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# Get the Facts

## INTRODUCTION

You know it can be hard to support yourself or your family. But do you know that **when you are not working** you may be able to **get help with some of your basic living costs?** Do you know that **even when you are working**, you may be able to **get help with some of your basic living costs?** You may qualify for help with your grocery costs. You may be able to get medical assistance, so that when someone in your family is sick they can see a doctor. You may be able to get help paying for child care.

This is the Chicago Jobs Council's 3rd Edition of **Get the Facts**. We wrote this booklet so that you and your family could learn what help you might be able to get. We wrote it to explain some of the most basic rules of Illinois' public benefits programs:

- **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)** - the state's cash assistance program for pregnant women and families with children.
- the **Food Stamp** program.
- medical insurance programs like **Medicaid, All Kids, and FamilyCare**.
- the **Child Care** program.

**These programs are complicated. You should know that we can't explain all the rules for public benefits programs in this booklet.** The Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) is the state agency that runs the cash assistance, Food Stamp, and childcare programs. The Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services (IDHFS) runs the medical assistance and child support enforcement programs. IDHS and IDHFS have more rules that may determine whether you can get help.

In **Get the Facts**, most of the things we talk about may be useful to you if you are pregnant or have children who live with you. Some of the things we explain may be useful to you if you are single and without children in your care. A part of this booklet explains benefits rules for different situations. Two of these situations are homelessness or domestic violence. We have also tried to include phone numbers or website addresses of places that have other helpful information.

The **Table of Contents** lists all the questions we have asked and answered. You can use it to find the information that is most important to you. We hope you will **get the facts** about programs that can help you with your basic living costs.

## 2. Can I get food stamps?

The Food Stamp program gives individuals and families a monthly grant to buy food.

### ELIGIBILITY BASICS


You may qualify for food stamps if you live in a family or are single. You may qualify even if you are working. Your income before taxes, called **gross income**, cannot be larger than limits set by the government. The chart below shows the highest gross income you can have in a month and still receive food stamps if you live in Illinois. These income amounts are different if you are aged 60 or older, or if you are disabled.

Number of People in Household	Highest Gross Monthly Income
1	\$1,107
2	\$1,484
3	\$1,861
4	\$2,238
5	\$2,615
6	\$2,992

To get food stamps your assets cannot be worth more than \$2000. Assets are things like a car or a bank account. If you or a member of your family is aged 60 or older your assets cannot be worth more than \$3000. The following things **do not count as an asset**:

- your home;
- clothing;
- furnishings;
- one car;
- retirement account.

How your eligibility for food stamps is figured out is very complicated. Other income and different living situations can change the amount of food stamps you may get. If you get food stamps, IDHS expects you to **report new employment income within 10 days of getting your job.**

 **IMPORTANT** You may get help with food stamps even if you work **full-time**. For every \$1 of increased income your food stamps will only go down about 30 cents.

## EMERGENCY OR EXPEDITED FOOD STAMPS

There are times when you need food stamps right away to help feed your family. You can ask for emergency or **expedited food stamps**. **If you are eligible you will get expedited food stamps within 5 days.** You are eligible for expedited food stamps if at least one of the following is true:

- your monthly income and bank accounts are less than your rent or house payment plus your utility costs;
- your monthly income is less than \$150 and your cash and bank accounts are not more than \$100; or
- at least one person in your household is a migrant farm worker and your cash and bank accounts are not more than \$100.

**!** **IMPORTANT** If you are eligible for expedited food stamps an IDHS worker must schedule you to complete an application the day you ask for this emergency help or the following day. At the time you apply, you only need some proof of your identity.

**!** **IMPORTANT** If you live in **DuPage, Kane, Lake, or Will County** you may apply for emergency food stamps at some food pantries. This is called **Express Stamps**. Even if you are not eligible for Express Stamps, you may still be eligible for food stamps and should complete an application (See Question 5).

## WORK ACTIVITY REQUIREMENTS

If you are **aged 18 – 49, you must register for work activity when you apply for food stamps**. You can register with an **IDHS Food Stamp Employment and Training Program**. You can also register in any other IDHS work activity program. In work activity programs you may be expected to go to classes that help you get ready for a job. **You may have to go to job interviews and accept a job offer. You must follow the rules of the work activity program in order to receive the full amount of your food stamps.**


You **do not have to be in a work activity program** if you are:

- already working 30 hours a week;
- pregnant
- responsible for the care of a child under age 18;
- already in a TANF work activity program;
- not able to work due to a mental or physical health condition;
- caring for a person unable to care for themselves;
- getting unemployment insurance or registered at the state unemployment insurance agency;
- in a drug or alcohol treatment program;
- a student in school at least part time.

### 3. Can I get medical assistance?

Medical assistance programs help pay for health care. You may be able to get medical assistance for yourself or for your children if you do not have health insurance. You may also get medical assistance if you are aged 65 or older, are blind, or disabled. If you are a single adult and you get General Assistance, you may get some medical assistance.

Each of the different medical assistance programs in Illinois has different income limits and other qualifying rules. The medical assistance you can get is based on your family situation, work status, and income. The major medical assistance programs are explained below.

 **IMPORTANT** The tables used here give monthly income limits for medical assistance. **If you earn an amount that's more than the limit, but close to the limit, you should apply for medical assistance.** When your eligibility is determined, IDHFS allows different things to be subtracted from your income, like childcare costs. These things are called “deductions” or “disregards.” You may still be eligible for medical assistance, even if your income is higher than the limit, after allowable deductions.

## ELIGIBILITY BASICS FOR CHILDREN AND PREGNANT WOMEN

### Moms & Babies

If you are pregnant, you may qualify for medical assistance under Illinois' **Moms & Babies** program. You can get Moms & Babies assistance while you are **pregnant and 60 days after your baby is born.** The table below shows the income limits based on family size.

Family Size	Monthly Income Limit
1	NA
2	Up to \$2,282 per month
3	Up to \$2,862 per month
4	Up to \$3,442 per month
5	Up to \$4,022 per month

## **All Kids**

Your children may be able to get medical assistance under Illinois' **All Kids** program. KidCare and Medicaid are now part of All Kids. **Even if you are working**, you may get All Kids for your children. All Kids can also help you pay some of your cost of your employer's health insurance for your children. The table on the next page explains the eight levels of assistance under the All Kids program. **Co-payments and premiums** are the amount of money you have to pay.

Some children must be uninsured for 12 months to get All Kids. There are some exceptions to this rule. For example, your child may have lost insurance when a parent lost a job. You should call or visit your neighborhood IDHS office to determine your eligibility.

**Monthly Income Box**

<b>Family Size</b>	<b>All Kids Assist</b>	<b>All Kids Share</b>	<b>All Kids Premium Level 1</b>	<b>All Kids Premium Level 2</b>	<b>All Kids Premium Level 3</b>	<b>All Kids Premium Level 4</b>	<b>All Kids Premium Level 5-7</b>	<b>All Kids Premium Level 8</b>
<b>1</b>	\$1,132 or less	\$1,133 – 1,276	\$1,277 – 1,702	\$1,703 – 2,553	\$2,554 – 3,403	\$3,404-4,254	\$4,255 – 6,807	\$6,808 or more
<b>2</b>	\$1,517 or less	\$1,518 – 1,711	\$1,712 – 2,282	\$2,283 – 3,423	\$3,424 – 4,563	\$4,564 – 5,704	\$5,705 – 9,127	\$9,128 or more
<b>3</b>	\$1,903 or less	\$1,904 – 2,146	\$2,147 – 2,862	\$2,863 – 4,293	\$4,294 – 5,723	\$5,724 – 7,154	\$7,155 – 11,447	\$11,448 or more
<b>4</b>	\$2,289 or less	\$2,290 – 2,581	\$2,582 – 3,442	\$3,443 – 5,163	\$5,164 – 6,883	\$6,884 – 8,604	\$8,605 – 13,767	\$13,768 or more
<b>5</b>	\$2,674 or less	\$2,675 – 3,016	\$3,017 – 4,022	\$4,023 – 6,033	\$6,034 – 8,043	\$8,044 – 10,054	\$10,055 – 16,087	\$16,088 or more
<b>Cost Box</b>								
<b>Monthly Premium</b>	None	None	1 child: \$15 2 children: \$25 More children: \$5 each	\$40 per child	\$70 per child	\$100 per child	\$150 – 250 per child	\$300 per child
<b>Max Monthly Premium</b>	N/A	N/A	\$40 for 5 or more children	\$80 for 2 or more children	\$140 for 2 or more children	\$200 for 2 or more children	No Cap	No Cap
<b>Co-Payments for Physician Office Visit</b>	None	\$2	\$5	\$10	\$15	\$20	\$25	\$25

\*\* No co-payment when a child gets a regular check-up or shots. These are free for all children enrolled in All Kids.  
(Table adapted from the State of Illinois All Kids website, [www.allkids.com](http://www.allkids.com)).

## ELIGIBILITY BASICS FOR ADULTS

### Medicaid

**If you and your children get TANF cash assistance you also qualify for medical assistance.** You get a **Medicaid card** to use for many health care needs including:

- doctor visits;
- dentist visits;
- clinic visits;
- eye care;
- prescriptions, and
- emergency care.

### FamilyCare

**If your children get All Kids, (see page 3-2) you may qualify for FamilyCare medical assistance.** The table below explains the eight levels of FamilyCare. Co-payments and premiums are the amount of money you have to pay.

Family Size	FamilyCare Assist	FamilyCare Share	FamilyCare Premium	FamilyCare Rebate
	You pay only a \$2-\$3 co-payment for prescriptions and doctor visits if your monthly income is:	You pay only a \$2 co-payment for prescriptions and doctor visits if your monthly income is:	You pay a monthly premium of \$15-\$40 depending on family size, \$3-\$5 co-payment for prescriptions, and \$25 per doctor visit if your monthly income is:	You may get FamilyCare Rebate if you have insurance with your job and your monthly income is:
1	\$1,132 or less	\$1,133-1,276	\$1,277- 1,574	\$1,133- 1,574
2	\$1,517 or less	\$1,518-1,711	\$1,712- 2,111	\$1,518- 2,111
3	\$1,903 or less	\$1,904- 2,146	\$2,147- 2,647	\$1,904- 2,647
4	\$2,289 or less	\$2,290- 2,581	\$2,582- 3,184	\$2,290- 3,184
5	\$2,674 or less	\$2,675- 3,106	\$3,017- 3,720	\$2,675- 3,720
6	\$3,060 or less	\$3,061- 3,451	\$3,452- 4,257	\$3,061- 4,257
7	\$3,446 or less	\$3,447- 3,886	\$3,887- 4,793	\$3,447- 4,793
8	\$3,832 or less	\$3,833- 4,321	\$4,322- 5,330	\$3,833- 5,330



**HELP** Get more information about All Kids and FamilyCare from:

**All Kids Hotline**  
**1-866-255-5437**  
**www.allkidscovered.com.**

### **Aid to the Aged, Blind, and Disabled (AABD)**

You may get **AABD medical assistance** if you are aged 65 or older, blind, or disabled. Your income must be at or below limits set by the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services (IDHFS). The following table shows the income limits based on family size.

<b>Family Size</b>	<b>Monthly Income Limit</b>
1	\$851
2	\$1,141
3	\$1,431
4	\$1,721
5	\$2,011
6	\$2,301

**Your monthly income may be greater than the amounts in the table above. If your medical costs are large, you may still be able to get medical assistance.** The IDHFS will expect you to pay some of your costs and then they will cover other costs. The costs you must pay is called your “spend down”. Spend down rules are very complicated.



**IMPORTANT** If you are single or if you have children in your household and you need help to cover medical care, **you should apply for assistance.** There are many rules in Illinois' medical assistance programs. It is hard to be sure if you are eligible for help. You and your family may qualify for medical assistance, even if another person or family similar to yours does not.

All programs except All Kids and FamilyCare will help with bills for medical care you got up to three months before your application.

**HELP**

Get legal help or information about medical assistance programs from:

**Public Benefits Hotline**

**1-888-893-5327** (Cook County)

**Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance Foundation**

**1-877-342-7891** (Southern and part of Central Illinois)

**Prairie State Legal Services**

**1-800-690-2130** (Northern and part of Central Illinois)

**Illinois Legal Aid**

**[www.IllinoisLegalAid.org](http://www.IllinoisLegalAid.org)**

## 5. How do I apply for and get public benefits?

### THE APPLICATION PROCESS

There are two primary ways to apply for TANF cash assistance, food stamps, and medical assistance:

- You can go to the IDHS office in the area you live or are staying, and ask to apply; or
- You can complete an application on a computer with Internet access, then send it on-line, by mail, or fax it to IDHS

#### At the IDHS Office

You can walk in the IDHS office in your neighborhood and apply for cash assistance, food stamps, or medical assistance (see Question 1 about finding your local IDHS office).

**!** **IMPORTANT** When you ask to apply, no one at IDHS should stop you from applying by telling you that you must come back another day. No one should stop you from applying by telling you to attend a meeting or look for work first. The IDHS office might be too busy to complete an application with you the day you are at the office. **You can still start your application with only your name, address, and signature.** IDHS must determine your eligibility for cash assistance within 45 days and food stamps within 30 days of your application date.


You can have someone else apply for you. The person who applies for you is called your **approved representative or representative payee**. This person must have your written permission and signature.

**IDHS is required by law to get someone who can translate for you when you apply if you do not speak English.**

**\* COMMON PROBLEM** You must be able to talk with and understand your IDHS caseworker whenever you have meetings. You are not expected to keep your child out of school to help you communicate. Ask your caseworker to provide a translator that speaks your language. If you do not get the assistance you need because IDHS did not help you with a translator, you can **file an appeal** (see Question 6).


#### With a Computer


You can also apply for TANF cash assistance, food stamps, and medical assistance using a computer that has Internet access.

-  **HELP** Get an application or apply on-line for cash assistance, food stamps, or medical assistance with a computer at

**Illinois Department of Human Services**  
**[www.idhslink.com](http://www.idhslink.com)**

There are directions on the website to follow about applying and how to find your nearby office.


-  **IMPORTANT** You must go to the IDHS office to give your signature after completing the online application if you are applying for cash assistance or medical assistance. You do not need to do this if you completed the on-line application for food stamps only.

-  **IMPORTANT** You can send your on-line application or paper application with only your name and address.

Throughout Illinois there are also community agencies that will help you with a computer application for public benefits. These agencies are often social service agencies or food pantries. Sometimes schools, churches, or hospitals and health centers are able to help with computer applications for food stamps, medical assistance, or TANF cash assistance. Many of these agencies are called **RealBenefits™ Users**. Ask the school or community-based organization you know if they are a RealBenefits™ user.

## **Meeting a Caseworker**

Someone from IDHS will contact you to complete the application after they get it in the mail or by fax. If you apply on-line, you will be emailed when the IDHS office receives your on-line application. IDHS will email you an e-confirmation number and tell you what office the application was sent to and what information they need.


-  **IMPORTANT** If no one from IDHS makes an appointment for a meeting with you after you get your application to the local office, call your local office to schedule a meeting.

In a meeting with an IDHS caseworker to get cash assistance you will be asked for information about:

- your family size and ages,
- where you live,
- your income,
- other things of value (assets) you own,
- family members' citizenship status,
- your employment history,
- your health and the health of each member of your family,
- the education or training you have completed,

- any domestic violence, substance abuse, or mental health treatment you may need or are receiving, and
- any parent not living with the children.

IDHS will ask you to provide documents that prove, or verify, some information on your application for cash assistance, food stamps, and medical assistance.

 **COMMON PROBLEM** Sometimes not having documents which prove your information can delay getting the assistance you need. When you meet with an IDHS caseworker try to have as many documents as you can with you. Try to have:


- your driver's license, state ID card, or birth certificate,
- utility bills,
- social security numbers or proof that you applied for a social security number,
- rent receipts, your lease, or mortgage statement,
- child care receipts,
- child support orders,
- health records, and
- check stubs.

**Always keep the original documents for yourself.** Let IDHS have copies of the documents they need. If you have problems getting some documents, like health records, tell your caseworker and ask them to help you.

## **Continued Food Stamps and TANF Cash Assistance**

After you have received **food stamps** or **cash assistance for 6 months**, IDHS will contact you. To continue getting food stamps or cash assistance you will have to schedule a review. This is called a **redetermination**. For **cash assistance**, you can do your review by mail or at an IDHS office. For **food stamps**, you can do your review by mail, at an IDHS office, or over the phone.

When your food stamps are almost ending, IDHS will send you information about the Phone System Interview. In order to do a phone interview you must do it by the date on your IDHS notice.

 **IMPORTANT** There are certain cases where you may not do a phone interview. You must go to the IDHS office for an interview. Contact your IDHS office to find out if you can do a phone interview.



## HELP

To do a phone interview to continue receiving **food stamps** call:

**Illinois Department of Human Services**  
**Phone System Interview line:**  
**1-800-217-6070**

## CHILD SUPPORT COOPERATION

If you receive TANF cash assistance or Medicaid you must cooperate with child support rules. This means you must give IDHS and the state's **Division of Child Support Enforcement (DCSE)** information about your children's other parent.



**IMPORTANT** You do not need to give information about your children's other parent if:

- the child was conceived as a result of rape or incest;
- giving this information will cause you or your child to suffer emotional harm;
- giving this information will cause you or your child to suffer physical harm; or
- you fear domestic violence (see Question 18).

The Division of Child Support Enforcement uses the information you give them, and other records, to collect child support from the non-custodial parent. The non-custodial parent is the one without legal charge of the children. The DCSE also requires the non-custodial parent to pay for the children's health insurance offered by an employer. The DCSE helps establish paternity, too. Establishing paternity means getting a legal order that names the biological father as a parent. Paternity allows the biological father all the rights of a parent, such as the right to custody and the right to visitation.


**If you receive cash assistance, you will only receive up to \$50 of the monthly child support collected.** The State of Illinois keeps the rest of the child support in return for cash assistance and other benefits.

If your child support award is big enough, you may receive the whole amount and become ineligible for TANF cash assistance. You may still get food stamps or medical assistance.

## CASH AND FOOD STAMPS ON THE LINK CARD

Your TANF cash and your food stamps will be given to you once a month using the **Illinois Link Card**. This card is like a debit card a bank uses. IDHS should tell you how to use the Link Card. You will pick a four number code or personal identification number (PIN). This number will


allow you to get your money or make food purchases any time after your **benefit availability date**. Your benefit availability date is the day your cash and/or food stamps benefits are put in your Link Card account.

 **IMPORTANT** If your Link Card is lost, stolen, or damaged you should report this to IDHS. You will get a new Link Card and should change your PIN so that your money and food stamps are safe. **IDHS will not replace any money or food stamps in your account** that was taken out before you reported your problem with your Link Card.

## Getting Cash

You can get cash using your Link Card at stores where you buy food. **There is no charge to get cash at the same time that you buy food with your Link Card.** You can also get cash at automatic teller machines (ATMs). ATMs are found at banks and stores in and around your neighborhood. **You can get cash two times each month from an ATM without a charge.** Each time you get cash with your Link Card after the first two times, a \$1 charge will be taken from your cash assistance amount.

You can also use ATMs to find out how much cash you have on your Link Card. When you use an ATM to find out how much cash is on your Link Card it is called a balance inquiry. You are allowed two balance inquiries each month without a charge. For each **balance inquiry** over two, a 50¢ charge is taken from your cash amount.

 **HELP** There is no charge to find out your cash amount on your Link Card or the cash amounts you took from your account during the month if you call:

**Illinois Link Helpline  
1-800-678-LINK**

You must have enough money on your Link Card to take out the amount you want and cover any extra charge. If you do not have money to cover the charge, you will not be able to get the cash you want.

A bank **may not add their own charge** for use of their ATMs.

## Buying Food

You can use the Link Card to buy food at stores which accept the Link Card. At the store, you or the store clerk will run your card through a small machine called a point of sale terminal. The total cost of your food purchase will be subtracted from your food stamp amount.

**Food stamps are not combined with your cash amount on your Link Card. Your food stamps amount and cash amount are kept separate. Food stamps can only be used for food purchases.**

Some stores may have you sign a paper, called a voucher, for the amount of your food purchase. The store will have to call a state phone number to determine whether you have enough money to cover what you want to buy. A hold is then placed on your Link Card food stamp amount for the cost of your food purchase. There is a \$125 limit for a food purchase using a voucher.

## **MEDICAL CARDS**

You will get a medical card from the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services (IDHFS) if you qualify for:

- Medicaid;
- Transitional Medicaid;
- Aid to the Aged, Blind, and Disabled;
- General Assistance;
- All Kids; or
- FamilyCare.

If you are eligible for All Kids Rebate, you use your employee insurance card for medical care. You will receive the money that is your rebate amount back from the IDHFS by check.

 **HELP** To get help finding a doctor that accepts your medical card call:


**All Kids Hotline**  
**1-866-255-5437**

**IDHFS Helplines**  
**1-800-226-0768**  
**1-877-805-5312**

To get help finding a dentist that accepts your medical card call:

**Doral Dental Services of Illinois**  
**1-888-286-2447**

“date of notice.” **You can file a Notice of Appeal up to 60 days after a cash assistance or medical assistance decision or action you think is wrong. The time limit is 90 days if you want to appeal a decision about your food stamps. If IDHS delays or fails to make a decision about your benefits, you may appeal at any time.**

 **IMPORTANT** If you appeal an IDHS decision to cut or stop your benefits, you must file your appeal within 10 days of the date of notice, or by the “date of change,” to keep getting your benefits. The date of change is the date IDHS is scheduled to change your benefits amount.

### **Step 2 – Pre-Hearing Conference**

After you complete a Notice of Appeal form you will be called in to meet with your caseworker and a supervisor. This meeting is called a **Pre-Hearing Conference**. If you are able to work the problem out, you can decide to cancel your appeal. You will be asked to sign a **“Request to Withdraw Appeal.”** **Be sure you get your agreement with IDHS in writing.** If IDHS fails to follow the agreement, you will have a written record and your original right to appeal date. **If you are not able to work a solution out that satisfies you, you do not have to cancel your appeal.**

### **Step 3 – Hearing**

A **hearing** is a formal meeting where you and IDHS discuss the problem. A person called a **hearing officer** listens to you and IDHS talk about the facts. You have a right to have someone with you during the hearing, or any part of the appeal process. This person can be anyone you choose to support you or speak for you. You may want to ask a lawyer or someone who you believe understands IDHS rules. You may choose a friend, relative, or witness.

A hearing must be scheduled and a decision reached within 90 days of the Notice of Appeal. For food stamp problems, a hearing must be scheduled and a decision reached within 60 days of your Notice of Appeal.

## **WHERE TO GET HELP**

If you live in Chicago or Cook County and need legal help with an appeal you can call the **Public Benefits Hotline at 1-888-893-5327**. This call is free. The hotline worker can also help you solve problems with TANF, Medicaid, All Kids, FamilyCare, food stamps, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), child support, work programs, and Teen Parent Services.


The following table lists the names and numbers of other organizations that can help you understand public benefits rules and your rights. Most of these organizations are listed in other parts of this booklet.

<b>Problems with:</b>	<b>Who to Call</b>	<b>Phone Number or Website</b>
All public benefits	In Cook County – Public Benefits Hotline of the Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago	1-888-8WELFAR or 1-888-893-5327
	Outside Cook County – Illinois Legal Aid	<a href="http://www.IllinoisLegalAid.org">www.IllinoisLegalAid.org</a>
	Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law	312-263-3830, ext. 229
	In Southern and Part of Central Illinois – Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance Foundation	1-877-342-7891
	In Northern and Part of Central Illinois – Prairie State Legal Services	1-800-690-2130
Food stamps	Illinois Hunger Hotline	1-800-359-2163
All Kids, FamilyCare, and Medicaid	All Kids Hotline	1-866-468-7543
Medicaid, SSI, and SSDI	Health and Disabilities Advocates	312-223-9600
Childcare	In Cook County – Action for Children	773-687-4000
	Outside Cook County – Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies	1-877-202-4453
Teen parent benefits	Illinois Caucus for Adolescent Health	312-427-4460 or <a href="http://www.icaah.org">www.icaah.org</a> and click on Publications
Benefits for immigrants	Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights	312-332-7360 or <a href="http://www.icirr.org">www.icirr.org</a> and click on Publications

## 10. What things can I do to meet my TANF work activity requirements?

### WORK ACTIVITIES


The things that you can do to count for your work activity requirement are called **work activities**. **Paid work** counts for your work activity requirement and so do other activities described below.

 **IMPORTANT** Your caseworker will tell you how you must keep track of your work activity hours. You will also be told how to prove your work activity.


#### College


If you are college-ready you can register for a two- or four-year degree program.

- **Full-time Study-** If you go to **college full-time and keep at least a C average (2.5 on a 4.0 scale) you will not have a work activity requirement**. If you do not get a 2.5 grade point average you will have one marking period to get your grades up to 2.5 without having to work. Your TANF counter can be stopped for up to 36 months of full-time college education.

 **Your TANF counter stops if you go to college full-time and keep a 2.5 grade point average.**

- **Part-Time Study-** You can also go to college part-time, but you must keep a C or 2.5 grade point average. Your hours of college classes plus hours in other work activities must total 30 if you go to college part-time.

 **If you are a part-time student or your grade point average is less than 2.5 your TANF counter does not stop** unless you also work for wages for 30 hours a week.


 **COMMON PROBLEM** If you have not started a college degree before April 1, 2007, IDHS may tell you that you cannot start one. Sometimes IDHS makes it hard for you to count education for your work activity requirement. Be prepared to explain how you plan to succeed in college and get a job. Use this **Get the Facts** booklet to explain how you meet the work requirement rules. If you do not agree with an IDHS decision that stops you from going to school you can **file an appeal** (see Question 6).

## Job Training

If you need training to learn skills for a job, you may be in a job (vocational) training program. **You can be in the job training program up to two years without a paid job.** If you do not finish your training program in 2 years, IDHS may allow you to keep going. You will be expected to work 20 hours a week at the same time.


If job training is not a full-time activity then you must be working, or in another work activity, at least 20 hours a week. Your hours of job training and work, or other work activities, must total 30 hours a week.

 **Your TANF counter does not stop while you are in training** unless you also work for wages at least 30 hours a week.

 **COMMON PROBLEM** Sometimes IDHS makes it hard for you to count job training for your work activity requirement. Be prepared to explain how you plan to succeed in a job training program and get a job. Use this *Get the Facts* booklet to explain how you meet the work requirement rules. If you do not agree with an IDHS decision that stops you from getting job training you can **file an appeal** (see Question 6).

## Adult Education, English as a Second Language (ESL), or GED Classes

If you need to work on your reading or English skills, or you never finished high school, you can be in an adult education, ESL, or GED program. You can only count adult education, ESL, or GED programs for 10 hours of work activity. **You can be in these programs for up to two years without a paid job.** IDHS may also have you participate in community service or unpaid work experiences at the same time to reach a total of 30 hours per week.

 Your **TANF counter does not stop** while you are in adult education, ESL, or GED programs unless you also work for wages at least 30 hours a week.

## Work Programs

If you need to build up your job skills you may be assigned to a work program. Most of these work programs are run by agencies in your community that get funding from IDHS. Some of these programs offer you education or training. Other programs give you work experience. **If you are assigned to a program by IDHS you must participate to get your TANF cash assistance. In some work programs, if you do not participate in all assigned activities your cash grant may be reduced.**

You may be assigned to a work program if:

- You are an adult in a two-parent family without work.
- You have used 48 months or more of your 60-month TANF lifetime limit.
- You have no earnings.
- You are working less than 30 hours a week.

Make sure you understand what services these work programs offer and what you will be required to do. In most cases, these programs may be very helpful to you in getting the skills you need for a job and in getting a job. **If you do not think the work program you are assigned to is good for you, you should ask your program or IDHS caseworker to change your assignment.**



Your **TANF counter does not stop** while you are in a work program.

## Community Service

If you do not have much job experience, you may be assigned to do community service at a school, church, or community program to get experience. In some parts of Illinois, you may volunteer to do community service. You will also be expected to look for a job so that your work activity totals 30 hours a week. Your hours of community service may be combined with other work activity to total 30 hours a week.



Your **TANF counter does not stop** while you are in community service activities.

## Self-Employment Activities



If you have skills to be in business for yourself, self-employment activities can be a part of your 30 required hours of work activity. For example, you could attend a self-employment training program on starting a business. You could count meetings with a self-employment expert to make your business and budget plans.



Your **TANF counter does not stop** while you are in self-employment activities.



## Job Search

If you have some job experience you may be told to do a job search. You will be expected to make contacts with employers. You may also have to participate in other work activities. Your work activities must total 30 hours a week.


-  **IMPORTANT** Job search activity will only count as a work activity for **4 weeks in a row**. You can only count job search as work activity for **6 total weeks in a year**.
-  Your **TANF counter does not stop** while you are doing job search activities.

## **Counseling or Treatment Programs**

If you have personal or family problems like domestic violence, depression, or a drug or alcohol problem you can be in a counseling or treatment program. Depending on what you need, your treatment may be combined with other work activities to total 30 hours of work activity a week.

-  **IMPORTANT** You can only count counseling or treatment as work activity for **4 weeks in a row**. You can only count counseling and treatment for **6 weeks in a year**.
-  **IMPORTANT** You cannot be required to be in any domestic violence activity or program. Your cash assistance cannot be cut or stopped if you do not follow through with any domestic violence activity or program (see Question 18).

**You also do not have to participate in a “family formation” or “marriage promotion” activity suggested by IDHS.** Your cash assistance cannot be cut or stopped if you do not want to participate in these activities.

-  Your **TANF counter does not stop** while you are in counseling or treatment **unless you have qualified for an exemption** (see Question 11).

## 13. How will getting a job affect the TANF cash assistance I get?

### WORK PAYS

When you get a job, you must report your new income to IDHS within 10 days.

**!** **IMPORTANT** You may be able to keep some of your cash assistance as you work. **When you work, IDHS figures out what your cash amount will be by lowering your grant just \$1 for every \$3 you earn at your job.** Another way to say this is that your grant is lowered by 1/3 of your monthly earnings. This rule is called “**Work Pays.**” IDHS will use your income before taxes, called your gross income, to figure out your grant amount.

Here’s an example of how it works:

- If you are a single mother with two children you get a grant of \$396. If you get a job that pays \$7.50 per hour for 30 hours a week you would earn \$900 a month. **Under the Work Pays rule, you keep all your earnings and still get \$96 of your TANF grant** ( $\$900 \div 3 = \$300$  and  $\$396 - \$300 = \$96$ ). So, your monthly income with work and your reduced grant totals  $\$900 + \$96$  or \$996.

(The grant amount used in this example is for Cook, Boone, Champaign, DeKalb, DuPage, Kane, Kankakee, Kendall, Lake, McHenry, Ogle, Whiteside, Winnebago, or Woodford Counties. See Question 7 for grant amounts in other counties.)

**!** **IMPORTANT** When you earn over 3 times your cash grant amount you will no longer get cash assistance. **You may still be eligible for medical assistance and food stamps.**


IDHS will find out if you don’t report your income. When employers hire you, they must report your income to the State of Illinois. IDHS compares the social security numbers of people who were hired with people on TANF. **If you don’t tell your caseworker you got a job, your cash grant will be stopped and you will have to pay the State back.** If you get some cash assistance while you are working, you must report your work income twice a year to IDHS.

If you lose your job, you should tell your caseworker right away. You may be able to get back on cash assistance or get an increase in your grant amount. You may be able to get an extra payment, called a “**supplemental payment**”, to help you out until your monthly grant starts or increases. You may also get help finding another job or going to school to get some new job skills.

## EARNED INCOME TAX CREDIT (EITC)


If you work anytime during a year, you may qualify for the **Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)**. This credit returns some amount of money to you after you file your federal and state income tax forms. The amount of money you may get is based on your income and family size. The following chart shows you the most income you can earn in a year at your family size and get the Earned Income Tax Credit.

<b>Family Size</b>	<b>Income Limit Per Year</b>
1 adult	\$12,120
Married couple	\$14,120
1 adult + 1 child	\$32,001
Married couple + 1 child	\$34,001
1 adult + 2 or more children	\$36,348
Married couple + 2 or more children	\$38,348

 **HELP** You can get **free help to do your income taxes** during the months of January and February from the:

**Tax Counseling Project**  
**Center for Economic Progress**  
**312-252-0280**  
**[www.centerforprogress.org](http://www.centerforprogress.org)**

- **Elderly and disabled refugees and asylees** can get Aid to the Aged, Blind, and Disabled (AABD). If you lost your Supplemental Security Income (SSI) when a 7-year time limit to become a U.S. citizen passed, you can get up to \$500 a month from IDHS. This is a new law passed in July 2004.
- If you are **not a citizen** you can get All Kids medical insurance **for your children** (see Question3). This is not true if your children are undocumented.
- **If you are pregnant**, you can get medical assistance during your pregnancy. It does not matter if you are a legal immigrant or undocumented.
- **If you need emergency medical services**, you can get care. It does not matter if you are a legal immigrant or undocumented.
- **Non-citizen victims of domestic violence and their children** may be able to get TANF cash or medical assistance. Your family must also meet all other eligibility rules (see Questions 1, 3, and 9). A victim of domestic violence without children may qualify for AABD or General Assistance (GA) (see Question 1).

 **COMMON PROBLEM** When you apply for admission or residency, the U.S. government considers whether you may become a “public charge.” A public charge is someone who depends on the government for their basic needs. **Getting cash assistance is one of many things the government considers when you apply for admission or residency.** Getting food stamps or medical assistance should not affect the government’s decision about your application. If you are a victim of domestic violence and get cash assistance this should not affect the government’s decision about your application.

The rules for getting public benefits if you are an immigrant are complicated.

 **HELP** If you need help to understand what public benefits you may get you can contact the:

**Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights**  
**312-332-7360**  
**[www.icirr.org](http://www.icirr.org)**