



Cornell Law School

1L Immigration Law and Advocacy Clinic

Public Benefits: FAQs Updated December 2021

1. Can I accept public benefits without affecting my immigration status?

There are certain limits on receiving public benefits for some people, but if you are a U.S. citizen, a refugee, an asylum-seeker, or a similarly-situated person, there are no limits on the public benefits you can accept.

If you lack immigration status, are on a temporary visa, or have a green card, there might be some limits on what public benefits you can get without hurting your immigration status.

2. What benefits might affect my immigration status?

If most of your income comes from government assistance, receiving public benefits can hurt your immigration status. This includes either getting cash from the government as your main source of income, or living at a long-term care facility paid for by the government.

3. What public benefits can I accept without affecting my immigration status?

1. Medicaid and other health insurance and health services,
2. Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP),
3. Food assistance programs like Food Stamps and school lunch programs,
4. Housing benefits,
5. Childcare services,
6. Educational assistance,
7. And more!

4. Can I accept housing assistance? For example, can I stay at a public homeless shelter?

Yes.

5. Can my kids accept school lunches?

Yes. Your kids can accept any meals provided by their schools.

6. Can I go to the emergency room to get medical care?

Yes. You can and should always go to the emergency room if you need emergency medical care.



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7. Can I receive healthcare using Medicaid?

Yes.

8. Can I visit a soup kitchen or use food stamps?

Yes.

9. If I am pregnant, can I get care using Medicaid?

Yes.

10. Can I receive COVID-19 benefits?

Yes.

11. Can I accept health insurance that my state helps me pay for?

Yes.

12. If a natural disaster causes harm to myself or my property, can I accept government assistance?

Yes.

13. Can I accept donations from charities?

Yes.

14. Will something I did in the past that violates these rules affect my immigration status?

No.