

Temporary Assistance

What is Temporary Assistance?

Temporary Assistance, also known as Public Assistance, is cash assistance for needy adults who cannot find a job, are unable to work, or do not earn enough at their jobs to pay for their basic needs, as well as for needy children. For adults, Temporary Assistance is intended to provide short-term help as individuals seek work, participate in training or treatment necessary to enable work, or obtain disability benefits.

The two primary Temporary Assistance programs are Family Assistance and Safety Net Assistance. These programs provide the same level of assistance to a household, but serve different populations and have some different rules.

- **Family Assistance** – Family Assistance provides cash assistance to eligible needy families that include a minor child living with a parent (or both parents) or a caretaker relative. The program is governed by federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) guidelines, which limit an individual’s eligibility for Family Assistance to five years. After that time, if the family otherwise remains eligible, assistance may be received through the Safety Net Assistance program.
- **Safety Net Assistance** – Safety Net Assistance provides assistance to eligible needy individuals without children and other households not eligible for Family Assistance. Households that reach the five-year time limit for Family Assistance are automatically moved into the Safety Net Assistance program if they remain otherwise eligible for benefits. These households are required to have their shelter and utility allowances paid directly to their landlord and utility provider.

How much do recipients receive?

Temporary Assistance benefit amounts are established in State law and regulation. They vary based on a number of circumstances, including county of residence and household size. When members of the household have other resources, including earned income from a job, this also affects the benefit level.

The benefits are composed of “allowances” and, generally, together they determine the “standard of need” for a given household size. These allowances include a basic needs allowance, home energy allowances, a shelter allowance, and other allowances.

Generally, the maximum benefit level is the standard of need in a county, which varies. For example, in Albany County, the maximum benefit level (or standard of need) is \$367 per month for a single individual, or \$698 per month for a household of three. The standard of need for each county is set by State regulation.

How is eligibility determined?

Each individual and household’s circumstances are different, and a number of factors may impact a household’s eligibility for benefits, including household size, income level, housing situation, type of income, and other resources or benefits received. In addition, there are certain statutory eligibility requirements for applicants and recipients of Temporary Assistance, such as drug and alcohol screening and assessment, cooperation with child support enforcement activities, and cooperation with employment activities (e.g., job search).

Temporary Assistance recipients may be required to participate in a variety of work activities. Social services districts are required to provide any child care or transportation needed for an individual to participate in an assigned work activity. They may also provide other supportive services, such as work-related clothing or equipment to help individuals obtain a job.

What if recipients break the rules?

Failure to comply with program rules may result in the case closure or reduced benefits, as required by federal and State regulations. The actual amount by which benefits are reduced varies depending on the program rule in question.

Does getting a job reduce benefits?

Once a household is receiving benefits, State law permits a portion of earned income to be disregarded, ensuring that new earnings do not result in a reduction of benefits, up to a certain point. For households that have a child under age 18 (or under 19 and in school), the first \$90 of monthly income, plus 51 percent of the remaining earned income, is not counted when determining the benefit level. For all other households, the first \$90 is not counted.

Households with children already receiving Temporary Assistance can earn more, generally up to 185 percent of the standard of need, before becoming ineligible due to earnings. Households without children generally lose eligibility when earnings reach the standard of need plus \$90.

What is Emergency Assistance?

Emergency Assistance is a category of Temporary Assistance that helps resolve an urgent need or situation. Some examples include homelessness, a pending eviction, having little or no food, lack of fuel for heating in the cold weather, or a utility shut-off or pending disconnection.

Emergency Assistance can help with things like paying overdue rent, paying for temporary housing, covering utility arrears or paying for heating fuel.

Recipients of Emergency Assistance do not have to be eligible for ongoing Temporary Assistance.

How to apply?

Anyone can check their eligibility for Temporary Assistance at mybenefits.ny.gov.

To apply, an application must be filed and an in-person interview completed with the social services district. See otda.ny.gov/workingfamilies/dss.asp for more information.

New York City residents must apply at their local Job Center.

See www1.nyc.gov/site/hra/locations/job-locations.page for more information.

This fact sheet is intended to provide general program information and is not intended for use to determine eligibility or define program requirements for any individual or household.