

# General Assistance Frequently Asked Questions

## What is General Assistance?

The Maine General Assistance (GA) program is administered by municipalities to provide immediate help to eligible residents who cannot provide basic needs like utilities, shelter, food, heating fuel, medications, non-elective medical care, and other items essential to maintain themselves and/or their households.

To receive GA, people must follow program rules and meet eligibility conditions. GA is an income-based program intended to help residents who are in need and have nowhere else to turn.

**GA is the program of last resort.**

## How can I apply for General Assistance?

People wishing to apply for assistance should call the General Assistance administrator to schedule an appointment (207-450-5621). The Scarborough GA Office holds appointments on Tuesdays from 12:00 am to 3:00 pm and Wednesday's from 9:00am to 3:00pm the Public Safety Building.

Applicants must complete an application and provide verifying documentation to determine GA eligibility.

## What to bring to your appointment:

- Proof of all bills and expenses like rent/mortgage, heating fuel, utilities, food, medical expenses
- Proof of all bills paid within the last 30 days including paid receipts, cancelled checks, or other documentation proving how you have spent your money
- Proof of ALL incoming funds to your household is required. This includes but is not limited to: Paystubs, TANF, SSI, SSDI, State Supplements, loans, gifts, borrowed, in-kind, from yard sale, interest, dividends, 401k/403b, unemployment benefits, workman's compensation, VA Benefits, etc.
- Current financial statements from all investments and bank accounts
- Current lease if you rent, including name, address, telephone number, and email address of your landlord
- Driver's license or state I.D.
- Proof of residence in the town you are applying. A current utility bill may work.
- Social security or ID # verification for everyone in your household
- Doctor's statement if you are ill, disabled, and unable to work
- Insurance policies, bonds, assets if you have them
- Title and registration for any car, truck, or recreational vehicle you may own or have in your name

### How do I qualify for future General Assistance?

At the time an applicant receives a decision on their application, the administrator will inform them of their responsibilities to be eligible for future assistance. This includes providing documentation (receipts) of all expenses and all income sources thirty days previous to the next application date.

All clients, **regardless of whether they received benefits in the past**, are responsible for showing they have done everything possible to prevent needing future GA, including accessing resources like SNAP, Maine Care, HEAP, and subsidized housing.

### AM I required to work?

If you are unemployed or underemployed (working less than full time) but can work, you must:

- Register for work at the local Career Center
- Actively look for work at least 10 places per week
- Accept any job offer (paying at least minimum wage)
- Participate in any no-cost training, retraining, educational, or rehabilitative program that would help you become employed, if referred to such a program by the administrator.
- Agree to perform and complete work for the municipality if assigned to a “workfare” program.

### What would cause me to be ineligible or disqualified from the program?

General assistance is a program that encourages clients to do all they can to prevent needing future assistance. It is YOUR responsibility to show that you are eligible and in need. Applicants may be found ineligible to receive general assistance if they have:

- Mis-spent money on items not considered necessities like non-government issued phones, cable tv subscriptions pet food, cigarettes, and alcohol
- Refused or forfeited benefits like SNAP, SSI and subsidized housing
- Quit a job without just cause
- Failed to complete a workfare assignment - currently Scarborough does not have workfare. However, work effort projects do apply and are added to monthly logs.
- Willingly and knowingly made false representations about themselves and/or their household
- Not provided or permitted the necessary verification required to complete the application

### How often can I apply for general assistance?

Typically, GA is determined for a one to thirty-day period. If applicants need to apply for GA again, they are responsible for making sure they have met all requirements for program eligibility.

### **What if I disagree with the decision of the administrator?**

Applicants should discuss the matter with their GA administrator. All applicants have the right to request a Fair Hearing, which provides the applicant with a Board composed of individuals not involved in the decision to decide whether you are eligible for assistance. If you would like a Fair Hearing, you must request a hearing in writing within 5 working days of when you receive your decision.

### **Do I have to pay back the assistance I receive?**

Yes. You are required to repay the municipality when you are financially stable. If the municipality assists with a mortgage payment or capital improvement on your property, it may place a lien on your property in the Registry of Deeds. An automatic lien is placed against any Workers Compensation lump sum payment you may receive. Any future Supplemental Security Income (SSI) retroactive benefits received also fall into this category. If you have applied for SSI, the administrator will ask you to sign an agreement form that results in the municipality and the Department of Health and Human Services being paid back for the assistance being issued you after you applied for SSI. If you refuse to sign this form you will be denied GA.