

General Assistance / County Aid

What is General Assistance?

General Assistance – sometimes called General Relief – is commonly called “GA.” It is a county “cash aid” program. General Assistance is for people with no other means of support. It is only for county residents. Each county has its own rules for its GA program.

Who can get GA?

To be eligible for GA, you must:

- Be a **county resident**.
- Be **age 18 or older**, or
 - An emancipated minor, or
 - A child under age 18 who has no means of support. (There are special rules for children. The county will need to be sure the child is safe and may refer the child for a foster-care evaluation.)
- Be **low-income**. Your “income” and “resources” (like a bank account) must be below the financial limits set by your county. The home you live in does not count as a resource..
- Be a **citizen** or have **legal immigration status**.
- **Follow the county rules**. The county may have other rules you need to follow to qualify for GA.

Time limits and work rules

- Most people can only get GA for **3 months out of a 12 month period**.
- Most counties require that you do **job search or a work program**. (If you do “workfare” where you work at a job the county assigns to you to get benefits, you do not have to repay the GA for that time.)
- If you cannot work because of a **disabling condition**, there is **no time limit** on how long you can get GA.

How do I apply?

You need to apply in the county where you live. Most counties require that you come in person. You should try to bring a photo ID and any immigration proof, if you are not a citizen. If you have a bank account (or one that closed recently), bring your last bank statement.

GA is a loan

Think of GA as a **loan**. The county will ask you to sign an agreement that if you become eligible for SSI benefits because of a disability, the county can repay itself for GA benefits it paid to you during a time you were eligible for SSI from your lump sum retroactive payment

of SSI. If you own a home, you must agree to a **lien on your home**. The lien allows the county to seek reimbursement for GA payments it makes to you if you later sell your home and there are proceeds from the sale. **If you get a job** after leaving the GA program, and have more income than the amount needed for your basic needs, the county will ask you to pay back the GA benefits.

Can I get other help?

If you are low income, you can get Medi-Cal. Your county should give you a health benefits application when you apply. If not, ask for one. You may also be eligible for help to buy food through the CalFresh program.

Sanctions (penalties)

If you turn down a job offer or refuse to do a work or training program, or break a county rule on purpose, or you do not meet the rules because of three “negligent” (careless) reasons, the county can bar you from GA for up to 180 days. If you had a good reason for not doing what the rule required, make sure to appeal, ask for a hearing and tell the county.

What else should I know about GA?

- Counties can give you a reduced grant if you are sharing housing.
- Counties can deny you GA if you have a felony warrant out against you and you are fleeing arrest.
- You cannot get GA if your minor children are on CalWORKs, even if you are not eligible for CalWORKs.
- If the county tells you their rules mean you cannot get aid, get legal advice. The county policy may be wrong.
- You have the right to have a hearing if you disagree with a county action. The county must give you a **written notice** of the action. The notice must state the time to ask for a hearing. There is a short time to do this. If you ask for a hearing quickly, your aid will continue until you have your hearing.

IF YOU NEED LEGAL HELP, CONTACT LEGAL SERVICES OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA