

Aging and People with Disabilities: General Assistance

Background – General Assistance

Oregon's current General Assistance (GA) program was funded through HB 4042 during the 2016 Legislative Session and implemented that year. Sponsored by the House Committee on Human Services and Housing, the bill passed unanimously, with the intent to serve a portion of Oregon's most vulnerable individuals - those with severe disabilities experiencing homelessness or at imminent risk of homelessness. The program's structure was recommended by Portland State University's Regional Research Institute's 2014 General Assistance Study, and is supported by research from Utah, Washington and New York, which documented that providing housing to individuals with disabilities resulted in overall cost avoidance by decreasing shelter use, medical expenditures and incarcerations.

Benefits Structure

Participation in the program is capped at 200 individuals per month and benefits provided include:

- Up to \$545 per month for housing;
- \$90 per month for utilities;
- \$60 per month for a personal incidental fund (PIF); and,
- Free assistance with the Social Security Administration's disability-related application and appeals process.

GA recipients' housing, utility, and PIF expenditures can be recovered by DHS when individuals are awarded Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits. Funds recovered are used to support ongoing program operations.

Eligibility Criteria

Recipients must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- Be an adult without minor children living with them;
- Receive Presumptive Medicaid-OSIPM medical assistance;
- Meet disability, financial, and nonfinancial eligibility criteria for SSI;

- Apply for SSI;
- Sign an Interim Assistance Reimbursement agreement, allowing the department to recoup assistance paid to the GA consumer once they are awarded SSI benefits; and,
- Be homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness as defined by OAR 461-135-0700(1).

Metrics

- 118 individuals currently receive GA benefits, representing a caseload increase of 100 percent since January of 2017;
- 74 percent of participants have been housed, which is a 12 percent increase from January of 2017;
- More than 4,700 individuals have been referred to the program since its inception;
- 542 individuals are currently being evaluated for GA, and the department receives five to 15 new referrals each business day;
- 163 individuals have been awarded SSI benefits to date;
- DHS has collected \$425,822.76 in reimbursements for the program, representing a recovery rate of approximately 85 percent;
- The current average wait for a recipient's favorable SSI decision is 233 days. As individuals become eligible for SSI benefits, they transition to other programs, and slots are opened for new GA individuals.

Collaboration with Community Action Agencies and Community Partners

The launch and ongoing operation of the GA program has been a community effort. Collaboration with over 50 local Community Action Agencies and community partners has made it possible for DHS to leverage GA funding while also accessing Community Action Agency and community partner supports, including assistance with application fees, move-in fees, and deposits. This partnership has led to favorable outcomes for a portion of Oregon's most difficult-to-serve consumers.

Program Contacts

For additional information about the General Assistance program, please contact DHS Aging and People with Disabilities Interim Medicaid Financial Eligibility Administrator, Erika Miller, at Erika.E.Miller@state.or.us or (503) 269-7192; DHS Senior Legislative Policy Analyst, Cynthia Stinson, at cynthia.j.stinson@state.or.us or (503) 508-5990.