

City of Portland
Health & Human Services Department
Social Services Division

GENERAL
ASSISTANCE
OVERVIEW



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GENERAL ASSISTANCE - BACKGROUND

Maine's General Assistance Program is as old as the state. Municipalities were charged with the responsibility of assisting indigent people who had no means of support and no family or friends to help them. That primary responsibility continued until the federal government stepped in with the great depression of the 1930's and the war on Poverty Programs in the 1960's. The State's so-called "Pauper Laws" remained on the books in almost the same form from when Maine achieved statehood until the mid 1970's when legislation was enacted to change General Assistance law. The Legislature required municipalities to develop policies and procedures and to adopt ordinances based on State law. In the early 1990's, the General Assistance Program was drastically changed to include "overall maximum levels of assistance," work requirements, limits on emergency assistance, and other program requirements. Today, the General Assistance Program serves as an emergency safety net program for Maine's low-income population.

State law requires municipalities to administer General Assistance (G.A.), which provides immediate aid to individuals who meet eligibility requirements and are unable to provide basic necessities essential to maintain themselves or their family. G.A. provides a specific amount and type of aid for basic needs during a limited time period and is not intended to be a categorical welfare program. G.A. provides basic needs in the areas of shelter/housing, utilities, food, medication, and other essential goods and services.

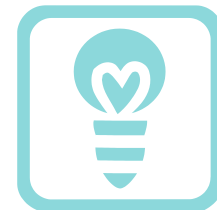
GENERAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

- General Assistance is the program of “last resort” for residents of the community who are unable to provide for their basic needs.
- The General Assistance is the most accountable assistance program in the State of Maine. Applicants are required to take responsibility for themselves by endeavoring to become self-reliant. For disabled persons, this may mean applying for disability benefits, for able-bodied persons, obtaining meaningful employment.
- This is a voucher only program. Eligible applicants receive vouchers for rent, food, medication, utilities, etc. The vendors submit the vouchers to the City of Portland and payment is made directly to the vendor.
- There is no typical General Assistance recipient. A GA recipient may be a person who is temporarily out of work due to a layoff or illness; has a long-term physical or mental disability; or is employed and in an emergency situation through no fault of their own.
- The GA program receives partial reimbursement from the State of Maine Department of Health & Human Services.

DEFINITIONS

Basic Necessities

- Food, clothing, shelter, fuel, electricity, non-elective medical services (recommended by a physician), non-prescription drugs, and telephone (basic service only) when medically necessary.
- Any commodity/service determined essential by the overseer in accordance with ordinance and statute.
- Does not include security deposits, except for “emergency” purposes (when no other permanent lodging is available).



ASSISTANCE PROVIDED

Food

- Food voucher to the store for non-taxable items only (no change is received after purchase).

Non-Food

- Voucher to selected store for personal/household items such as soap, cleaning supplies, and other household items.

ASSISTANCE PROVIDED

Prescriptions

- Must have copy of prescription in applicant's name
- G.A. can only pay Medicaid rates only after approval from DHHS
- No co-payments (Exceptions: MaineRX)
- Over-the-counter medications (non-food voucher)

WHAT TO BRING WHEN APPLYING FOR ASSISTANCE

- Proof of identification for all household members (i.e. driver's license, social security cards, alien ID if applicable, etc.)
- Proof of household income; pay stubs, TANF EBT card, SSI/SSDI letter
- Verification of expenses; actual bills paid
- Rent receipts, mortgage receipts, utility bill receipts

ITEMS NOT CONSIDERED BASIC NECESSITIES

If income is spent on non-basic necessities it is considered misspent income and deducted from the eligibility maximum amount.

- Phone Bill/Cell Phone
- Car Payments
- Credit Card Debt
- Loan Payments
- Alcohol
- Pet Care Costs
- Cable Television
- Furniture/Furniture Rental Fees
- Cigarettes
- Vacation Costs
- Legal Fees/ Court Fines
- Key Deposits
- Fees for Internet Service

Ineligible Food Items

Taxable items are NOT to be purchased using City-issued vouchers. Some examples are:

- Hot/Cold Prepared Foods
- Prepared Sandwiches
- Candy
- Soda
- Water
- Punch
- Liquid Iced Tea
- Powerade
- Diet Mixes/Drinks/Bars
- Energy Drinks
- Frappuccino/Frap Coffee
- Ensure
- Pet Food

For additional information regarding prepared food items, please visit the Maine Revenue Services website at www.state.me.us/revenue

Eligible Non-Food Items

You may purchase the following items with City-issued vouchers:

Baby Products

Baby bottles
Baby brush
Baby lotion
Baby/Handy Wipes
Cloth Diapers
Diaper Rash Cream
Nipples
Pacifier
Safety Pins

Household Items

Bleach
Cleaning Solutions
Light Bulbs
Liquid Powder/Detergent
Mops/Brooms
Oven Cleaner
Paper Towels
Sponges/Scrubbers

Miscellaneous Items

Batteries
City Trash Bags
Coffee Filters
Denture Adhesive
Deodorant
Disposable Razors
Feminine Hygiene Products
Foil/Plastic Wrap/Sandwich Bags
Food Storage Containers
Paper Plates/Cups
Shampoo/Conditioner or Combo
Shaving Cream
Soap
Toilet Paper
Toothbrush/Toothpaste

The following items must be specifically listed on the
Non-Food Voucher:

Cold Medicine – Laxatives – Lice Medication –
Over the Counter Meds – Vitamins

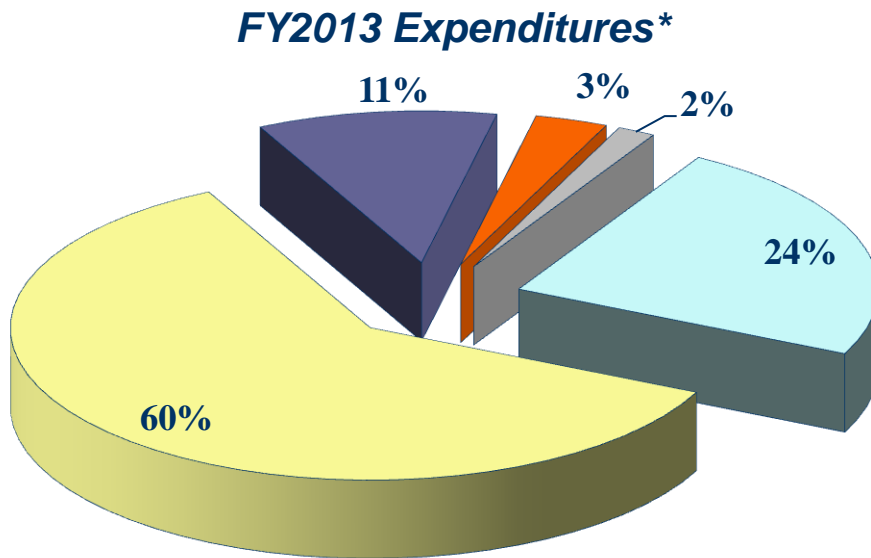
Reimbursements to Municipalities for GA

The State of Maine Department of Health & Human Services reimburses municipalities for a percentage of direct cost of General Assistance distributed to eligible recipients. DHHS does not provide reimbursement for costs related to the administration or operation of the program.

All municipalities receive 50% of reimbursement for financial assistance issued to eligible recipients

Once total GA expenditures exceed 0.0003% of the most recent State property valuation rate for the municipality then the reimbursement rate increases to 85%. This rate normally impacts the larger municipalities, such as Portland and Bangor.

General Assistance FY 13 Expenditures



■ Shelters
 ■ Rent/Util
 ■ Food
 ■ Medical
 ■ Personal Items

Food Assistance
\$1,024,883 or 11% of the overall
FY 13 GA expenditures

Shelters
\$2,247,740 or 23% of the overall
FY 13 GA expenditures

Rent Assistance
\$5,762,285* or 60% of the overall
FY 13 GA expenditures

**Total # of unduplicated clients
served in FY13 = 4,376**

**Total Food/Shelter/Rent = \$9,034,908 for a total
of 93% of the overall FY 13 GA Expenditures**

*Rent total includes all related
utility costs

USE OF INCOME ON BASIC NECESSITIES REQUIRED

- Income for basic necessities
- Rent/shelter costs
- Food, utilities, medication, heating oil
- Use of income requirements

TYPES OF INCOME

INCOME

- Wages from Employment
- Cash on Hand
- Income Tax Refund
- Unemployment Benefits
- Child Support Benefits
- TANF Benefits
- Social Security Benefits
- SSI/SSDI Disability Benefits
- Checking/Savings Accounts
- Veteran's Pensions
- Rental Income
- Loans
- Worker's Compensation
- Savings Bonds
- Trust Fund Annuities
- Life Insurance Policies
- Retirement Accounts/401(k)/457
- School Loans
- Refugee Reception & Placement Funds
- Refugee CASH Assistance & MATCH funds

FINANCIAL RESOURCES

- Car/Recreational Vehicles
- Real Estate Holdings
- Gifts



APPLICANTS – Other Resources

Applicants must apply for and use all other resources available, such as:

- Federal Food Stamps (FFS)
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
- MaineCare (Medicaid) / Medicare
- Unemployment benefits
- Heating & Energy Assistance Program (HEAP)
- Subsidized housing programs
- Other government assistance programs
- Other available community resources

SELF-SUFFICIENCY / EMPLOYMENT

The goal of the G.A. program is for applicants to become self-sufficient / self-supporting. Applicants will be required to meet any appropriate eligibility requirements. This may include:

- Seeking work
- Participating in an employment services program
- Life skills or Understanding GA Basics workshops or classroom training.
- Performing work through the Workfare Program
- Working with vocational rehabilitation services
- Pursuing an application for permanent Social Security Disability benefits.

WORKFARE

General Assistance law requires that able-bodied individuals participate in Workfare as a condition of receiving financial assistance. Participants in this work experience program repay the City for assistance received by working at a rate equal to State minimum wage. Work assignments may include performing basic tasks at the Barron Center, City Shelters or other City locations. The goal is to encourage employment and self-sufficiency.

DECISION SHEET

- Written decision
- Reason for granting or denying assistance
- Amount of assistance granted
- Time period assistance granted for (i.e. 01/01 – 01/08)
- Work requirements
- Referrals
- Documentation needed for future applications
- Right to a Fair Hearing
- Applicant's Signature

GENERAL ASSISTANCE - Portland MAXIMUMS – Effective 7/1/2013

Established by State Statute

in HH

1	=	\$750
2	=	\$888
3	=	\$1,148
4	=	\$1,444
5	=	\$1,546

Additional \$68 for each household member beyond 5

OVERALL MAXIMUM AMOUNT

Varies by municipality

GENERAL ASSISTANCE CONTACT INFORMATION

**State of Maine
DHHS GA Hotline**

1-800-442-6003

**Monday – Friday
8:00 AM – 5:00 PM**

OFFICE HOURS

196 Lancaster Street, Portland

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday

8:00am – 4:30pm

Thursday 8:00 – 11:30am

CLOSED THURSDAY AFTERNOONS

EXCEPTION: WE ARE OPEN IN THE AFTERNOON ON THE 2nd THURSDAY OF EACH MONTH

Best times to apply: Early mornings or mid-week;

NOT 3:00pm on Friday