



ACCESSING BENEFITS WITH AN HHS/OTIP LETTER

A letter from the Dept. of Health and Human Services, Office on Trafficking in Persons (HHS/OTIP) grants benefits to the same extent as a refugee.

- If you have an **Interim Assistance Letter**, you can access benefits for 120 days.
- If you have an **Eligibility Letter**, the letter never expires.

Your Benefits Start Date is **bolded** and underlined in the middle of your HHS letter. You can apply for benefits beginning on this date.

Remember: keep your letter in a safe place! You will need your original HHS letter to apply for benefits.

BENEFITS AND SERVICES YOU MAY BE ELIGIBLE FOR:

You must meet other eligibility requirements (such as income limits) for certain benefits. If you do not meet these other requirements, you will not be able to receive the benefit or service.



HEALTH & MEDICAL INSURANCE

- **Medicaid***: Health coverage for people with low income and limited resources.
- **Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)***: Health insurance for children under 18 years old with low income and who are uninsured.
- * Medicaid and CHIP eligibility are scheduled to end 10/1/26, per H.R. 1. However, this may differ by state and some exceptions may apply.*
- **Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA)**: Time-limited medical help for refugees and other special populations who are not eligible for Medicaid. *RMA is only available for up to 8 months following your Benefits Start Date.*



REFUGEE HEALTH SERVICES

- **Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) Medical and Mental Health Services**: Screenings, diagnosis, treatment, and preventative care.
- **Refugee Health Promotion (RHP)**: Health education classes, medical and mental health navigation, groups, and peer support meetings.
- **Support for Trauma Affected Refugees (STAR)**: Case management services for individuals who have symptoms of trauma.



FOSTER CARE

- **Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Program (URM)**: Foster care for unaccompanied refugee minors and other special youth populations in the United States. *If state foster care is unavailable.*



EDUCATION & JOB TRAINING

- **Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)**: Grants, loans, and work-study to help pay for education.
- **Refugee Support Services**: Services include English language training, vocational training, and job placement and retention.
- **Job Corps**: Career training program for youth 16 to 24 years old with employment authorization.



MONEY

- **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)**: Cash and work opportunities for families and children under 18 years old.
- **Supplemental Security Income (SSI)**: Cash assistance to meet basic needs (food, shelter, and clothing) for people who are blind, aged, or have a disability and have little or no income and resources.
- **Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA)**: Time-limited assistance for refugees and other special populations over 18 who are not eligible for SSI or TANF. *RCA is available for up to 8 months following your Benefits Start Date.*



HOUSING

- **Public Housing Program**: Affordable housing for families and individuals with low income.
- **Housing Choice Voucher Program**: Housing voucher program to help families and individuals with low income pay rent. *Dependent on availability.*

Note: Eligibility for SNAP (food assistance) ended on November 1, 2025 as directed by H.R. 1.

FOLLOW THESE STEPS TO ACCESS BENEFITS AND SERVICES:

Apply for benefits with your letter

Apply online or go to a benefits-issuing agency. The best way to apply may depend on your state. *More information is on page 3.*



Denied. Ask why you were not approved.



Approved! Ask how and when you should start receiving benefits



Need a non-work Social Security Number (SSN)?

Denied for another reason? Contact USCRI's Aspire Program for assistance:
Aspire@refugees.org or 1-800-307-4712



Request an explanation document

If unable to access benefits, request an explanation document from the benefit-issuing agency explaining why you need an SSN. *More information is on page 4.*

Apply for a Non-Work Social Security Number (SSN)

Use your HHS Eligibility or Interim Assistance Letter AND your explanation document from the benefit-issuing agency to apply for a nonwork SSN. *More information is on page 4.*

Use your non-work SSN to re-apply for benefits.



Approved! Ask how and when you should start receiving benefits.

Denied. Document the reason and contact USCRI's Aspire program for assistance:
Aspire@refugees.org or 1-800-307-4712



HOW TO APPLY FOR BENEFITS

Apply online or find a benefit-issuing agency near you.

When you go to a benefit-issuing agency, bring with you:

- ✓ Your HHS Eligibility or Interim Assistance Letter.
- ✓ Proof of household income *for all working household members*. A household member is any person you live with or share expenses with, related or unrelated.

Proof of income may include:



Recent pay stubs



Employment offer letter



Bank statements showing regular income



W-2 form

* If you don't have proof of income, benefit-issuing agencies may accept a written, signed letter from you or your employer stating your income and employment.

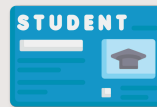
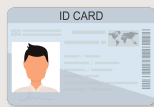
Your original HHS Eligibility or Interim Assistance Letter *should* be enough evidence for age and date of birth.

When applying for public benefits or a nonwork SSN, additional documents are not required, but to avoid delays, it can help to bring any identifying documents you have, such as:

- Photo identification (ID), such as a state-issued ID, unexpired passport, or school-issued ID
- Documents from the Office of Refugee Resettlement, such as the Verification of Release (VOR) for unaccompanied children



REQUIRED



OPTIONAL

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What if they tell me that I can't apply because of my immigration status?

Ask to speak to a supervisor. Show them your letter and reiterate that it grants you benefits to the same extent as a refugee. You are not required to have an immigration status.

What if I'm under 18 years old and don't have a caregiver or guardian to apply on my behalf?

Most states require you to apply with an adult caregiver. If you are unable to, have your case manager, attorney, teacher, or another trusted adult write a letter stating that you provide for yourself and are not a dependent of another adult and present it at the benefits office for their consideration.

What if I don't speak English?

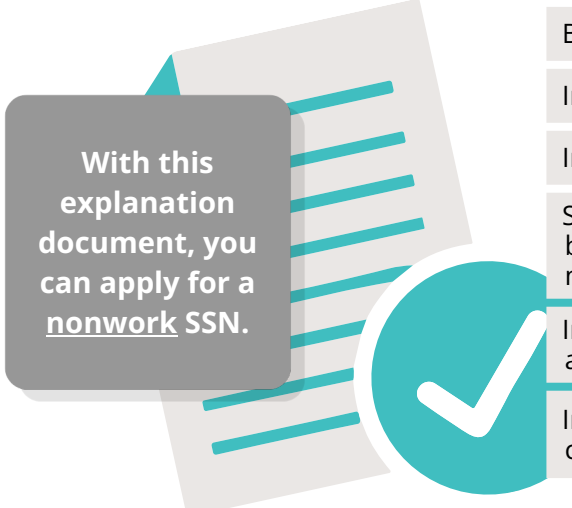
Benefits offices are required by federal law to provide free language interpretation services to individuals with limited English proficiency.

What if they want to verify the HHS letter?

If the benefits or SSA office say they need to verify the letter, they can do so at: <https://shepherd.otip.acf.gov/shepherdpublic/letterverification>

DOES THE BENEFIT-ISSUING AGENCY REQUIRE YOU TO HAVE A SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER TO ACCESS BENEFITS?

If this is the case, you must request an official explanation document from the benefit-issuing agency explaining the need for the SSN. The document must:



With this explanation document, you can apply for a nonwork SSN.

Be dated and on agency letterhead

Include your name

Include the nonwork reason an SSN is required

State the **ONLY** reason you are being denied the benefit is because you do not have a nonwork SSN, but otherwise meet all requirements

Include the relevant statute or regulation requiring the SSN as a condition to receive the benefit or service

Include the name and telephone number of an official to contact so the information provided may be verified

APPLY FOR A NONWORK SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER



Where to Go:

If your state requires a nonwork SSN to access benefits and services, go to <https://www.ssa.gov/locator> or scan the QR code to find the closest Social Security office.



Advocating for yourself can be scary, but if you have issues, showing SSA staff these policy numbers can help.



What to Bring:

1. HHS Eligibility / Interim Assistance Letter
2. Explanation letter from the benefit-issuing agency stating that you need an SSN to access benefits.



What Next?

You should receive your nonwork SSN within two weeks of applying. Once you receive it, reapply for benefits and services.

RM 10211.075H: SSA can accept the HHS Eligibility or Interim Assistance Letter as evidence of age, identity, and evidence of alien status.

RM 10211.600: Accessing federally funded or public assistance benefits is a valid reason for a nonwork SSN, if all other requirements for the benefit have been met.



NEED HELP ACCESSING BENEFITS OR SERVICES?

Call USCRI's Aspire Program at 1-800-307-4712 or email aspire@refugees.org.