

HOW TO QUALIFY

To get General Assistance, your income must fall below the OVERALL MAXIMUM LEVEL OF ASSISTANCE for your household size. The OVERALL MAXIMUM LEVEL OF ASSISTANCE is found in the local GA ordinance (see Appendix A). Also, your income must be less than what you need to pay for the basic necessities of food, shelter, heating fuel, electricity, water and sewer utilities, household supplies, clothing and medical care.

It is important to remember that your "income" is any income you will probably receive over the next 30 days as well as any income received over the last 30 days that was not spent on basic necessities. In order to make sure you will get all the assistance you may need, you must make sure you **SPEND YOUR MONEY ONLY ON BASIC NECESSITIES AND KEEP YOUR RECEIPTS!**

Remember, every time you re-apply, you will have to show that you are doing everything you have been asked to do to reduce your need for assistance. What follows is a brief explanation of these additional requirements.

WORK REQUIREMENT

If you are unemployed or underemployed (working less than full time), but you are able to work, you must:

- register for work at the Maine Job Service;
- actively look for work;
- accept any job offer (paying at least minimum wage);
- participate in any no-cost training, retraining, educational or rehabilitative program that would help you get a job if referred to such a program by the administrator; and
- agree to perform and successfully complete work for the municipality if assigned to a "workfare" program.

If you do not comply with these work requirements, and you do not have a good reason for not complying, you will be disqualified from receiving GA for 120 days. Also, if you are not in an emergency situation, the administrator may ask you to perform workfare before your assistance is actually issued to you. Do not hesitate to ask the administrator for a complete description of your rights and responsibilities under the municipal work program.

There are some exceptions to the work requirement: Applicants do not have to meet the work requirements if they have a physical or mental disability that prevents them from working. Also, people who are the sole caretakers of a pre-school age child or other dependent person in need of care will not be asked to fulfill the work requirements. Applicants who feel they have a legitimate reason they can not meet the work requirements should discuss the matter with their GA administrator.

Quitting Work & Getting Fired

If you have been working, but quit your job without a good reason or get fired from your job for misconduct, you are automatically disqualified for 120 days from the date of separation from your employment. Remember that the administrator does not want to disqualify you from receiving the assistance you need, so it is in your best interest to fully comply with the work program rules.

OTHER REQUIREMENTS - USE OF INCOME & RESOURCES

You are required to use your income for basic necessities. If your income is enough to pay for your household needs, but you spend your money on items that are not considered basic necessities (*ask your GA administrator to explain what is and is not considered a basic necessity*), you will not be eligible for assistance. Also, the municipality may have adopted certain use-of-income guidelines that the administrator will expect you to follow. These guidelines may ask you to spend your money on certain basic needs first, such as rent or electricity. These guidelines will be explained to you and given to you in writing.

In addition, you must use any and all resources that would reduce your need for GA. If you refuse to use a resource without a good reason, you will be disqualified until you do so. These resources include:

- TANF, SSI, SSDI, Food Stamps, HEAP fuel benefits, and other government benefit programs;
- trust funds;
- alimony or child support payments;
- educational, retraining, medical or rehabilitative programs;
- assistance from relatives legally liable for your support;
- unnecessary assets, such as extra vehicles and real estate, which you may be required to sell.

For instance, if an applicant is likely to be eligible for TANF but refuses to apply, that applicant will not receive GA until he or she does apply. As another example, if an applicant owns an expensive car or is making payments on a car that is beyond his or her means, the GA administrator may require that the vehicle be traded in for a less expensive vehicle.

Also, if you receive a lump sum payment, (*such as a Workers' Compensation settlement*) the administrator will "prorate" your eligibility. This means that you may not be eligible for GA for a number of months—even up to one year—depending on the size of the lump sum payment and the way the lump sum payment was spent. To protect your eligibility for GA, the lump sum payment must be spent on basic needs.

Further, if you are receiving income from a government benefit program but your income is reduced or terminated because you committed fraud or violated that program's rules—GA will not replace the lost income.

OTHER INFORMATION

When is Assistance Granted?

Within 24 hours after you apply for GA, the administrator will give you a written decision explaining if you are or are not to be granted assistance, and the reason why. If you are eligible to receive assistance, the written decision will describe the types and amount of assistance you will receive. Any assistance granted will be in the form of a voucher payable to a specific vendor.

If you are not in an emergency situation and your assistance has been granted on the condition that you perform workfare assignment, the written decision will explain your rights and responsibilities, and when your assistance will be actually issued. If you are not eligible to receive GA, the written decision will explain why you are ineligible, and you will be informed that you can challenge the decision by requesting a fair hearing.

Amount of Assistance

The amount of assistance you receive depends upon your situation. However, the municipality does have maximum levels of assistance for the various basic necessities that it will not exceed. For example, if your total eligibility is \$450 and your rent is \$425, but the municipality allows a maximum of \$350 for housing, you will not receive your total rent of \$425 even though you are eligible for \$450. It is your responsibility to find housing within your ability to pay.

- proof of all household income including: pay stubs, TANF, SSI and SSDI statements;
- financial statements from all your bank accounts;
- name and address of your landlord;
- your driver's license or other identification;
- your Social Security number and the Social Security numbers of all members of your household;
- a doctor's statement if you are ill, disabled, or not able to work;
- insurance policies;
- title and registration for any car, truck or recreational vehicle you own.

If you have applied for GA before, and have been instructed by the GA administrator to apply for certain resources (subsidized housing, TANF, SSI, Food Stamps, etc.) or have been instructed to look for work, you will have to show proof that you have fulfilled any and all of those requirements.

Remember that it is your responsibility to show that you are eligible. If you do not bring in all the information that has been asked for, the administrator may have to deny your request for assistance until you provide the necessary information.

It is the administrator's job to verify the information you supply. This may include obtaining information from your landlord, employer, doctor, or any other person having information about your income, expenses or other information necessary regarding your application.

The administrator will ask for your permission to contact other people to verify the information you have provided. If you do not want the administrator to contact some of those other people, you should tell the administrator. However, if you refuse to give permission and the administrator is unable to verify necessary information, your request for GA may be denied.

Fraud

It is very important that you tell the truth when you apply for GA. If the administrator finds out that you have not told the truth in order to obtain assistance you are not entitled to, you will be disqualified from receiving GA for 120 days. In addition, the administrator may refer your case over to the police department or District Attorney's Office for committing General Assistance fraud, which is a Class E crime.

Note: Disqualifications under this program are effective statewide.