

NOTES REGARDING STEPS for General Assistance Application Processing Guide

- 1 GA can only be issued to an eligible applicant who has requested assistance. In a few, very limited circumstances, GA can be issued in response to a request over the phone. For this to occur, however, the applicant must: (1) be housebound, (2) have no friend or family member who could apply in person on behalf of the applicant; (3) consent to a home visit to determine eligibility if the municipality wants to insist on a home visit, and (4) be requesting only a limited amount of GA to cover an immediate necessary basic need until such a time as a face-to-face interview can be arranged.
 - Note: For funeral requests, please use the 1 page burial/cremation application. See MMA Ordinance Section 6.9 for the burial/cremation application process.
- 2 The two areas of concern most often associated with household size and composition are: (1) the roommate situation, where more people admittedly live in the household that are applying for GA, and (2) the “invisible boyfriend” issue, where the actual number of people receiving the GA benefit is under-reported. The “invisible boyfriend” issue is largely a matter of amassing the necessary proof of residence. For further discussion of determining roommate eligibility, see policy regarding "pooling".
- 3 It is very important to formally (i.e., in writing) notify any applicant of his or her disqualification in a timely manner. Before determining a household’s eligibility, the household size must be determined, and to that end a determination must be made if any household member should be or is currently disqualified.
- 4 The extent to which an administrator requires verification is not fixed by law. Some administrators fastidiously require thorough documentation, while others are more inclined to rely on the impressions gained during an interview before deciding what level of verification to require. Administrators should strive to keep the burden of proving eligibility squarely on the applicant by clearly listing the documentation the applicant will be required to supply before eligibility can be determined. If requiring documentation, deny them and you will have met the 24-hour determination time frame. If/when they bring what’s required, then you can redetermine eligibility.
- 5 If the applicant is not requesting assistance for a basic need, the application process can be abbreviated. The applicant should be informed of the types of commodities or services that are potentially available under the GA program, but if the request for a non-necessity remains unchanged, a denial can be issued on those grounds.
- 6 Income should be verified (MMA Ordinance Sect. 6.3). This includes but is not limited to: employment income for previous 30 days; new hire information; medical release information; tax returns; workers comp; unemployment, etc. ACES Portal and/or the GA Hotline can verify the known Social Security income, TANF, & more.
- 7 Deficit calculation is purely mathematical. Overall Maximum Level of Assistance Allowed is from GA Ordinance Appendix A and based on household size. Must be calculated on all applications.
- 8 All 3 columns of Expenses (Section 8, '24 app) should be completed if a Deficit exists and/or there is an emergency. Food 2nd and 3rd columns are the max amount, for household size, regardless of the amount in column 1. For all other rows, the 3rd column is the lesser of the client’s need and the maximum allowed. Knowing if the applicant has electric hot water and/or heat as well as the number of bedrooms makes a big difference in budgeting.
- 9 Basic math calculation.

- 10 After determining the amount of General Assistance for which a household is eligible, there is no legal requirement that the full amount of 30-day assistance must be issued. A first-time applicant in an emergency may require exceeding maximum guidelines. There is nothing stating that maximums must be exceeded for repeat clients. For a variety of reasons, the administrator may decide to issue only 1-2 weeks' worth of GA, for example. Generally, after determining the household's eligibility, assistance is issued for the specific requested basic needs up to the maximum level of assistance for those specific basic needs in the ordinance, until the total level of eligibility is exhausted. (Voucher/purchase order to vendor. NO CASH. MMA Ordinance Section 6.10)
- 11 There is no defense for failing to issue a written decision. The importance of issuing a written decision cannot be overstated. For starters, all applicants have a legal right to such a decision. In addition, a well written decision can cut through all the confusion surrounding a case and significantly reduce the likelihood of appeal and litigation. Finally, the decision is the record of all ongoing requirements the municipality has placed on the applicant, and thereby creates a "paper trail" that can prove indispensable down the road. Even when a middle-of-the-night phone call prompts a grant of some emergency heating oil, a written decision explaining the grant should be prepared the following day, sent to the recipient, and a copy placed in the case file.
- Both decision sheets are available in carbon copy form from the MMA
 - o Notice of General Assistance Eligibility; MMA Form #3A Revised 10/99
 - o Notice of General Assistance Ineligibility; MMA Form #3B (1992) Revised 10/99
- 12 Narrative statements are required for all applications for General Assistance. (10-144,Ch. 323) A brief, written statement that explains case actions. The narrative explanation of the emergency situation that prompted the issuance of more assistance than the applicant was eligible for "on Paper". (Think Fair Hearing!)
- 13 The recovery mechanisms are many and each one has its own paperwork system. The details are discussed in MMA's General Assistance Manual. It should be noted here, however, that of all the recovery systems, only the lien that is placed on retroactive SSI payments under DHHS' interim Assistance Agreement system is completely mandatory. The municipality has no discretionary authority not to create such a lien whenever a person applies for assistance who has applied for but not yet received SSI. The paperwork system to create this lien is available from DHHS called "AUTHORIZATION FOR REIMBURSEMENT OF INTERIM ASSISTANCE" or "IAR" form.
- 14 The need to retain all paperwork in a chronologically organized file speaks for itself. General assistance records shall be retained for a minimum of three full years to coincide with the State's fiscal year which begins July 1 and ends on the following June 30. MMA Ordinance Section 3.2 – Maintenance of Records.
- ◆ All application section references are for the 2024 version of the APPLICATION FOR GENERAL ASSISTANCE
 - ◆ Questions pertaining to the General Assistance program may be directed to the GA Hotline at 1-800-442-6003, option 2 then 1, Monday thru Friday from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM or email GAHotline.DHHS@Maine.gov.
 - ◆ www.maine.gov/dhhs/ofc/programs-services/general-assistance
 - ◆ <https://mainewelfaredirectors.org/>

Revised 07/20/2024