

About the Economic Services Administration

In State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2020, one in four 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 1.9 million individuals receive service from more than 4,025 ESA employees dedicated to connecting children, adults, and families to resources and opportunities that help them reach their full potential.

Together, the variety of services ESA provides aim to achieve a unified goal of reducing the number of individuals and families living below 200 percent of the federal poverty level by 50 percent by 2025 in a way that eliminates disparity. This goal—along with specific strategic objectives, success measures, and action plans—is part of [ESA's 2021-2023 Strategic Plan](#). Of course, it is not a goal that can be achieved by ESA alone. [Governor Inslee's Directive 17-13](#) ensures that other state agencies, legislators, and stakeholders representing those most affected by poverty are engaged in work to reduce poverty in Washington State. Under this directive, a work group co-chaired by DSHS, the Employment Security Department, and the Department of Commerce submitted a coordinating draft of the comprehensive 10-year poverty reduction strategic plan to Governor Inslee in January 2020¹. In addition, [House Bill 1482](#) (2018 Legislative Session) established the Legislative-Executive WorkFirst Poverty Reduction Oversight Task Force requiring DSHS to develop a five-year plan² by December 2019 to address intergenerational poverty, subject to oversight and approval by the task force.

ESA's core services focus on:

- **Poverty Reduction** – helping low-income people meet their foundational needs and achieve economic security through cash grants, food, and medical assistance, and employment-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; Pregnant Women Assistance (PWA); Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA); medical assistance; and child support.
- **Child Support** – ensuring parents fulfill their responsibility to their children through consistent financial and medical support. This helps children reach their full potential by making sure they have the resources to thrive.
- **Disability Determination** – determining whether individuals applying for Social Security disability benefits have a medical condition that prevents them from working. Under contract with the federal Social Security Administration, ESA's Division of Disability Determination Services determines

¹ Reducing Poverty & Inequality in Washington State: 10-year plan for the future Coordinating Draft can be viewed at <http://media.wpc.wa.gov/media/WPC/adm/wa-poverty-reduction/prwg-coordinating-draft.pdf>.

² Available at https://app.leg.wa.gov/ReportsToTheLegislature/Home/GetPDF?fileName=Five-Year%20Plan%20to%20Reduce%20Intergenerational%20Poverty_093ab0c3-45f9-471c-82b4-08e31314bad7.pdf
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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 52 local Community Services Offices (CSOs). Services are also provided through a variety of outstationed staff in different communities, two Mobile CSOs, 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 www.washingtonconnection.org. These services include checking benefit status information, 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 (DCS) assists with establishing parentage, as well as establishing, enforcing, and modifying child support and medical support obligations. Through a family-centered approach, DCS has connected families to over 4,500 community resources and partnered to help remove barriers and address the needs of the family. Child Support accounts for as much as 40% of income for families living in poverty.

- 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 1-800-457-6202 or email DCSAppRequest@dshs.wa.gov to have a non-assistance application mailed to them.
- Most client-related services are available by phone at 1-800-442-5437.
- Constituent-related services are available by phone at 1-800-457-6202.
- The DCS Alternative Solutions Program provides connections to government and community groups which help parents remove barriers to getting and keeping jobs. For more information, 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 we all need to build a solid foundation in our 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 Employment Pipeline and 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 regional contracts with community-based organizations, including agencies that offer services to persons with limited English proficiency (LEP).
- Basic Food Employment & Training (BFET) provides employment and training opportunities to Basic Food recipients through contracted community-based, tribal organizations, Employment Security Department (ESD), and community and technical colleges.
- 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 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 service to refugee and immigrant communities. Services focus on health and wellness, employment and training, immigration and naturalization services, and programs to serve the whole family, including the Refugee School Impact Program, Refugee Youth Mentoring, 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>.