About the Economic Services Administration

In State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2025, more than one in five Washington residents turned to the Economic Services Administration (ESA) within the Department of Social and Health Services for assistance with cash, food, child support, disability determination, support for transitioning to employment, and other services. A customer base of over 1.7 million individuals receive service from over 3,928 ESA employees dedicated to connecting children, adults, and families to resources and opportunities that help them reach their full potential.

Together, the variety of assistance and services ESA provides aim to reduce poverty and support economic well-being in Washington, which is a priority outlined in the DSHS House of Health and Human Services. This priority cannot be achieved by ESA alone or without improvements in the way it operates, which is why ESA focuses on collaborating with other state agencies, community partners, and tribes on a Government-to-Government basis while continuing to transition to a human-centered service delivery model. This priority—along with specific strategic goals, success measures, and action plans—is part of ESA's Strategic Goals in the DSHS Strategic Plan.

The goal for reducing poverty and supporting economic well-being is also a shared statewide priority. In January 2021, the Poverty Reduction Workgroup, which developed into the Washington Economic Justice Alliance (EJA), completed a *10-Year Plan to Dismantle Poverty*, providing a blueprint to build a just and equitable future in Washington state. In December 2021, *Executive Order 21-05* created an interagency subcabinet explicitly focused on implementing the strategies and recommendations in the 10-Year Plan. The subcabinet works in collaboration with the Economic Justice Alliance, people experiencing poverty, and the *Legislative Executive WorkFirst Poverty Reduction Oversight Task Force* to focus on developing and implementing strategies that address the root causes of poverty and promote sustainable solutions for future generations.

ESA's core services focus on:

- **Poverty Reduction** – removing barriers that prevent people from achieving their full potential and providing assistance so that people can meet their foundational needs through cash grants, food assistance, medical assistance, and employment and career training-focused services. Major programs include Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and WorkFirst (Washington's welfare-to-work program); Basic Food (Washington's SNAP – Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program); Basic Food Employment & Training (BFET); Aged, Blind or Disabled (ABD); Housing and Essential Needs (HEN) Referral; Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA); medical assistance; and child support.
- **Child Support** – providing a pathway for parents and caregivers to provide consistent financial and medical support for their children and promoting resources so that families can thrive.
- **Disability Determination** – determining whether individuals applying for Social Security disability benefits meet the criteria to receive benefits. Under contract with the federal Social Security Administration, ESA's Division of Disability Determination Services determines whether individuals qualify for benefits from the Social Security Administration and for medical assistance.

Community Services Division

ESA's Community Services Division (CSD) provides direct client services to the public through a network of 48 local Community Services Offices (CSOs). Services are also provided through a variety of outstationed staff in different communities, eight fully self-contained and equipped mobile offices which consist of two 40-foot trucks and six smaller 28-foot trucks, and a single statewide Customer Service Contact Center.

- Most client-related services can be provided by phone at 1-877-501-2233, or online at *https://www.washingtonconnection.org*. These services include checking benefit status information, applying for and completing an interview for food or cash benefits, renewing program benefits, reporting changes, and accessing the Answer Phone system.
- Constituent-related services are available by phone at 1-800-865-7801.

Division of Child Support

ESA's Division of Child Support ensures children receive the financial support they need to thrive through the collection and distribution of child support payments. DCS also provides resources to establish parentage and paternity, set up child support and health care coverage, and change existing child support orders.

Through a family-centered approach, DCS helps families achieve economic stability and create a solid foundation for their children. Its Alternative Solutions program connects struggling families to more than 4,600 community resources to help remove barriers and address the needs of the family. DCS also contracts with organizations across the state to provide parents with free or low-cost services for mediation, parenting plans, visitation arrangements, counseling, and parent education.

To locate a local DCS office, get additional information, pay child support, and download or request an application for child support services, go to *www.childsupportonline.wa.gov*. Customers can also call 800-457-6202 or email *DCSAppRequest@dshs.wa.gov* to have a non-assistance application mailed to them.

- Most customer-related services are available by phone at 800-442-5437.
- Constituent-related services are available by phone at 800-457-6202.
- The DCS Alternative Solutions Program provides connections to government and community groups which help parents remove barriers to getting and keeping jobs. To learn more about DCS's Alternative Solutions program, contact AlternativeSolutions@dshs.wa.gov or 360-664-5028.

ESA Partnerships

ESA works collaboratively with other state agencies and community partners to carry out programs and initiatives that help adults, children, and families access what everyone needs to build a solid foundation in their lives: healthy meals, safe housing, and educational opportunities. Coordinated employment and training services are provided by staff from the Employment Security Department, colleges, community action agencies, and nonprofit organizations.

- ESA staff work with any DSHS client via the Alternative Solutions programs by connecting community-based organizations and employers with clients to help remove employment barriers, thereby helping to increase economic security.
- To ensure eligible individuals are connected to food benefits, local Community Services Offices work with a variety of community-based organizations, such as food banks, Basic Food Outreach contractors, and other organizations that advocate for children and families.
- WorkFirst services are provided through state-level agreements with other agencies and regional or local contracts with community-based organizations, including agencies that offer services to persons with limited English proficiency (LEP). Collaboration for this service array is supported by 26 WorkFirst Local Planning Area teams (LPAs), with CSD providing state level coordination and liaison support.
- Basic Food Employment & Training (BFET) provides employment and training opportunities to Basic Food recipients through contracted community-based organizations, tribal organizations, Employment Security Department, and community and technical colleges.
- ESA works in collaboration with the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to administer the Summer EBT program, also referred to as SUN Bucks, that provides food benefits to children who lose access to free and reduced-price meals during the summer months when school is out.
- ESA clients use their Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card to access their cash and food assistance benefits through ATMs and point of sale (POS) machines at participating retailers/businesses across the state.
- ESA staff work with Indian Tribes on a government-to-government basis consistent with the principles of tribal self-governance embodied in the Centennial Accord and DSHS Administrative Policy 7.01.
- Individuals can apply online for a variety of state and federal benefit programs through the *Washington Connection* website, with portal access available at more than 900 community partner sites around the state.
- ESA's Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance invests state and federal funding into ethnic community-based organizations, refugee resettlement agencies, community-based organizations, public health departments and health centers, and other organizations to provide culturally responsive and linguistically appropriate services to refugee and immigrant communities. Services focus on health and wellness, employment and training, immigration-related legal services and naturalization services, and programs to serve the whole family, including the Refugee School Impact Program, Refugee Youth Mentoring, Unaccompanied Refugee Minor Foster Care Program, and Refugee Elders Program.

How to Access ESA Services

- A list of services and contact information is available at *www.dshs.wa.gov* or *www.access.wa.gov*. To do business in person, locate an office, or get additional contact information, individuals can go to *https://www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/esa-find-office*.