

YOUR GUIDE

How do we apply?

What's the work program?

TO

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS!

NY STATE ID
\$
EBT CARD

18

WELFARE

HRA CENTER

Who can help me with my case?

How do sanctions work?

IN NYC

APPLY!

FIND OUT HOW TO GET –
AND KEEP – YOUR BENEFITS!

MAKING
POLICY
PUBLIC

CASH ASSISTANCE: THE BASICS

1. WHO IS CASH ASSISTANCE FOR?



1. People with low or no income.

How much depends on how many people are applying on your case, how much income you have and where it comes from, and how much money you have (like cash and savings).



2. Usually, you have to be at least 18 to apply for your own benefits.

If you're 16 or older and don't live with your parents, you might be able to apply on your own. Otherwise, your parent or guardian can apply to receive benefits for you.



3. Citizens, green card holders/ permanent residents & immigrants.

Refugees, asylees, U- and T-Visa recipients, Cuban or Haitian entrants, and others qualify. Immigrants without legal status may not qualify, but may be able to get benefits for children or other people they live with who have legal status.



When you apply to receive assistance, HRA opens a new "case" with information about you and whoever you're applying with. HRA will give you a "case number" they use to keep track of your benefits.

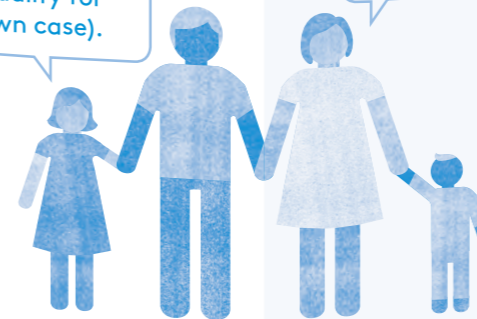
See the back cover to find out where you can get more info

2. WHO APPLIES?

Your cash assistance case can include just you, or other people. You can apply with anyone you live with.

Children 18 and over can ask to be taken off the case (and may qualify for their own case).

If you live with a spouse or children under 18, they have to apply with you.



5. WHERE TO APPLY

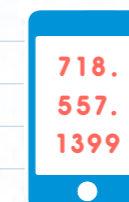
You'll need to go to an HRA Center to apply. To find one:



NYC Info



HRA Online

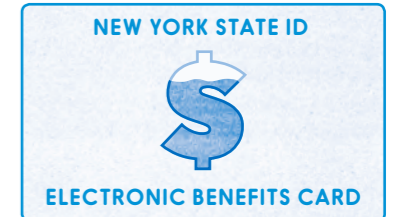


HRA Info

NEXT

Find out how to apply!

3. PAYMENTS



Twice a month, your benefits will be added to an EBT card that HRA gives you.

It's like a bank card, and your benefits are like cash you can withdraw or spend using your card.

Rent assistance payments are sent to your landlord twice a month on the same dates you get your cash payments.

4. CHILD SUPPORT

If you get child support, the payments will go to HRA instead of to you.

HRA should send you:

- up to the first \$100 of support they receive for one child
- up to the first \$200 of support for 2 or more children

If HRA doesn't receive the child support payment, you won't receive this payment.

Payments show up as cash on your EBT card, in addition to your normal benefits.

If you think HRA made a mistake, you can ask them to review your child support payments. For more information:

www.childsupport.ny.gov/dcse/desk_review.html

HOW TO APPLY FOR BENEFITS

1. WHAT YOU NEED TO BRING



For each person on your case, you'll need to show:

- **Identification and age**
Use documents like driver's licenses, US passports, birth certificates, photo IDs, or hospital/doctor's records.
- **Social security numbers**
If you have them, bring social security numbers (but not the cards) for each person.



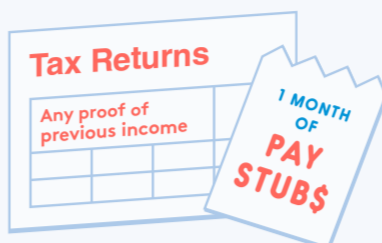
Citizenship or immigration status for each person you live with

- Use a birth certificate, US passport, documentation from USCIS, or other immigration documents.



Proof of where you live, including:

- **How much you pay to live there**
You can use a lease or a letter from your landlord (saying that you rent, the address, and how much rent they charge). If you have ConEd or National Grid bills, bring those, too.
- **Who lives with you**
Bring a letter from the landlord, school records, or letters from two neighbors or other people.



All income for all people who are part of the case

- **Income from a job**
Bring one month of pay stubs, or a letter from your employer saying how much you work and are paid each month. If you're self-employed, bring your income tax return and business records.
- **Other income that you receive**
Bring documents that show child support, Social Security, unemployment, or other benefits. Bring a letter of support from anyone who helps you with expenses.
- **Previous sources of income**
If you had other income before applying, bring proof that it ended. This could be a notice showing that benefits expired, or a letter from your employer saying the dates you worked and why you left.



For each child in your household:

- **The child's relationship to you**
Use birth certificates, court records, foster care documents, or adoption paperwork.
- **The child's school paperwork**
For any children in school, you need a letter or record from the school showing they're enrolled.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU'RE MISSING SOMETHING

Ask the worker at the HRA Center if you can use something else in its place, or bring proof that you tried to get it but couldn't.

• As long as you're trying to get the document, it shouldn't count against you in your application.

• Even if you don't have everything, still show up to your appointments and explain what's going on.

• You have the right to HRA's help getting documents if you have trouble getting them on your own.

ORIGINALS OR PHOTOCOPIES?

You can bring copies instead of originals, **except** for identification and citizenship/immigration documents. You don't need to have documents notarized.

Your marital status

- Any paper that shows if you are married, divorced, separated, or widowed.

Other resources

- If you own property or cars, or have money in a bank account or cash, you should bring documentation about them.

2. IMPORTANT TIPS FOR YOUR HRA CENTER VISIT

REMEMBER THAT EVERYONE HAS THE RIGHT TO APPLY FOR BENEFITS

You have the right to apply even if an HRA worker says that you shouldn't. If you disagree with what is happening, stay calm, be polite, and ask to speak to a supervisor.

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO AN INTERPRETER

No matter what language you speak, you can ask for an interpreter for interviews and appointments. You may also have the right to translated copies of important documents.

ASK FOR RECEIPTS AND KEEP COPIES OF EVERYTHING YOU GIVE HRA OR THEY GIVE YOU

Write down who you met with, when, and what they said. Keep all this information in a folder. You'll need these in case you ever have to prove to HRA that you did something.



If you have a mental or physical disability, you have the right to ask for a "reasonable accommodation" to make HRA's services more accessible to you. Call HRA's info line at 718.557.1399.



If you are experiencing domestic violence, HRA has to refer you to your center's Domestic Violence Liaison for more help.



You can apply for food stamps and Medicaid at the same time you apply for cash assistance.



3. EXTRA GRANTS

You can apply for these grants at your center. You should hear back within a month. If you don't hear back or are denied, you can apply again or ask for a Fair Hearing.

Utility Payments

You have the right to HRA payments to prevent utility shut-offs. Bring your utility bill to the HRA Center.

Back Rent (Rent Arrears)

HRA may help you pay back rent you owe, if you can show that you are able to pay the rent going forward.

Flood or Fire

HRA can help pay to replace clothing or furniture lost in a flood, fire, or other disaster.

Restaurant Allowance

If you don't have access to a working kitchen, HRA should give you extra cash each month.

Storage

HRA must pay for storage if you are in a temporary living situation, like a shelter.

FEPS (Family Eviction Prevention Subsidy)

FEPS provides extra rent and pays back rent for some families with children facing eviction. Ask your HRA Center to refer you to a FEPS Provider.

Moving Expenses

HRA will pay for half of the broker's fee, a security deposit voucher, movers, and possibly a furniture allowance if you move from temporary to permanent housing or when a move is necessary. Go to HRA before you move.

Pregnancy

If you bring HRA medical documents showing that you're pregnant, you can get an extra \$50/month starting in the fourth month of pregnancy.

Heating Payments

If you pay for heat, you may be eligible for grants under the HEAP program. Contact the New York State HEAP hotline at:

1.800.342.3009

4. WHAT TO EXPECT AFTER APPLYING

APPLICATION DECISION

HRA has to let you know what they decide and why. You'll get a letter in the mail.

WAIT TIMES

30 TO 45 DAYS

FOLLOW-UP APPOINTMENTS INCLUDE:

- ELIGIBILITY VERIFICATION
- FINGERPRINTING
- CHILD SUPPORT
- DRUG & ALCOHOL SCREENING
- WORK ACTIVITIES

HRA will schedule several follow-up appointments before they approve your application.

Your whole application could be rejected if you miss even one of these appointments.

If you have to miss an appointment, call and try to reschedule. Keep written notes of these calls — how many times you tried, whether you got through, and who you spoke to.

HRA CALL NOTES:



IMMEDIATE NEEDS GRANTS

You have the right to apply for "immediate needs grants" any time during the application process.

You might qualify if you have no money to buy food or other essential items (like feminine hygiene products, toothbrushes, toothpaste, disposable diapers, soap, combs, etc.).

If you qualify, HRA has to grant you the money the day you qualify, or give you the items you need.

HOW TO KEEP YOUR BENEFITS

1. THE WORK PROGRAM

All adults on your case between the ages of 18 and 60 may have to do a certain number of hours of work activities every week, as part of the Work Program.

WHAT COUNTS AS WORK ACTIVITIES?

- PAID WORK (from a job outside the Work Program)
- TRAINING PROGRAMS
- SCHOOL
- JOB SEARCH
- COLLEGE (2- & 4-year colleges count)
- HOMEWORK HOURS
- INTERNSHIPS/ EXTERNSHIPS
- WORK-STUDY HOURS

If you're already doing any of these, bring information about it to HRA to see if it can count towards your hours.

REQUEST AN ACTIVITY

You can ask to be in a specific training program. The list of approved educational and training activities is here: www.nyc.gov/html/hra/html/services/training.shtml

You can let HRA know which work activities you're interested in. When it's possible, they're supposed to give you assignments in those areas.

COLLEGE CREDIT

HRA now accepts both 2- & 4-year colleges as work activities.

HRA will also count one unsupervised homework hour for each credit/classroom hour, as well as all supervised homework hours required by your school.

WHO DOESN'T NEED TO DO WORK ACTIVITIES?

- PEOPLE WHO ARE SICK, INJURED, OR HAVE A DISABILITY, AND ARE UNABLE TO WORK
- HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS UNDER 19
- PREGNANT WOMEN DUE TO GIVE BIRTH IN UNDER 30 DAYS
- PARENT OR PERSON RESPONSIBLE FOR AN INFANT UNDER 3 MONTHS OLD
- MAIN PERSON WHO TAKES CARE OF A SICK OR DISABLED PERSON IN YOUR HOUSE

MEDICAL EXEMPTIONS

If you're unable to work or disabled, you could be "exempt" from or "work-limited" for the Work Program.

You'll need to get examined by HRA's doctors. Give HRA paperwork from your doctors about your medical condition and how it affects your ability to work. HRA has to take this into account when making its decision.

If your medical condition changes at any time, you can ask HRA for a new evaluation.

REQUEST A FAIR HEARING

If HRA decides you are "non-exempt" and you disagree, request a "Fair Hearing" right away (see section below).

If you ask for a hearing within 10 days of HRA's decision, you don't have to participate in the Work Program while you wait for your hearing.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

You have the right to childcare and transit during HRA-approved work activities.

HRA is supposed to try to schedule appointments that don't conflict with your class or work schedule.

If you can't make an appointment because of class or work, tell HRA right away. They're supposed to re-schedule and excuse the absence.

3. APPOINTMENTS

You'll need to go to appointments throughout the year to keep your benefits. It's really important to show up—missed appointments can mean reduced or canceled benefits.

KEEP TRACK OF YOUR APPTS

BRING PROOF

CONCILIATION

If HRA thinks you missed appointments they may send you a date for a "Conciliation Appointment," which is your chance to explain what happened.

The Conciliation Appointment is a deadline, and you can go any time before that date.

Be ready to tell your side of the story and bring whatever proof you have.

PREVENT A SANCTION

CHILD SUPPORT

If you miss an appointment with the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE), or don't give them information they ask for, you can get a "child support sanction," cutting your household's benefits by at least 25%. You will also lose Medicaid (for yourself only).

Child support sanctions end as soon as the parent does what HRA is asking.

BRING CASE DOCUMENTS

RECERTIFICATION

At least once a year, you have to go to an in-person recertification appointment. Bring all your documents to this appointment.

CASE CLOSED

If you miss a recertification appointment, HRA could close your entire case and stop your cash assistance.

4. NOTICES

HRA will send you notices in the mail for a lot of different things. It's really important to pay attention to these and to make sure you respond.

IF YOU GET A LETTER AND DISAGREE WITH WHAT IT SAYS: ASK FOR A FAIR HEARING RIGHT AWAY.

You can also try to fix the problem by asking for a "conference" at your HRA center.

If you get a notice for a "Mandatory Dispute Resolution," go to it — you may be able to fix the problem there.

If HRA wants to change your benefits (like reducing or ending them, or sanctioning you), they always have to mail you a letter to let you know what is being changed and why.

IF YOU DON'T GET A NOTICE

If HRA changes your benefits without mailing you a letter, ask for a Fair Hearing right away. One defense that could help you keep your benefits is that you didn't receive a notice about the action.

QUESTIONNAIRES "questionnaires" in the mail HRA sends you "questionnaires" in the mail that say exactly how you need to return them. Follow all instructions — if you don't respond, HRA could end your benefits.

ADDRESS CHANGE

If your address changes, visit your HRA Center to update it and keep a copy of the receipt from your visit.

RECOURPMENTS

If HRA paid you too much, you may get a "recoupment" letter. This means your future benefits will be cut by at least 10% each month until the amount is repaid.

You can ask for a Fair Hearing if you disagree that HRA has overpaid you.

If the recoupment makes it so you don't have enough money to pay for essentials like food, shelter, utilities, or medical costs, you can ask for a "hardship determination," so your benefits are only cut by 5%.

NOTICE!

2. HOW TO AVOID SANCTIONS

If HRA thinks you're not meeting its work requirements, they can cut back your benefits. These are called a "sanctions," and here's how you can avoid them.

HOW DO SANCTIONS WORK?

HRA can sanction you if you miss a work appointment, show up late, or HRA decides you didn't cooperate at your work appointment.

If you're the only person on your case, your case will close during your sanction period. If there are other people on your case, the person that was sanctioned will lose their benefits.

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For example if you're part of a four person case and you are sanctioned, you'll lose 1/4 of your benefits for as long as the sanction lasts.

SHOW UP TO ALL APPOINTMENTS ON TIME



"GOOD CAUSE"

If you miss an appointment, bring proof of why.

If you can't get written proof, take notes on what was going on that day so that you can describe it in as much detail as possible.

IF YOU MISS AN APPOINTMENT, CALL HRA RIGHT AWAY



EXAMPLES OF GOOD EXCUSES THAT COULD KEEP YOU FROM GETTING SANCTIONED ARE:

- Something that shows you couldn't get childcare
- A letter from an employer or pay stubs if you were at work or at a job interview
- Something that shows you couldn't get transportation to work
- A note from a doctor or hospital that says the work assignment is not medically appropriate for you
- A doctor or hospital note that shows that you or your child had an appointment

GET PROOF OF WHERE AND WHY YOU MISSED THE APPOINTMENT



5. FAIR HEARINGS

When you disagree with something that has happened, you should talk to an HRA worker about it first. If there's still a problem, you can ask for a Fair Hearing, which is a chance to have a neutral party review your disagreement with HRA.

HOW DO FAIR HEARINGS WORK?

When you ask for one, the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA, the agency that oversees HRA) will review that specific issue and make a decision about it.

You have the right to ask for a Fair Hearing any time you disagree with an HRA action about your case.

If you want a Fair Hearing about a change to your benefits, you have 60 days to ask for it after you receive the notice. You can still ask after 60 days, but the judge will ask you why you waited so long.

AID TO CONTINUE

Ask for "aid to continue." That way you may be able to keep getting your benefits while you wait for a Fair Hearing. Make sure you ask before the date your benefits are supposed to be cut. You should get aid to continue if HRA didn't mail you a letter about the cut.

HOW TO GET A FAIR HEARING

Fill out an online request form:

www.otda.ny.gov/hearings/request

Or contact the Office of Administrative Hearings, by phone, mail, or in person (see notecard below).

Make sure to list all the issues you're having with HRA in your request, because the judge will only talk about those issues.

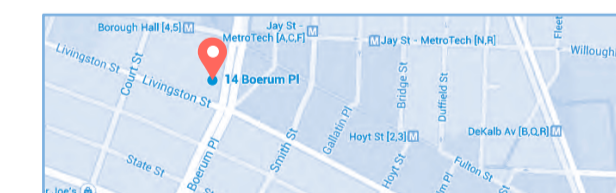
If something else comes up that you didn't include in the first request, you have to ask for a new hearing on the issue. Be careful — HRA can still send you new notices about your benefits while you wait for your Fair Hearing. Keep meeting all other requirements while you wait for your hearing.

GET READY FOR YOUR HEARING

You have the right to get a copy of all the evidence HRA will present.

Ask the HRA Division of Fair Hearings for your case's "evidence packet." It's a good idea to review this before your hearing day so you know what HRA is going to say.

ON THE DAY OF YOUR HEARING



Go to your hearing at 14 Boerum Place in Brooklyn ready to defend yourself with all your evidence.

The hearings are usually only 5 to 10 minutes, but you might have to wait for several hours before it's your turn.

You have the right to testify, bring witnesses, ask questions, or bring a representative (this person could be a lawyer but doesn't have to be).

Make sure to make all your arguments in front of the judge.

Point out when evidence HRA presents doesn't apply to your case.

The case against you will be argued by someone from HRA with printouts about your case. Remind the judge that person doesn't have any personal knowledge of the case.

AFTER YOUR HEARING

The judge's written decision will be sent to you in the mail.

If you haven't received it more than a month after your hearing, contact the Office of Administrative Hearings. See the notecard below for contact info.

If you win, HRA has to give you back any benefits they owe you as a result of the hearing (for example, if a sanction was ended) within 30 days from the date of the decision.

If you still haven't received your benefits after 30 days, file a compliance complaint by contacting the Office of Administrative Hearings or go to:

www.otda.ny.gov/hearings/compliance

You can also go to your HRA Center with the Fair Hearing decision and ask to speak with the "Fair Hearing Compliance Unit."

If you lose at the hearing, get legal help right away, since you only have 120 days to appeal the decision.

See the back cover to find out where you can get legal help.

CONTACTING THE OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS

- Online: otda.ny.gov/hearings/request
- Visit: 14 Boerum Place, 1st Floor, Brooklyn, New York 11201
- Phone: 800.342.3334
- Fax: 518.473.6735
- Mail: New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, Office of Administrative Hearings, P.O. Box 1930, Albany, NY 12201-1930

GETTING YOUR EVIDENCE PACKET

- Visit: HRA Division of Fair Hearings, 14 Boerum Place, 6th Floor, Brooklyn, NY 11201
- Phone: 718.722.5012
- Fax: 718.722.5018

- Be sure to tell them your Fair Hearing number and the mailing address where you want the evidence sent.

IF YOU NEED HELP

MAKING POLICY PUBLIC

Is a program of the Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP). CUP partners with policy advocates and graphic designers to produce foldout posters that explain complicated policy issues, like this one. makingpolicypublic.net

COLLABORATORS

CUP: Christine Gaspar, Clara Amenyo, Ingrid Haftel
Urban Justice Center's Safety Net Project: Denise Miranda Esq., Edwin Ortiz, Helen Strom
All Other Services: Kevin Wade Shaw, Joel Stillman



THE CENTER FOR URBAN PEDAGOGY (CUP) is a nonprofit organization that uses the power of design and art to increase meaningful civic engagement. welcometocup.org

ALL OTHER SERVICES

is a civic-minded graphic design studio. All Other Services develops visual and strategic direction for brands, institutions, and advocacies that positively impact communities. allotherservices.info

URBAN JUSTICE CENTER



SAFETY NET PROJECT

THE SAFETY NET PROJECT

protects due process rights and provides direct legal services for low and no-income New Yorkers while engaging the greater community in casting a wider, finer safety net for economic justice and human dignity. safetynetproject.org

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CONTACT HRA

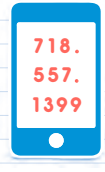
To apply for benefits or get help with your case, visit an HRA Center. To find one:



NYC Info



HRA Online



HRA Info

FOR MORE HELP AND INFO

If you have trouble with your application or need more help, get in touch with one of these organizations:

• THE SAFETY NET PROJECT

The Safety Net Project offers free legal clinics that operate at soup kitchens, food pantries, and other locations in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Queens. Staff can advise you on cash assistance rules and Fair Hearings. They may also be able to represent you in Fair Hearings.

For locations, directions, and hours, visit www.safetynetproject.org or call 646.459.3042.

• PROJECT FAIR

Project FAIR can give you information on Fair Hearings, benefits, and community services. They also offer referral services.

Visit the Project FAIR Help Desk in the main waiting area at: 14 Boerum Place, 1st Floor, Brooklyn, NY 11201. It's open Monday–Friday from 12:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

HOW TO GET A FAIR HEARING

If you have problems with your case, talk to HRA first. If the problem isn't fixed, contact the Office of Administrative Hearings to request a Fair Hearing.

- **Online:** otda.ny.gov/hearings/request
- **Visit:** 14 Boerum Place, 1st Floor, Brooklyn, New York 11201
- **Phone:** 800.342.3334
- **Fax:** 518.473.6735
- **Mail:** New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, Office of Administrative Hearings, P.O. Box 1930, Albany, NY 12201-1930

LOOK INSIDE TO LEARN ABOUT CASH ASSISTANCE: WHO IT'S FOR, HOW TO GET IT, AND HOW TO KEEP IT.