



California Public Benefits Online: The Basics

This publication offers community members, application assisters and advocates basic information about accessing public benefits applications, rules and regulations online.

THE BASICS ABOUT CALIFORNIA'S COMPUTER ELIGIBILITY CONSORTIA

The Statewide Automated Welfare Systems (SAWS) support the determination of eligibility and delivery of social services programs including CalWORKs, Food Stamps, County General Assistance and Medi-Cal. There are three "consortia" that, while the actual implementation of the systems is done by private contractors, are directed by the state and counties. The state agency that is responsible for oversight of the SAWS consortia by preparing project documents, procuring Independent Verification and Validation services, reviewing consortia deliverables, and approving and tracking expenditures is the Office of System's Integration (OSI), formerly the Health and Human Services Data Center (HHSDC) and before that the Health and Welfare Agency Data Center (HWDC). OSI is under the Health and Human Services Agency and oversees the development of human services automation systems and is part of the Health and Human Services Agency.

C-IV (Consortium IV) was implemented in 2003 and is now used in 39, with many new counties coming on in 2010. <http://www.c-iv.org>

CalWIN (CalWORKs Information Network) There are 18 middle-sized counties participating the CalWIN consortium and combined, they serve approximately 43% of the caseload. CalWIN covers more programs than the other computer systems. Some of these additional programs include: County Medical Services Program (CMSP), GA/GR, Expedited Food Stamps, Homeless Assistance, KINGAP, Minor Consent, CalLearn/FSET/GA FSET/County Specific ES Programs., Special Circumstances and Adoptions Assistance. <http://www.calwin.org>

LEADER (The Los Angeles Eligibility Automated Determination, Evaluation, and Reporting System) serves only Los Angeles County. It is currently based on the same technology as the ISAWS system, but is seeking a more modern web-based system and is currently negotiating the LEADER Replacement System with Accensure that will include a more robust set of benefits currently offered in LEADER and in C-IV. http://www.ladpss.org/dpss/LRS_RFP/default.cfm

Below is a chart showing which county belongs to each consortia.

Consortia IV	CalWIN	LEADER
Alpine, Amador, Butte, Calaveras, Colusa, Del Norte, El Dorado, Glenn, Imperial, Humboldt, Inyo, Kern, Kings, Lake, Lassen, Marin, Mariposa, Madera, Mendocino, Merced, Modoc, Mono, Monterey, Napa, Nevada, Plumas, Riverside, San Benito, San Bernardino, San Joaquin, Shasta, Sierra, Siskiyou, Stanislaus, Sutter, Tehama, Trinity, Tuolumne, Yuba	Alameda, Contra Costa, Fresno, Orange, Placer, Sacramento, San Diego, San Francisco, San Luis Obispo, San Mateo, Santa Barbara, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Solano	Los Angeles Only

ELECTRONIC BENEFITS TRANSFER (EBT) TECHNOLOGY

Food Stamp and CalWORKs are distributed via Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT). In California, this system is administered by a contract with ACS. As of September 2010, information regarding cash access locations, cash withdrawal fees and grocers and markets accepting EBT cards can be found online. Additionally, client specific information regarding benefit transactions is available via secured server now as well. This information is all available on <http://www.ebt.ca.gov>.

ONLINE APPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC BENEFITS

By the end of 2010, applicants for Food Stamps and Medi-Cal will be able to apply online across all three consortia. By summer of 2011, the same will be true for CalWORKs. Each consortium has each developed their own online applications that feed directly to their corresponding computer systems. There is currently no single location where applicants can go to apply for benefits, if unsure about which consortia serves their county, but this is currently being designed by the County Welfare Director's Association (CWDA) for launch in early 2011. Each consortia-built web-based application has different features, they are noted below:

C-IV: C4Yourself

<https://www.c4yourself.com>

C4yourself is the longest standing online application in California. It serves Medi-Cal, CSMP, Food Stamps and CalWORKs. It allows clients to save applications, check benefits and view messages from their worker. It is available in Spanish and English and is now available in all C-IV Counties.

CalWIN: Benefits CalWIN

<https://www.benefitscalwin.org>

Benefits CalWIN is a new online application that was built using the BenefitsSF program as the base. It is expected to be functioning in all CalWIN counties by 2011 and the roll-out calendar is below. It currently only includes Food Stamps and Medi-Cal, but will soon include CalWORKs. It allows clients to save applications, check benefits and view messages from their worker. It is available in Spanish and English and Cantonese.

Release Number	Counties Deployment	Production Release Date
Phase I	Tulare & Santa Clara	May 24, 2010 (COMPLETE)
Phase II	Alameda, Contra Costa, Fresno, Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz	July 26, 2010 (COMPLETE)
Phase III	Yolo, Orange, Placer, Sacramento, San Diego, San Francisco, Solano, Sonoma, Ventura, San Mateo	November 22, 2010

LEADER

By 2011, LEADER will post their online application which is based on the same coding as C4Yourself and so is expected to be very similar in functionality.

Hard Copy Applications

For many reasons, new online application process and procedures will not work for certain populations. For people for whom online application does not make sense, the following resources are available to public benefit advocates to assist their clients in the application process.

Digital Versions of Application Documents: All DSS translated applications and forms are available via this link: http://www.cdss.ca.gov/cdssweb/FormsandPu_274.htm. Note that the SAWS form can be used to apply for cash assistance and food stamps as well as Medi-Cal.

Links to County Social Service Agency Websites: <http://www.cwda.org/links/chsa.php>

PUBLIC BENEFIT PROGRAM WEBSITES

In California, there are several state and local programs that help low-income families and individuals meet their basic needs. The following is a summary of some of these programs and websites the government websites where you can learn more about program rules.

BASIC NECESSITIES

California Work Opportunities & Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs)

CalWORKs provides households with children and women in the last 120 days of pregnancy, who have little or no assets or income with basic living expenses. The average benefit level for a family of three is \$694 per month, or approximately 64% of the federal poverty line. The program requires strict asset limits, including auto resource limits, and work participation. CalWORKs recipients and low-income families who have recently left CalWORKs, can receive subsidized child care while they are working or attending work training through the CalWORKs Child Care Program <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/calworks> and <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/cdssweb/PG78.htm>

Cash Assistance Program for Immigrants (CAPI)

CAPI provides basic cash assistance for low-income elderly and/or disabled immigrants who are not yet eligible for Supplemental Security Income. <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/cdssweb/PG42.htm>

General Assistance or General Relief

State law requires counties to offer basic living allowances to low-income people not eligible for CalWORKs. This assistance comes in the form of loans, grants and housing assistance. These benefits and requirements for participation varies greatly from one county to another. There is no single location where GA/GR benefit rules & amounts, but county social services agencies are listed at: <http://www.cwda.org/links/chsa.php>

Supplemental Security Income (SSI)

SSI offers basic subsistence income for elderly and/or disabled, low-income Californians who are not eligible for Social Security Disability or Social Security Retirement benefits. In order to qualify, applicants must demonstrate full medical disability lasting more than a year. People receiving SSI are not eligible for food stamps in California. <http://ssa.gov/pubs/11125.html>

FOOD ASSISTANCE

Food Stamp Program – Supplementary Nutrition Assistance Program

The Food Stamp Program, referred to as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) nationally, helps low-income people by supplementing their food budget. In order to receive food stamps, most households need to have incomes under 130% of the federal poverty line, but over 60% of California's food stamp households have incomes under half of the poverty line. <http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/foodstamps>

California Food Assistance Program (CFAP)

CFAP is a food assistance program that runs parallel to the Food Stamp Program, serving low-income, legal permanent residents who are not yet eligible for federal food stamp benefits. <http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov>

Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) & Local Food Banks

Groceries are available at local food banks. <http://www.cafoodbanks.org>

School Meals and Summer Lunches

Free & reduced-price breakfast & lunch at public schools is available when in session to children in households with income below 185% of poverty. During summer months, the Summer Lunch Program is offered in some communities. <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sh/sn/summersites10.asp>

Women Infants and Children (WIC)

Pregnant women & children under 6 receive nutrition support, lactation consulting, and access to healthy foods at WIC. <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/wicworks>

MEDICAL CARE & HEALTHCARE COVERAGE

Medi-Cal

Medi-Cal is health coverage funded by both California and the federal government. It covers children, the aged, disabled and other low-income or medically needy people. Medi-Cal is California's Medicaid program. There are many different types of Medi-Cal coverage. Income requirements for the program vary based on household composition and other indicators of need, but for example, a family of three (with children under 18) can qualify for Medi-Cal (1931b) with income of \$18,312 per year.

<http://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/medi-cal>

County Health Programs

Counties offer health care for low-income people not eligible for other health care coverage. Soon, several California counties will expand the reach of their county health programs through the County Coverage Expansion & Enrollment Demonstration (CEED) Projects. <http://www.cwda.org/links/chsa.php>

Community Health Clinics

Low-income people in many communities are serviced by a network of private health clinics. The California Primary Care Association lists many clinics on their website. <http://www.cPCA.org/resources/findclinic>

County Healthy Kids Programs

Several local coalitions, called Children's Health Initiatives (CHIs), have developed health insurance programs to provide health care coverage, referred to as Healthy Kids Programs, to uninsured children who do not qualify for Medi-Cal or Healthy families. <http://www.cchi4kids.org/>

County Mental Health Programs

California's community-based public mental health services are provided by California's counties. A list of local mental health agencies can be located at. <http://www.dmh.ca.gov/docs/CMHDA.pdf>

Family PACT

Family PACT provides comprehensive family planning services to low-income men and women in California who do not have other family planning health insurance.

<http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/OFP/Pages/default.aspx>

Healthy Families Program

Health Families is a low cost health insurance program that provides health, dental and vision coverage to qualifying children who are not eligible for no-cost Medi-Cal. Healthy Families members pay between \$2 and \$24 per child, or no more than \$72 for a family, per month in premiums. While some services are free, most services also require a co-payment. <http://www.healthyfamilies.ca.gov>

In Home Support Services Program (IHSS)

IHSS provides people who are blind, disabled or over 65 years old with in-home support services so that they can safely live in their homes. There is a wide range of services covered through IHSS, including assistance with household chores, help with personal care such as bathing, and paramedical services. It serves as a viable alternative to assisted living or nursing facilities.

<http://www.cdss.ca.gov/agedblinddisabled/PG1296.htm>

California Area Indian Health Service

California Area Indian Health Service offer comprehensive medical care for children and adults with a documented Native American tribal membership. <http://www.ihs.gov>

Every Woman Counts Breast and Cervical Cancer Screening

The Every Woman Counts Breast and Cervical Cancer Detection Programs offer free clinical breast exams, mammograms, pelvic exams and cancer screening to low-income women in California who cannot access these services through their medical insurance, Medi-Cal or Medicaid. <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs>

FREE ALTERNATIVE ONLINE SOURCES OF LEGAL INFORMATION

FREE CASES

California Official Reports page – <http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/opinions.htm>

California published case law decided by the California Supreme Court from 1850, from the California Courts of Appeal from 1905 and the Appellate Department of Superior Court from 1934. Updated monthly and are current to within 90 days of filing.

California Slip Opinions – <http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/opinions/index.htm>

For a nonsearchable database of slip opinions (i.e., opinion not yet enhanced and edited for the Official Reports for 120 days.

California Unpublished Opinions – <http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/opinions/nonpub.htm>

Unpublished opinions of the California Courts of Appeal are posted here for 60 days solely as public information about actions taken by the Courts of Appeal. They are listed in reverse chronological order.

FindLaw – <http://lp.findlaw.com>

Covers varies by court. U.S. Supreme Court searchable since 1893. Ninth Circuit from 1996. California Supreme Court and Courts of Appeal from 1934.

leixsONE – <http://www.lexisone.com>

Searchable the last ten years of State & Federal Courts and U.S. Supreme court from 1790 to present. No Federal District Court cases are available. Other limitations are noted at the website.

U.S. Courts – <http://www.uscourts.gov/>

The official page of the Federal Judiciary leads to websites for the U.S. Supreme Court, U.S. Courts of Appeals, U.S. District Courts and U.S. Bankruptcy Courts. Availability of free cases varies by court.

FREE STATUTES, CODES AND REGULATIONS:

Official California Legislative Information page – <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/>

Contains the California Constitution, Statues since 1993, and current unannotated codes plus bills and bill tracking services since 1993.

Free Regulatory Sources – <http://www.oal.gov/>

Links to the California Code of Regulations and the California Regulatory Notice Register.

Federal Sources –

CPO Access – <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/>

One-stop source of federal bills, the statutes at large, the U.S. Code, the Code of Federal Regulations, Federal Register and the U.S. Constitution.

The Official Law Review Counsel – <http://uscode.house.gov/>

The office U.S. Code.

CITY & COUNTY ORDINANCES

California Local Codes and Charters from the Institute of Governmental Studies at UC Berkeley

<http://igs.berkeley.edu/library/cagovdocs/calcodes.htm>

Municipal Codes Online from the Seattle Public Library

http://www.spl.org/default.asp?pagID=collection_municodes

SPECIFIC AGENCY MATERIALS

Department of Social Services - Manual of Policies & Procedure, Eligibility & Assistance Standards Manual

<http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/ord/PG302.htm>

Department of Social Services – All County Letters

<http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/lettersnotices/PG931.htm>

Department of Social Services -All County Information Notices

<http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/lettersnotices/PG1011.htm>

Department of Health Care Services - All County Welfare Directors Letters

<http://www.e-parc.ca.gov/Pages/default.aspx>

ABOUT WESTERN CENTER ON LAW AND POVERTY

Western Center on Law and Poverty (WCLP) serves as a support center for California's legal aid community and leads the way in large-scale impact litigation, administrative advocacy, budget advocacy and legislative advocacy in an effort to ensure that low income Californians can easily access safe and affordable housing; adequate health care, and a broad spectrum of safety net services.