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Public Assistance Programs is a series of publications that describe state and federal programs that provide assistance in the form of healthcare, income, food, housing, and child care. Each work in the series describes an individual program. Please see the list on the last page for other works in this series.

Overview

General Assistance (GA) is a state program that provides cash assistance to needy persons who fall into specified statutory categories and who meet the GA eligibility requirements, including income and asset requirements. Broadly, GA provides assistance to people who are not eligible for assistance from federal programs and who are not able to provide for themselves. As of October 1, 2024, most GA recipients receive a monthly grant of \$350. Nearly all GA recipients are single adults.

Contents

Administration	1
Eligibility Requirements	2
Benefits	5
Funding and Expenditures	7
Recipient Profile.....	7
About This Series.....	9

Administration

Minnesota State Legislature

The legislature established GA in 1973 when it abolished county “Poor Relief” programs and the “Township Relief System.” The original GA program provided assistance to needy persons who did not qualify for federal programs. In 1985, the legislature changed the GA program to allow assistance only for those people who meet certain standards of “unemployability.” The state law includes minimum statewide standards for assistance, general eligibility requirements (including resource limitations), provisions for program funding and administration, and guidelines for determining the county financially responsible for GA grants.

State Department of Human Services (DHS)

DHS supervises program administration. DHS rules govern GA administration in Minnesota. DHS also issues a detailed program manual for county caseworkers, which includes specific eligibility criteria and schedules for determining benefits.

In addition, DHS maintains MAXIS, which is the centralized computer system for determining an applicant's eligibility for GA and GA grant amounts. DHS also assists counties in GA administration by providing them with technical assistance on eligibility requirements and other program components.

Counties

The counties administer GA. The county human services agency, with the assistance of the state agency through the MAXIS computer system, determines if an applicant meets the state's eligibility requirements and determines the amount of assistance.

Eligibility Requirements

The GA program provides aid to individuals or couples who are not eligible for federally funded assistance programs, but who are unable to provide for themselves ([Minn. Stat. § 256D.01](#)). An applicant qualifies for GA if he or she meets the eligibility standards set by state law and has income and assets below the limits established by the state legislature and DHS.

Income Limits

The legislature mandates that DHS limit eligibility for GA based on maximum income levels. The limit applies to earned and unearned income. If the current net income of an individual or couple is below the applicable need standard, that person or couple may be eligible for GA.

Currently, an applicant's net income is calculated in two steps. First, all of the applicable allowed disregards (income that is not counted when determining eligibility and calculating the amount of the assistance payment) and deductions are subtracted from the applicant's gross monthly earned income, to get the applicant's net earned income amount. These disregards and deductions include an earned income disregard of the first \$65 of earned income plus half of the remaining income earned each month.¹

Second, all unearned income that is not otherwise excluded is added to the applicant's net earned income amount, in order to arrive at the applicant's net income. Some types of unearned income are excluded from this calculation. Examples of excluded unearned income are certain types of federal assistance payments received by the person or couple, such as the value of food support and low-income home energy assistance.

¹ [Minnesota Statutes, section 256P.06](#), subdivision 3, lists the items that must be included when determining assistance unit income.

The net income limit represents the state's determination of the minimum monthly income individuals need to provide themselves with "a reasonable subsistence compatible with decency and health" ([Minn. Stat. § 256D.02](#), subd. 4). For this reason, the net income limit is also known as the standard of assistance or the "need standard."

Asset Limits

State regulations also set the maximum value of assets an applicant may possess and be eligible for GA.

The equity value of an assistance unit's² personal property must not exceed \$10,000. Personal property is limited to: (1) cash; (2) bank accounts; (3) liquid stocks and bonds that can be readily accessed without a financial penalty; (4) nonexcluded vehicles (one vehicle per assistance unit member age 16 or older will be excluded when determining the equity value of personal property); and (5) the full value of business accounts used to pay expenses not related to the business.

The county agency may waive the value of any asset determined to be essential to the client, or any asset that is for sale and not yet sold.

Personal property owned by the applicant or participant is presumed to be legally available to the applicant or participant unless he or she documents that the personal property is not legally available to him or her. When personal property is not legally available to the applicant or participant, its equity must not be applied to the personal property limits.

The equity value of real and personal property transferred without reasonable compensation within 12 months preceding the date of application must be included in determining the resources of an assistance unit.

Additional GA Eligibility Requirements

In addition to having financial need, a GA applicant must also:

- be a resident of Minnesota;
- be ineligible for aid from any cash assistance program that uses federal funds (i.e., MFIP or SSI);
- be a citizen of the United States; and
- meet other eligibility requirements.

A GA applicant must be a resident of Minnesota. A resident is a person who intends to make his or her home in Minnesota and has been in the state for at least 30 days. Exceptions to the 30-day requirement are made for migrant workers who meet certain criteria and for persons in

² An assistance unit is the group of people who are applying for or receiving benefits and whose needs are included in a cash grant.

situations of unusual hardship. Time spent in a battered women's shelter also counts towards meeting the requirement.

A GA applicant must be ineligible for aid from any cash assistance program that uses federal funds (i.e., MFIP or SSI).³

A GA applicant must be a citizen of the United States. Lawfully present noncitizens who are lawfully residing in the United States are eligible for GA. Undocumented noncitizens and nonimmigrant noncitizens⁴ are not eligible for GA benefits.

The income and assets of sponsors of noncitizens are deemed available for GA applicants and recipients as provided under federal law. In order to receive GA, lawfully present adult noncitizens who are under age 70 and have lived in the United States for at least four years must also meet certain requirements relating to English literacy or application for U.S. citizenship.

A GA applicant must be unable to work because the person:

- 1) Has a professionally certified illness, injury, or incapacity expected to continue for more than 45 days and that prevents the person from getting or keeping a job
- 2) Has a diagnosed developmental disability or mental illness that prevents the person from getting or keeping a job
- 3) Is of advanced age (age 55 or older)
- 4) Is needed in the home to care for a person whose age or medical condition requires continuous care
- 5) Is placed in a licensed or certified facility for care or treatment under a plan approved by the local human services agency
- 6) Or is one of the following:
 - a. a person who has an application pending for or is appealing a termination of Social Security disability or SSI benefits, as long as the person has a professionally certified illness or disability
 - b. a person who is assessed as not employable
 - c. a person under age 18 in certain specified circumstances and with consent of the local agency
 - d. a person who is eligible for displaced homemaker services and is enrolled as a full-time student
 - e. a person involved with protective or court-ordered services that prevent working at least four hours per day

³ An eligible person may receive GA while waiting for an SSI determination.

⁴ A nonimmigrant is a person who is lawfully present in the United States, but who is not lawfully residing in the United States (because the person maintains a residence outside the United States). Nonimmigrants are generally admitted temporarily and for a limited purpose (e.g., tourists, foreign students).

- f. a person over the age of 18 whose primary language is not English and who is attending high school at least half-time
- g. a person who has a condition that qualifies as a specific learning disability, has a rehabilitation plan that was developed or approved by the local agency, and is following the plan
- h. a person whose alcohol and drug addiction is a material factor that contributes to the person's disability and who has been assessed by the county agency to determine if he or she is amenable to treatment

GA Ineligibility

GA is not provided to:

- fugitive felons and parole and probation violators; or
- persons who have fraudulently misrepresented residency to obtain assistance in two or more states (in which case, GA is not provided for ten years).

Special Requirements for Previous Drug Offenses

Special requirements apply to persons convicted of a felony drug offense.

An individual convicted of a felony-level drug offense during the previous ten years may be subject to random drug testing. The county must provide information about substance use disorder treatment programs to an individual who tests positive for an illegal controlled substance.

These requirements do not apply to individuals with convictions or positive test results related to cannabis, marijuana, or tetrahydrocannabinols.

Benefits

GA Grants

GA recipients receive a monthly cash assistance payment, called a grant. The amount of a recipient's grant is determined by subtracting the recipient's net income from the applicable monthly GA assistance standard.

Monthly GA Standards for Single Persons and Childless Couples

Eligible Units	Monthly Standard
One adult	\$350
Emancipated minor	350
One adult, living with parent(s) who have no minor children	350
Minor not living with parent, stepparent, or legal custodian (with social service plan approval)	350

Eligible Units	Monthly Standard
Married couple with no children	350 per eligible unit member
One adult, living in a medical facility or receiving housing support	125

The monthly standard of assistance will be adjusted for inflation each year beginning on January 1, 2026.

Unlike MFIP, the GA program does not include an employment and training component. GA recipients are not required to participate in employment and training services as a condition of receiving benefits.

Emergency General Assistance (EGA)

Applicants with insufficient income or resources may be eligible for a GA grant for emergency needs, not to exceed 30 days, as long as the applicant is ineligible for MFIP benefits and had annual net income no greater than 200 percent of the federal poverty guidelines for the previous calendar year. An individual or family may not receive EGA more than once in any 12-month period. In the case of nonresidents, state law provides that the 30-day residency requirement is not waived when a person applies for EGA ([Minn. Stat. § 256D.02](#), subd. 12a, para. (f)). EGA grants may be made to the extent that funds are available. DHS allocates EGA funds to counties based on a formula in statute. No county is allocated less than \$1,000 in a fiscal year.

Housing Support

Individuals who are eligible for GA may also be eligible for residence in community settings paid for by the state or county under the Housing Support program ([Minnesota Statutes, chapter 256I](#)). Housing support provides room and board payments to eligible individuals. (The GA grant for a recipient who receives housing support is a personal needs allowance of \$125 per month.)

Eligibility for Other Programs

GA recipients may be eligible for health care benefits through the MA or MinnesotaCare programs.

GA recipients who are citizens, and some who are lawfully present noncitizens, are also generally eligible for the federal Food Support program but must make separate applications for those benefits. A GA recipient who also receives food support is exempt from the SNAP Employment and Training program, but may volunteer for SNAP Employment and Training services.

Lawfully present noncitizen recipients of GA who are not eligible for federal food support solely because of their citizenship status may be eligible for the state-financed Minnesota Food Assistance Program. **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Payment of Benefits

GA grants are generally issued once per month on the first day of the month subsequent to the initial grant. For persons without a verified address, the county may issue checks on a weekly basis. Grants are paid directly to program recipients or to legally appointed guardians. In other circumstances, such as evidence of continual mismanagement of funds or drug dependency, the county may institute vendor payments. Vendor payments are payments made directly to the providers of goods and services (such as the landlord or the utility company). The county may also issue the GA grant as a “protective payment;” that is, the grant can be given to another individual to be spent on behalf of the recipient.

Funding and Expenditures

The state pays for the costs of GA benefits.

In state fiscal year 2023, the state paid out \$50,276,075 in benefits to GA recipients. This figure does not include those receiving housing support.

Recipient Profile

In March 2022, 99.6 percent of GA recipients were single adults and 0.4 percent of GA recipients were childless couples.

In state fiscal year 2023, the average monthly number of GA cases was 21,777.

This table shows GA monthly average recipients and total annual payments remaining stable over the past ten years while average monthly payments decreased from 2014 to 2018 and then began increasing, with the exception of fiscal year 2020 when payments decreased.

GA Monthly Average Cases and Payments, Fiscal Years 2014 – 2023

Fiscal Year	Monthly Average Cases	Monthly Average Payments	Total Annual Payments
2014	23,019	\$185.08	\$51,124,719
2015	23,250	184.36	51,435,727
2016	23,230	180.95	50,443,730
2017	23,238	177.71	49,556,022
2018	23,238	175.30	48,883,093
2019	23,176	180.87	50,301,759

Fiscal Year	Monthly Average Cases	Monthly Average Payments	Total Annual Payments
2020	23,361	177.57	49,778,343
2021	25,501	183.03	56,011,116
2022	22,380	185.03	49,691,402
2023	21,777	192.39	50,276,075

Source: Department of Human Services, February 2024 Forecast of Revenues and Expenditures, Background Tables

About This Series

Public Assistance Programs is a series of publications that describe state and federal programs that provide assistance in the form of healthcare, income, food, housing, and child care. Each work in the series describes an individual program.

Current works in this series include:

- Overview of Public Assistance Programs
- General Assistance (GA)
- Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP)
- Minnesota Supplemental Aid (MSA)
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- Medical Assistance (MA)
- MinnesotaCare
- Subsidized health coverage through MNsure
- Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)
- Food Support
- Housing Support

Please see the health and human services area of the House Research website for more information about these programs and related topics.

Earlier Versions

Information in the series was originally published as the *Minnesota Family Assistance: A Guide to Public Programs Providing Assistance to Minnesota Families*, which was a comprehensive guide to these programs.



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