first day the TANF grant stops.

Single mothers who apply for Cash Assistance are required to cooperate in establishing paternity and enforcing child support for any child on the TANF grant. A mother does *not* have to cooperate if she has “good cause,” which includes circumstances where the pregnancy was the result of rape or incest, or if cooperation would endanger her or her child’s health because of a history of abuse or the threat of violence. At any point, a parent can seek an exception to TANF requirements by filing a “Verification of Good Cause Based on Domestic Violence” (PA 1747) form found here:

http://services.dpw.state.pa.us/oimpolicymanuals/cash/PA_1747.pdf

PA 1747 Forms completed by the TANF recipient are valid for six months. Case Managers may also fill out this form in the section designated “Authorization/Verification by a Third Party.” Third party verification is valid for one year.

If DHS refuses to issue benefits or reduces benefits as a sanction for failure to cooperate on child support, TANF applicants should appeal promptly and contact the AIDS Law Project for assistance.

§8.7 Teens and Cash Assistance

Teen parents are required to live with their own parents or another adult and to stay in school in order to receive TANF, but several exceptions exist:

- if a teen parent is unable to live with parents who are ill, have died, won’t allow them to live there, or no space is available, the requirement is waived.
- if the teen parent’s physical or emotional health, or the physical or emotional health of their child, would be jeopardized by living with their parents.

Note: Despite these exceptions, DHS frequently insists that teen parents live at home. Any teen parent denied benefits because of these rules, or told to move back to a parents’ home, should appeal immediately.

§8.8 Burial/Cremation Expense Payments

DHS will pay up to \$750 to a registered funeral service provider for burial and/or cremation services for a deceased individual who was receiving or eligible to receive TANF, SSI or State Blind Pension. DHS will not pay for burial if the total value of countable resources is \$1,500 or more. In limited circumstances, DHS will also pay for services for a cash recipient’s family member. Additionally, burial/cremation expense payments are available for: a

cash recipient's stillborn child or child who died soon after birth; a former cash recipient whose benefits were discontinued due to hospitalization and who died while in the hospital or within three months of the date of admission; or an individual who has continuously received payment toward the cost of Long Term Care (LTC) since January 1, 1973. The payment is made directly to a funeral service provider registered with DHS. The \$750 payment is available without regard to the deceased's age.

Payment is not available if the deceased was a veteran and the Veterans' Administration Death Benefit is \$750 or more. Nor will DHS pay burial expenses of a deceased United Mine Workers Union member for whom the UMWA Welfare and Retirement Funds will pay funeral expenses or death benefits.

The DHS burial payment will be reduced by certain resources available to pay funeral expenses. These resources include any cash on hand in the deceased's estate, other personal property in the estate of the deceased that may be readily converted to cash and is not needed to meet a living requirement for the survivors, life insurance death benefits, lump-sum death benefits paid by Social Security's Old-Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance (OASDI) to a surviving spouse, burial reserve or burial space in the estate of the deceased, and the value of a prepaid funeral arrangement, including accrued interest.

Contributions up to \$750 for funeral expenses beyond the DHS covered minimum standards will not count as resources to reduce the DHS burial payment. Likewise, "in kind" donations such as articles of clothing, the use of cars to carry the funeral party, newspaper advertising, flowers, and religious services do not reduce the DHS burial payment.

A request for payment may be made to the County Assistance Office by a relative, friend, or representative of a fraternal society of which the deceased was a member, or by a representative of a charitable or religious organization. Use Form PA 118 available here: http://services.dpw.state.pa.us/oimpolicymanuals/supp/PA_118_1.pdf and submit to the deceased's local CAO. Requests for payment may not be submitted by funeral directors, although funeral directors may notify the CAO of a request.

§8.9 Appeals

If DHS mistakenly denies a applicant's cash assistance application, or reduces or terminates a recipient's benefits, file an appeal immediately. If the appeal is not filed within 30 days of the date of the denial notice, the right to appeal is lost, unless the individual can show that DHS is at fault. If the appeal is won, DHS will pay benefits back to the date of the denial, termination or reduction.

If a TANF recipient appeals within 10 days of the receipt of the notice reducing or terminating their benefits, DHS must continue paying benefits until the appeal is resolved.

A TANF recipient who misses the 10-day deadline for continued benefits still has the right to appeal within 30 days of the date of the notice. If they win their appeal they will receive benefits back to the date of wrongful discontinuation or reduction.

If the CAO discontinues or reduces a TANF recipient's benefits without any notice, the recipient has a right to ask the CAO to reinstate the benefits and send proper notice before taking adverse action. DHS must comply with this request and reinstate the benefits immediately.

TIP: Never to withdraw an appeal until a notice of eligibility has been received from the CAO pursuant to the appeal.

Case managers should refer clients needing legal assistance with TANF appeals to their local legal service organization or the AIDS Law Project of Pennsylvania.

§8.10 Reopening Benefits

Individuals whose TANF benefits were recently denied or discontinued, but who submitting all items needed to establish or re-establish eligibility within 60 days, may not have to complete a new application and go through the entire application process.

NOTE: For cash assistance, if the denial is due to excess income and/or resources, or if benefits are discontinued because work requirements were not met, a new application is required, unless the household reapplies and provides the proof.

The re-opening procedure should be used when the individual has missed an appeal deadline. For example, if benefits were denied on April 1 for failure to provide proof of disability, and an appeal was not filed within 30 days of the denial, on the 33rd day the applicant can submit proof of disability and complete the application process. The applicant's benefits can be opened from the date of application.

NOTE: A individual still within the appeal deadline should file an appeal from the denial, discontinuance or reduction and pursue the appeal.

Additional Resources:

- Department of Human Services, Cash Assistance Handbook
http://services.dpw.state.pa.us/oimpolicymanuals/cash/Cash_Assistance_Handbook.htm