

Food Stamps (Basic Food benefits)/ABAWD Time Limit and Work Requirements



Should I Read This Publication?

Yes, if you receive food stamps (Basic Food benefits) and you are an Able-Bodied Adult Without Dependents (ABAWD).

What is an Able-Bodied Adult Without Dependents (ABAWD)?

An ABAWD:

- Is age 18-49
- Does not take care of any minor children
- Is not pregnant **and**
- Is capable of working

What is changing on January 1, 2016?

Starting on January 1, 2016, most ABAWDs will only get **three** full months of food stamps if they do not meet the work requirements.

ABAWDs who do not qualify for an exemption or participate in the work requirements, and who have received three full months of food stamps, **will not get food benefits again until 2018.**

I receive food stamps. Do I have to meet the work requirements?

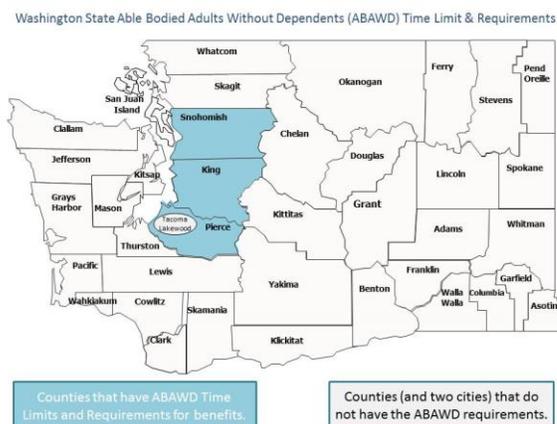
Yes, if all of these are true:

- You live in an area of Washington where the work requirements apply
- You are age 18 to 49
- You do not have any dependents
- You are physically and mentally able to work
- You do not qualify for an exemption (see exemptions below on page three of this publication)

Where in Washington will there be work requirements for people who get food stamps?

If you live in **King or Snohomish County** and you do not qualify for an exemption, you have to meet the work requirements.

If you live in **Pierce County**, you must meet the work requirements unless you live in Tacoma or Lakewood. If you live in Tacoma or Lakewood, you do not have to meet the work requirements, and you will keep getting food stamps. If you live in any other part of Pierce County, you must meet the work requirements unless you qualify for an exemption.



Why do the work requirements only apply to some areas of Washington?

Entire cities and counties can be exempt from the work requirements based on unemployment rates in the city or county. If the number of unemployed people is low enough, people in that city or county will have to meet the work requirements.

King, Snohomish, and parts of Pierce County do not qualify for the exemption. King and Snohomish County residents, and residents of all cities in Pierce County except Tacoma and Lakewood, must meet the work requirements.

I am an ABAWD. I live in King, Snohomish, or part of Pierce County (not Lakewood or Tacoma). What are the exemptions to the work requirements?

You do not have to meet the work requirements if any of these is true:

- You are not physically or mentally able to work
- You live in a household with a minor child
- You care for a disabled person or a frail elder who is incapacitated
- You participate in a drug or alcohol rehabilitation program
- You receive a disability-based benefit (such as SSI, SSDI, ABD, Worker Comp, and so on)

- You are pregnant at any stage of the pregnancy
- You get unemployment benefits
- You have applied for unemployment benefits
- You are a student enrolled at least halftime in a recognized school
- You cannot find work because you are homeless
- You work 30 or more hours per week
- You are already complying with the work requirements of an employment and training program for TANF

How do I know if I qualify for an exemption from the work requirements?

If you think you qualify for an exemption listed in the previous section, [contact DSHS immediately](#) at 1-877-501-2233 to be screened for an exemption from the ABAWD work requirements.

If you think you qualify because you are unable to work, you should also contact your doctor immediately to get a written statement saying you cannot work.

What are the work requirements?

You must do one of these:

- Work at least 20 hours per week, averaged monthly
- Complete at least 16 volunteer hours at a Workfare organization (DSHS will determine the exact number of required hours)
- Participate in Basic Food Employment and Training (BFET)
- In King and Pierce Counties, participate in Resources to Initiate Successful Employment (RISE)
- Participate in a state-approved employment or training program, including but not limited to:
 - LEP Pathway
 - Refugee with Special Employment Needs (RSEN) project
 - Programs included in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)
 - AmeriCorps VISTA

What is a Workfare organization?

A public or non-profit private agency, such as a community organization or a school.

How do I know how many hours I have to complete at a Workfare organization?

Call DSHS at 1-877-501-2233 or visit your local CSO office. You can find your local CSO office at <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/community-services-find-an-office>. You can also email DSHS at jobhelp@dshs.wa.gov.

How do I show DSHS that I am completing my Workfare hours?

Submit the Basic Food Workfare Activity Report to DSHS. See attachment to this publication.

How do I sign up for BFET, RISE, or another state-approved employment or training program?

You can call DSHS at 1-877-501-2233 to get additional information. You can also email DSHS at jobhelp@dshs.wa.gov, or visit your local CSO office. You can find your local CSO office at <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/community-services-find-an-office>.

You can get more information by visiting <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/employment-and-training-programs>.

What if I have a good reason for not meeting the work requirements?

An ABAWD can claim “good cause” for not meeting the work or volunteer hours if s/he was sick, transportation broke down, or there was bad weather that shut down the workplace. There could be other reasons that would be considered good cause.

As long as the ABAWD has a job or volunteer slot but missed work hours for reasons “beyond his or her control,” DSHS should accept this as “good cause” and not stop the food stamps benefits.

If you have a work or volunteer placement, and you have not met your work requirements for a good reason, contact DSHS immediately.

I do not meet the work requirements. What will happen to my food stamps?

Your food benefits will end if you do not meet work requirements for three full months. These months do not have to be in a row.

Example: You do not meet the work requirements in January, February, and March 2016. Your food benefits will end (close) on March 31, 2016.

Example 2: You do not meet the work requirements in January, March, and June. You do meet the work requirements for all other months. Your food benefits will end on June 30, 2016.

Can I get my food stamps (Basic Food benefits) back if I lose them because I did not meet the work requirements?

Yes, if one of these is true:

- you become exempt
- you start participating in work requirements,
- you move to an area of Washington where the work requirements do not apply

If you meet any of the above, you can get a second period of three months of food stamps. If you get your benefits back for a second set of three months, and you stop complying with work requirements or lose your exemption from the work requirements, you will lose your benefits again after the second three full months.

I lost my food stamps because I did not meet the work requirements. I did not get a second three-month period or I have lost my benefits again after the second three-month period. Will I ever be able to get food stamps again?

Yes. Anyone can receive benefits for another three months without meeting the work requirements starting on January 1, 2018, no matter when s/he enrolled in food stamps before this date.

Can I appeal a decision that DSHS has made about my food stamps?

Yes. Every food stamps applicant or recipient has the right to ask for an administrative hearing to challenge any DSHS decision s/he disagrees with. This includes if DSHS denies or ends food stamps benefits for alleged failure to meet an ABAWD exemption or a work or volunteer requirement. Contact a local Legal Services Office immediately if your food stamps benefits are incorrectly terminated or denied.

If an ABAWD requests an administrative hearing, the three-month clock stops ticking and benefits will continue until there is a hearing decision. If you continue to receive benefits while a hearing is pending, and the hearing decision goes against you, you might be at risk for an overpayment. This means you might have to pay back some of the benefits money you received while the hearing was pending.

What if I need legal help?

- Apply online with **CLEAR*Online** - <http://nwjustice.org/get-legal-help>
or
- Call CLEAR at 1-888-201-1014

CLEAR is Washington’s toll-free intake, advice, and referral service for low-income people seeking free legal assistance with civil legal problems.

- **Outside King County:** Call 1-888-201-1014 weekdays from 9:15 a.m. until 12:15 p.m. CLEAR works with a language line to provide interpreters as needed at no cost to callers. If you are deaf or hard of hearing, call 1-888-201-1014 using your preferred TTY or Video relay service.
- **King County:** Call 211 for information and referral to an appropriate legal services provider Monday through Friday from 8:00 am – 6:00 pm. You may also call (206) 461-3200, or the toll-free number, 1-877-211-WASH (9274). 211 works with a language line to provide free interpreters as needed to callers. Deaf and hearing-impaired callers can call 1-800-833-6384 or 711 to get a free relay operator. They will then connect you with 211. You can also get information on legal service providers in King County through 211’s website at www.resourcehouse.com/win211/.
- **Persons 60 and Over:** Persons 60 or over may call CLEAR*Sr at 1-888-387-7111, regardless of income.

This publication provides general information concerning your rights and responsibilities. It is not intended as a substitute for specific legal advice.

This information is current as of January 2016

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