

Guidance for Connecting to Local and State Services

Sponsors of newcomers may be new to welcoming *and* navigating the often complex world of benefits and services available to new residents facing challenges in their local area, such as economic instability. This guide is intended to help familiarize sponsors with the types of services that may be available for newcomers in their new city or state.

Getting started

United Way's [2-1-1 service](#) can be a great place to start to learn about community resources in your area.

County or state human services departments, local city offices for immigrants, and statewide offices for new Americans can also be great first stops in your exploration of available services. You can find these partners through a quick internet search!

Local libraries also have a lot to offer in terms of information about local resources and programs. We recommend visiting one of the larger libraries in your area to learn more details about what they offer to the community. You might be surprised by the scope of support offered.

Healthcare

Part of being a sponsor will be to connect individuals to healthcare. Through your work, you will establish connections with organizations and partners in your local community whose missions are to make healthcare accessible. It is likely that there are health accessibility and affordability groups in your state or local community who routinely help individuals navigate healthcare and health insurance. Ask around!

Federally Qualified Health Care Centers (FQHCs)

- Funded by the federal government to offer affordable health care in communities across the United States.
- Cannot turn anyone away for an inability to pay or for lack of insurance.
- FQHCs also often have health insurance enrollment specialists who can help newcomers determine what their insurance options may be.
- Interpretation available, as needed, usually through a language line.

Local public health departments (or agencies)

- Low or no cost resources available to all residents, such as vaccinations or health screenings (including tuberculosis) and connection to treatment for diseases of public health concern.

Affordable Care Act (ACA) Healthcare Marketplace

- Some states have their own health exchanges or marketplaces where you can shop for healthcare. Residents of other states may access ACA plans through the federal marketplace.
- There may be health exchange staff that can walk the newcomer through the enrollment process.
- As part of the ACA health plan application, in most states, the newcomer will also be screened for other low and no cost health insurance programs, including the Children's Health Insurance Plan (CHIP) and Medicaid. Available plans will vary based on your area of residence.

Emergency Medicaid

- Available in all states.
- Covers low-income individuals of any immigration status, including those in humanitarian parole, in life-threatening situations.
- Emergency Medicaid also covers labor and delivery (but does not cover pre or post natal care).
- A physician must supply a letter on behalf of the patient that the situation was life-threatening, and the hospital can usually help their patients navigate the enrollment.
- In some states, Emergency Medicaid also covers additional life-threatening conditions, such as kidney conditions that require dialysis, and pregnant women.

Healthcare Through an Employer.

- Most newcomers, like most Americans, access healthcare through their employer.
- Newcomers will be able to transition to employer-sponsored healthcare plans; benefits such as health insurance are always an additional consideration when seeking employment.

Other Public Health Insurance Plans

- Available public health plans will vary by state.
- There are states that cover eligible immigrants without permanent status (such as those on humanitarian parole) and some do not. Many limit this type of coverage to children under 18.
- In addition, some states have expanded Medicaid coverage, for instance, and some have not. Expanded Medicaid states offer coverage to eligible adults without dependent children; in addition, the income eligibility threshold is higher (138% of Federal Poverty Level) in states that chose to expand Medicaid.
- Check with your local state or county human services department, local health accessibility nonprofit, or state Medicaid office for more information about eligibility in your area.
- Some states also have their own health care plans, such as through a public option, for low-cost insurance.

In complex medical situations, many hospitals have social workers or other positions who help those with challenges outside the hospital setting, such as with housing or health insurance.

Confused about health insurance? You are not alone. Connecting with nonprofits that help community members navigate these complexities or with enrollment staff at FQHCs are great places to start.

Education

Every resident, regardless of immigration status, can enroll in the United States' public school system for Kindergarten through high school (Grade 12). Some school districts may have newcomer centers or community school programs that help students transition to a new learning environment. Many school districts offer school choice, which means newcomer families can explore what learning environment may be best suited for their student's strengths and interests. The local school district (often offices of family or community engagement can be a good step) will be able to provide more information.

Free and Reduced Lunch

- Offered by some schools.
- Provided to students in the school based on household income; there is no immigration status requirement. Should this be a benefit provided for a newcomer's student, school staff can assist the family with enrollment.

Community Colleges

- Often serve first generation students and in many communities, first generation students are also immigrants or the children of immigrants.
- Often have college-level classes that train individuals for careers and community classes, such as English as a Second Language, that do not require college enrollment.
- Often also have services that help evaluate foreign transcripts. These services can help ensure students do not have to retake classes and can help professionals navigate recertification processes or apply for occupational licenses as well as tailor job searches to be in line with their career goals.

English as a Second Language classes (ESL)

- Funded by federal and state governments.
- Visit your state's adult education program online (commonly in Departments of Education) to get a list of providers in your area.

Employment and Career Training

Community Colleges

- Great place to learn about career training opportunities.
- Depending on the program, a newcomer may be able to take advantage of career training before they have their Employment Authorization Document (EAD).

- Offer skills training to assist their students in reskilling and upskilling for in-demand jobs and industries. These programs often attract both youth and adult learners.
- Oftentimes hold job fairs open to the public.

Local Workforce Centers/ American Job Centers

- Offer employment and career training services.
- Some services, such as resume writing and interview assistance, can be accessed even if a newcomer has yet to receive their work authorization
- Other services may be available after a newcomer has their EAD, including enrollment into programs that can help pay for job training, such as for a commercial's driver's license (CDL).

Apprenticeship Opportunities

- May provide newcomers to earn income while they learn on the job.
- Many states have recently increased investments in these types of programs and are expanding their portfolios of apprenticeable occupations.
- Some states also have a state office of apprenticeships, so be sure to check your state's department of labor (or workforce services) to learn more.

Childcare

Finding high-quality and affordable childcare is a challenge. Many state and county human service agencies can help newcomer families understand options.

Some newcomers may be eligible for childcare financial assistance. Find more information about this assistance, and options for childcare, [here](#).

Head Start and Early Head Start

- Provide low-income families with free learning and development services for their children from birth to age 5.

Public Benefits

Like health insurance, public benefits can be hard to navigate. Many states, however, have developed online application systems that determine eligibility for a variety of programs. State and county human services (or social services) offices have eligibility specialists, and there are often nonprofit organizations that assist residents in navigating the complexities. There are many reasons that someone may not ultimately be eligible for a program, such as household composition or income levels, and yet, people apply all the time. You do not need to know whether the newcomer your group is supporting will be eligible for a program to apply!

Federal Public Benefits Programs

- Administered by the state (or the county).

- Each federal public benefit program has its own eligibility rules. For example, in some states, SNAP (or food stamps) income eligibility is at 200% of the federal poverty level, while Medicaid in the same state is at 138%.
- Some states provide benefits to children under 18 even though their parents are ineligible.
- There are many federal public benefits that are less known but which have more flexible eligibility requirements, such as:
 - Low-Income Heat and Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) helps households meet their energy needs during the winter months. Importantly, this program determines eligibility for the household based on just one household member's eligibility.
 - Womens, Infant and Children (WIC) supports nutritional needs of pregnant and postpartum women as well as their young children.

States may also have state-funded benefit programs, some of which mirror or expand federal benefits for different populations, including newcomers.

Other Services

State IDs

- To apply for a State ID, go to your local Department of Motor Vehicles office. Many DMVs have modernized recently that allow for some services (like scheduling appointments) to be completed online. Check their websites first!
- State IDs do not require testing.
- Most newcomers will want to apply for a State ID quickly so that they have a form of identification widely recognized in local communities.

Drivers License

- To apply for a driver's license, newcomers should visit the local Department of Motor Vehicles office. Require applicants to pass written and driving tests; these tests, and any learning permit requirements, will vary state to state. Many states allow for interpretation of the written exam.
- Some states allow individuals without social security numbers to apply for driver's licenses, and some do not. If the newcomer resides in a state which requires a social security number, they may need to receive one before applying for a drivers license. Immigrant rights groups operating in your state will know whether or not you reside in a state where drivers licenses are available for all.

Banking

- Some large banks require a Social Security number before they will allow a newcomer to open an account. Credit unions are often more flexible and can be a great choice.