

POLK COUNTY GENERAL ASSISTANCE MANUAL



1. LEGAL AUTHORIZATION.

- a. The Code of Iowa, Chapter 252, imposes duties on counties of Iowa regarding General Assistance. This chapter directs the Polk County Board of Supervisors to provide for the relief of “poor” persons in Polk County.
- b. Polk County shall provide assistance for the following:
 1. **Poor**- Defined by 252.1 of the Code of Iowa as persons who have no property, exempt or otherwise, and are unable, because of physical or mental disabilities, to earn a living by labor.
 2. **Needy**- Defined by 252.1 of the Code of Iowa as persons who have some means. Assistance provided for “needy” persons in Polk County is limited to assistance to persons who have “circumstances which are not attributable to them.”

2. ADMINISTRATION.

- a. Personnel: The Director of the Community, Family and Youth Services Department (CFYS) administers the General Assistance (G.A.) program. The CFYS Director may designate qualified and trained CFYS staff to administer the program and carry out General Assistance duties. CFYS staff members are appointed by and responsible to the CFYS Director.
- b. Duties of Personnel:
 1. Accept applications for General Assistance on standard application forms provided by Polk County.
 2. Investigate the factual statements on each application.
 3. Determine eligibility of each applicant according to the guidelines set out in this manual.
 4. Arrange for vendor authorization and payment for each eligible applicant.

3. ELIGIBILITY: To be eligible for assistance, an applicant shall:

- a. Provide proof of identification- photo identification.
- b. Provide Social Security cards for all adults and children in the household.
- c. Be a resident of Polk County.
- d. Be 18 years or older.
- e. Meet income guidelines as outlined in this manual.
- f. Submit a fully completed application and provide all required documentation.
- g. If able-bodied, be working or actively seeking employment and be registered with Iowa Workforce Development.
- h. If not able to work due to mental or physical disability, provide written verification from a physician or licensed professional. The verification must state the primary health condition, whether the inability to work is temporary or permanent, and the approximate date (if applicable) that the applicant may return to employment. General Assistance shall provide forms for this purpose.
- i. General Assistance is available to persons receiving public assistance when there is a temporary emergency; however, assistance on an ongoing basis is not permissible.

4. EMPLOYMENT/EMPLOYMENT SEARCH.

- a. Able-bodied applicants who are unemployed will receive a referral to the Workforce Development Center. Applicants shall cooperate with that agency in seeking employment, and shall accept employment when available.
- b. If unemployed and eligible for unemployment benefits, applicants must apply for such and cooperate with the requirements of that program.
- c. Applicants who are unemployed for more than 30 days are not eligible for assistance unless they are approved and awaiting receipt of unemployment benefits.
- d. Applicants denied or in the appeal process for unemployment benefits, are not eligible for assistance.
- e. Full-time students are generally not eligible for assistance. Eligibility is determined based upon employment status and income, not academic status.
- f. Applicants who have just started a new job will be required to provide 30 days of pay stubs or income verification.

5. COMPUTATION OF INCOME.

- a. Net income shall be the aggregate of all income received by household members, including child support.
- b. Self-Employment: applicants who are self-employed will need to bring in documentation (i.e. ledger, employer's statement, State of Iowa documentation) to prove their employment in order for their income to be considered in making a decision for General Assistance.
- c. Single persons living in a roommate situation must apply separately for rent assistance. If eligible, roommates will receive equal rent assistance according to the guidelines; incomes receive individual consideration when determining eligibility.
- d. In determining eligibility for utility assistance, the applicant must be the individual listed on the utilities and that person must reside at the residence; however, eligibility is determined based on the entire income of the household. The exception to this is for separated couples. General Assistance will interview an applicant for utilities within 60 days of the separation if it is in the spouse's name and in disconnect or termination at the current residence.
- e. Tax refunds are income and will be pro-rated for a 90-day period from the time an applicant receives their money.

6. RESOURCES.

- a. General Assistance will review all personal property of the applicant, including net income, from any source when making a determination for granting assistance.

7. NEEDS: After eligibility is established, assistance may be granted for the following:

- a. Rent/Mortgage
 - 1. Payment for rent/mortgage must go to the owner/mortgage holder of the property.
 - 2. Campgrounds: The following criteria needs to be met to assist:
 - A. Is it safe?
 - B. Do they have electricity and water?
 - C. General Assistance will not assist with tent camping or first month's rent for tent camping and campgrounds.

3. Rent/mortgage payments are only for currently occupied housing, except for a temporary absence due to health reasons.
4. Rent/mortgage shall only be paid for housing in which utilities are on and not in threat of disconnection.
5. Rent/mortgage payments will not be issued to relatives.
6. Roommates are required to apply for assistance separately for their portion of the rent. For mortgage assistance, the mortgage holder is the applicant. General Assistance can assist with mortgage payments when the applicant is able to show they have paid the remaining balance beyond the General Assistance standard.
7. Rent/mortgage payments shall be for the current month only.
8. Landlords are required to agree to accept a County voucher and not to evict for non-payment of rent for a period of 30 days from the date specified on the voucher.
9. The Board of Supervisors sets the amount of assistance for rent and utilities. Flexibility will be allowed in cases where the entire request for assistance is no more than \$50 over the guideline.
10. General Assistance is not available for deposits or back rent.
11. Applicants need to demonstrate that their current housing is affordable by showing that income is more than housing costs.
12. Properties must have a valid housing certificate when requesting the first month of rent.

b. Utilities

1. Utility assistance includes payments for gas, electricity, water and fuel oil for the purpose of heating and cooking.
2. Utility assistance is provided only in emergencies when a disconnect notice has been received, utilities have been disconnected or a payment arrangement will be broken and results in disconnect.
3. Utilities that have been off for more than 30 days are an old bill and are not eligible for General Assistance.
4. The current month's rent/mortgage payments must be up to date in order to receive utility assistance.
5. General Assistance will only pay the payment arrangement amount or the amount needed to set up a payment arrangement and avoid services being disconnected.
6. An applicant must demonstrate a "good faith" effort to make 60% of their payments over the past 12 months. The definition of payment is the budget-billing amount for the account.
7. Payments made by other agencies do not qualify when determining "good faith" effort. If an applicant does not make three (3) "good faith" payments during the moratorium of November 1- March 31, they do not qualify for utility assistance.
8. In determining eligibility for utility assistance, the utilities are required to be in the applicant's name and must reside at the residence.
9. General Assistance is not available for old bills; reconnect fees, utility deposits, repairs and miscellaneous equipment-related fees.
10. The most recent utility guidelines will determine the amount of assistance allowed.

11. Applicants need to demonstrate that their current housing is affordable by showing that income is more than housing costs. The definition of housing costs is rent/mortgage and utilities.
- c. Food/Personals
 1. Applicants are not eligible for food vouchers if they receive Supplemental Nutritional Assistance (SNAP) through the State of Iowa. The use of food vouchers for tobacco products, alcoholic beverages or pet food is not permissible.
 2. Non-food items may include soap, paper products, household cleaning supplies and personal hygiene items.
 3. The most recent food/personal guideline will determine the amount of assistance allowed.
 4. Referrals will be made to the local food pantries.
 - d. Special Needs.
 1. Work Clothing: The reasonable value of clothing needed for employment, not to exceed \$100 per person. The applicant will need to provide verification of employment.
 - A. Steel Toe Boots: The individual must show they will have a minimum of a 30-day job assignment in order to be eligible.
 - B. Beds and Appliances: The reasonable value of needed beds, cribs, refrigerators, and stoves **not to exceed \$200** per household for both furniture and appliances.
 - a. An applicant may be eligible once every 10 years.
 - b. In cases of bed bugs, fire, etc. and depending on individual family needs, exceptions to limits on bed replacement is permissible.
 - c. If an applicant is requesting beds due to the presence of bed bugs, written verification of treatment is required.
 - C. Medical:
 - a. The reasonable value of needed services if the services are not available under Medicaid, the Medically Needy program at Broadlawns Medical Center, University of Iowa Hospitals or in a private hospital under the provisions of the Hill-Burton Act.
 - D. Cremation Expenses:
 - a. Up to the maximum allowed by resolution of the Polk County Board of Supervisors for all expenses involved in a cremation if those expenses are not covered in full from other sources.
 - E. Eyeglasses:
 - a. General Assistance may assist with up to \$100 towards eyeglasses no more than once every 5 years. Applicants will need to provide a prescription along with an estimate from a business that will accept a Polk County Voucher.
 - F. Air Conditioners:
 - a. General Assistance may assist with up to \$500 to repair a central air conditioner or install a window unit if the applicant can provide the required paperwork showing that having air conditioning is imperative to the life of the applicant. Air conditioners are once every 5 years per household.

8. FORMS OF ASSISTANCE.

- a. Assistance shall be purchased directly from the supplier for the poor or needy person. It may be for one or more of the items allowed.

9. DURATION OF ASSISTANCE.

- a. Poor person: Assistance shall continue until the physical or mental disability no longer prevents the person from employment or until the Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) has denied the person's appeal under SSI or SSDI, whichever event occurs first. If denied by the ALJ, an applicant(s) is not eligible for assistance again unless they have a new diagnosis.
- b. Needy person: Assistance is based on a (12) month period. The twelve (12) month period begins with the month the applicant first received assistance. The total amount provided in a 12-month period shall not exceed the "yearly assistance guideline", as determined by the Board of Supervisors.

10. REASONS TO APPROVE ASSISTANCE.

- a. Circumstances which are attributable to the person include:
 1. Failure to safeguard liquid assets and/or resources when the person reports loss or theft but has not made a police report and/or there is no evidence.
 2. Failure to prioritize expenses by directing income toward non-basic needs as a first priority or failing to reasonably plan and distribute expenditures in order to cover basic needs.
 - A. Approval of assistance for circumstances, which are attributable to the person, is limited to one time per year.
- b. Circumstances which are not attributable to the person include:
 1. Involuntary termination from employment for other than cause.
 2. Voluntary resignation of employment for good cause.
 3. Involuntary reduction in earnings.
 4. Strike/lockout
 5. Lost or stolen benefits, pending replacement. The applicant will need to provide a police report or case number.
 6. Awaiting approval and/or receipt of FIP and/or unemployment benefits.
 - A. If they have a Limited Benefit Plan (LBP) but are currently working and generating income above their FIP benefits, it should not be an automatic denial.
 7. Delayed delivery of eligible benefits due to an administrative error.
 8. Unusual and/or inordinate amount of medical expenses.
 9. Unusual and/or inordinate amount of transportation expenses when necessary for employment.
 10. Unusual and/or inordinate amount of expenses related to moving when:
 - A. The move is a result of domestic abuse.
 - B. There is a no contact order in place.
 - C. The move is a result of sub-standard housing.
 - D. The move will decrease shelter costs.
 - E. The move is required for reason other than cause i.e. eviction.

11. Release to the community after a period of incarceration of more than three months. If incarceration was less than one year, the applicant must demonstrate their prior work history.
12. Medically unable to work or unable to work due to mental health.
13. Emergency Traveler's Aid.
14. Transitional Housing.

11. REASONS TO DENY ASSISTANCE.

- a. Other resources that meet the applicant's needs are available and are equal to the resources available through General Assistance.
- b. The applicant did not provide the requested information or otherwise cooperate.
- c. The applicant is not currently employed and meets one or more of the following:
 1. Multiple episodes of unemployment.
 2. Has been unemployed for 30 or more days.
 3. Does not qualify for unemployment benefits.
 4. Voluntarily quit without cause.
- d. Received the maximum assistance available according to the General Assistance Guidelines.
- e. Income exceeds the General Assistance Guidelines.
- f. Does not meet the definition of "poor" or "needy".
 1. Denied SSI/SSDI by the Administrative Law Judge.
 2. Previously approved for ongoing assistance while applying for SSI/SSDI and received a denial at the ALJ level. The applicant does not have a new diagnosis from their previous SSI/SSDI applications.
- g. Spent Income on non-basic needs as defined by General Assistance.
- h. Unable to demonstrate housing affordability because income is less than housing costs.
- i. Assets or resources were lost or stolen. They did not file a report with the police or they have already received assistance for this reason.
- j. Does not meet Traveler's Assistance Requirements.
- k. Fraud (90 days). Presenting false or misleading information in order to obtain assistance.
 1. An applicant that presents false or misleading information in order to obtain General Assistance shall not be eligible to reapply for a period of 90 days from the date of discovery of the false or misleading information. General Assistance will notify the applicant in person the day of the fraud or mail a letter out within 5 working days to notify the applicant.

12. DENIALS.

- a. The Polk County General Assistance Denial is valid for all requests made within the month for which an applicant applies for assistance.

13. MISCELLANEOUS.

- a. General Assistance does not see clients for assistance with the current month's rent during the last week of the month.
- b. General Assistance will begin looking at assistance for next month's rent on the 20th of each month.

14. CLIENT EXPECTATIONS/ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS.

- a. Eligibility. In order to be eligible for General Assistance an applicant must:
 1. Reside in Polk County.
 2. Be over the age of 18 or an emancipated minor.
 3. Meet income and eligibility guidelines.
 4. First apply for any state or federal programs for which they may be eligible (FIP, food stamps, etc.).
 - A. All honorably discharged Veterans are required to apply at the Veteran Affairs Office, 2309 Euclid Avenue, 286-3670. Veteran Affairs will determine eligibility based on their guidelines.
- b. Requirements. An applicant must meet the following requirements:
 1. Complete a General Assistance application.
 2. Provide photo identification.
 3. Provide a copy of social security cards for all adults and children in the household.
 4. Interpreter's or individual representing someone need to provide a Proxy Letter and photo identification.
 5. Documentation of income and expenses for the past 30 days and in some cases, for the past 90 days.
 6. If unemployed, a form from the Workforce Development Center documenting eligibility status for unemployment benefits.
 7. If unable to work due to medical incapacity, provide a Polk County "Medical Incapacity Report" from a physician.
- c. Additional Requirements.
 1. For Rent Assistance: A completed Polk County Landlord Statement, given with the General Assistance standard for the requested month only. General Assistance will not issue payment to relatives.
 2. For Utility Assistance: Provide an account number for all utilities in the applicant's name along with the payment history from the water company for the last 12 months.

15. APPLICATION PROCESS.

- a. An applicant can choose to interview in person or by phone with a General Assistance caseworker. All necessary forms for the initial interview are available online at <https://apps.polkcountyiowa.gov/crm/GAWebApply/>. To apply for an interview over the phone applicants should call 515-286-2088.

16. DENIALS.

- a. The Polk County General Assistance Denial is valid for all requests within the month, which the applicant applied for assistance.

17. RIGHT OF APPEAL.

- a. If an applicant does not agree with the decision, they have the right to appeal, with the exception of a decision of Fraud. Applicants have 10 days from the date of the decision to file an appeal. To receive the necessary forms, an applicant may:
 1. Ask a staff member at General Assistance.

2. Request the forms by mail or by calling 515-286-2088.
3. Access the appeal form online at:
<https://apps.polkcountyiowa.gov/crm/GAWebApply/Appeal>.

18. APPEALS.

- a. Applicants should mail appeals resulting from the denial of General Assistance to the county Director's Designee or if for mental health services, to the Executive Director of Polk County Health Services. The Director will send their written decision regarding the appeal to the applicant within five (5) working days from the receipt of the appeal. The Director's decision will inform the applicant of their right to appeal the decision.
- b. An applicant has ten (10) days from the director's decision to make an appeal to the Director's Designee or Program Administrator. Appeals must include the applicants current contact information. Written appeals or communication will be added to the Service Appeal Board agenda for the next regular board meeting, as long as the next board meeting is not within five days after the appeal is received. Staff shall inform the applicant immediately by telephone and mail, of the date and time of the hearing before the Service Appeal Board. Upon written authorization, the Director shall allow the applicant and their attorney access to the applicant's case file. The Service Appeal Board's decision is final unless appealed to the district court. The applicant shall be informed of the method by which an appeal may be filed and that he or she may represent themselves, be represented by another person or an attorney.

19. APPEAL HEARING.

- a. The Service Appeal Board shall hear an applicant's appeal at the scheduled time unless the applicant requests a continuance. The Service Appeal Board may elect to have an Administrative Law Judge convene the appeal hearing. The applicant will be permitted to present whatever evidence they desire in support of the appeal, including testifying or having witnesses. The technical rules of evidence shall not apply. Submitted evidence will include the applicant's file. The Board may question the applicant, and the Director or their designated representative shall present the Board with the reasons for the decision.
- b. The Service Appeal Board shall make a decision on the appeal within five (5) working days after the hearing. The board will make their decision based on the evidence submitted to them. The board will mail its decision in writing to the applicant at their last known address. The Service Appeal Board's decision is final unless appealed to the District Court.
- c. An applicant has the right to appeal to the District Court within the time, manner, and the procedures established under the Iowa Administrative Procedures Act, Chapter 17A, and Code of Iowa. (Ord No 51, 8/11/89; Ord No. 115, 2/4/93; Ord No. 163, 7/11/97, Ord. No 164, 10/14/08; Ord. No 276, 6/09).