

COVID-19
Response

SFY

2021

This chapter provides an overview of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our programs and services.

ESA Briefing
Book

Overview

Our nation and the entire world continue to struggle with COVID-19 and its consequences; Economic Services Administration (ESA) is no exception. The State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2020 ESA Briefing Book described the scale of the pandemic's impact, including spikes in applications and caseloads, and highlighted the policy, program and service delivery changes that were implemented in Spring/Summer of 2020. This section illustrates lasting impacts from the pandemic during SFY 2021.

Community Services Division

Operational Impacts

Limited in-person services at local offices

During SFY 2021, the Community Services Division (CSD) continued to provide most of its key program services virtually while the vast majority of its employees continued to telework.

CSD maintained a skeleton crew in local offices to provide very limited in-person services to the public by appointment only, including:

- Issuing Electronic Benefit cards for homeless customers and alternate cardholders.
- Issuing support services to assist with WorkFirst participation, when mail was not a viable delivery option.
- Helping Aged, Blind, or Disabled (ABD) applicants complete required Consent and Interim Assistance Reimbursement Authorization forms when they rely on general delivery mail services or participate in the Address Confidentiality Program.

To promote a safe environment for staff and the community while providing limited in-person services, CSD modified local office lobbies by:

- Removing lobby phones to reduce risk of infection.
- Removing, rearranging, or blocking off lobby furniture to promote social distancing.
- Marking off floor space at least six feet apart to promote social distancing.
- Limiting lobby access to clients attending pre-scheduled Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card or support service appointments.
- Increasing the number of security guards in certain locations.

Virtual service-delivery model

- CSD redirected the delivery of most services to their statewide customer service contact center (telephone), Washington Connection (online), and the mail. This included:
 - Applications for benefits
 - Eligibility interviews
 - Reporting changes in household circumstances such as income and household composition.
 - Responses to questions
 - TANF eligibility determinations and WorkFirst orientation
 - Requests for phone appointments for WorkFirst case management
 - Requests for phone appointments for social services assessments and ABD disability determinations.
 - Requests for EBT card issuance and replacement
- Expanded use of telephonic signature for CSD administered programs to support a virtual service delivery model.

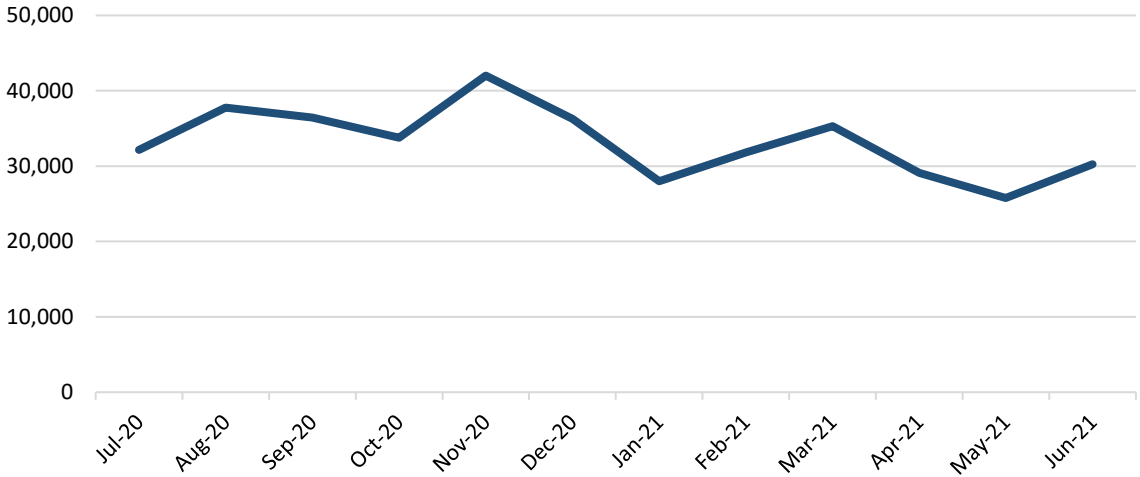
Program Changes and Application Volume

- Pandemic EBT, or P-EBT, Program applications – CSD implemented the P-EBT program to provide food benefits for families that lost access to free and reduced school lunch programs due to school closures.
- Disaster Cash Assistance Program, or DCAP¹ – CSD processed 110,073 DCAP applications between July 2020 and June 2021.
- Deferred Eligibility Reviews (ERs) – between November 2020 and February 2021 CSD implemented federally supported changes to defer eligibility reviews. This change allowed customers to skip their eligibility review requirements at the times when access to CSD services was limited during the COVID crisis.
- Suspension of Mid-Certification Reports (MCRs) – between November 2020 and June 2021 CSD implemented federally supported changes to suspend MCR reporting requirements for all cash and food program participants.
- In accordance with the Centers for Medicaid Services (CMS) guidance and in collaboration with the Washington State Health Care Authority, CSD suspended routine Medical Eligibility Review terminations.

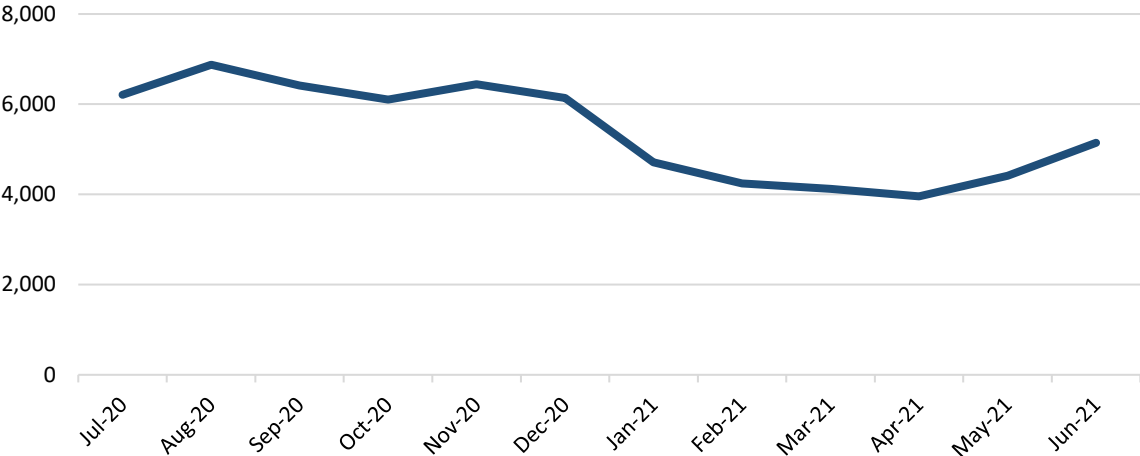
During SFY 2021 the overall volume of applications stabilized and showed some signs of decreasing, as illustrated by the charts below. CSD saw an increase in applications for cash programs towards the end of SFY 2021. This increase was due to the reactivation of DCAP on April 19, 2021 with program changes that allowed clients to apply monthly, instead of once in a 12-month period. As part of the application process, applicants were also considered for other CSD cash programs, which increased the count for the ABD and TANF programs.

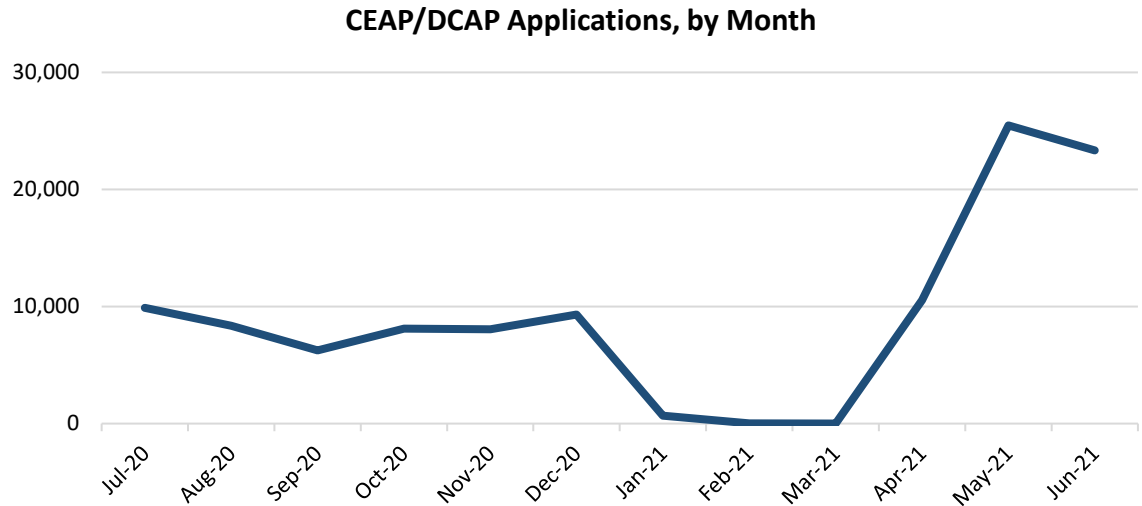
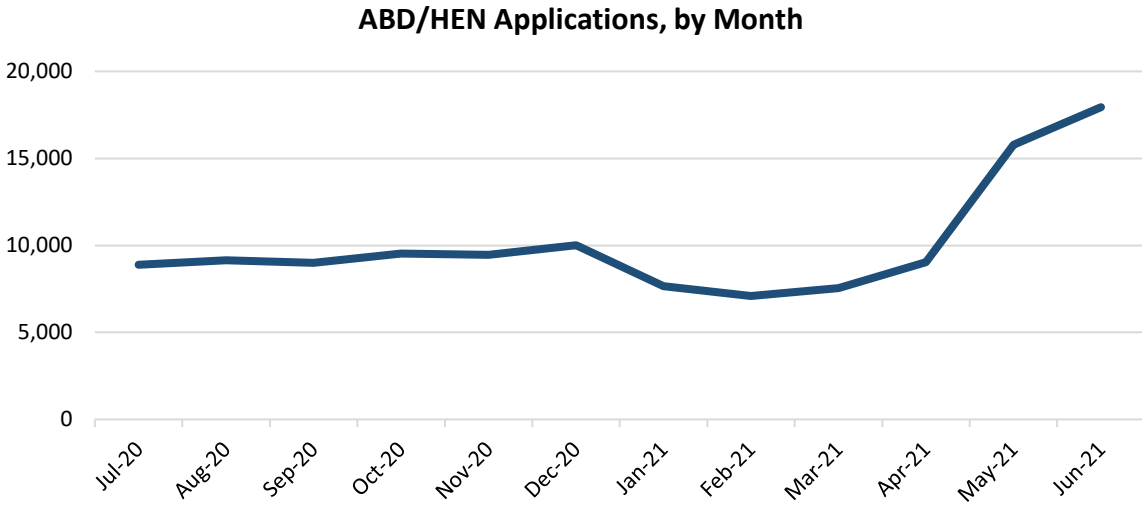
¹ DCAP was first activated on April 17, 2020 to help eligible families with no dependents under 18 meet their basic needs during the COVID-19 state of emergency. This first phase of the program ended effective January 5, 2021. However, DCAP applications received by January 4, 2021 were processed as long as the required interview was completed and required documentation was provided within 30 days of January 4, 2021. This process resulted in some cases receiving DCAP for the months of February and March 2021. The program was reactivated on April 19, 2021 and ended effective June 30, 2021 because available funding was exhausted. Similar to the initial phase of the program, applications received by June 30 could be processed as long as the required interview was completed and required documentation was provided within 30 days (through July 30, 2021). As a result, some cases might receive benefits in July and August 2021.

SNAP/FAP Applications, by Month



TANF/SFA Applications, by Month





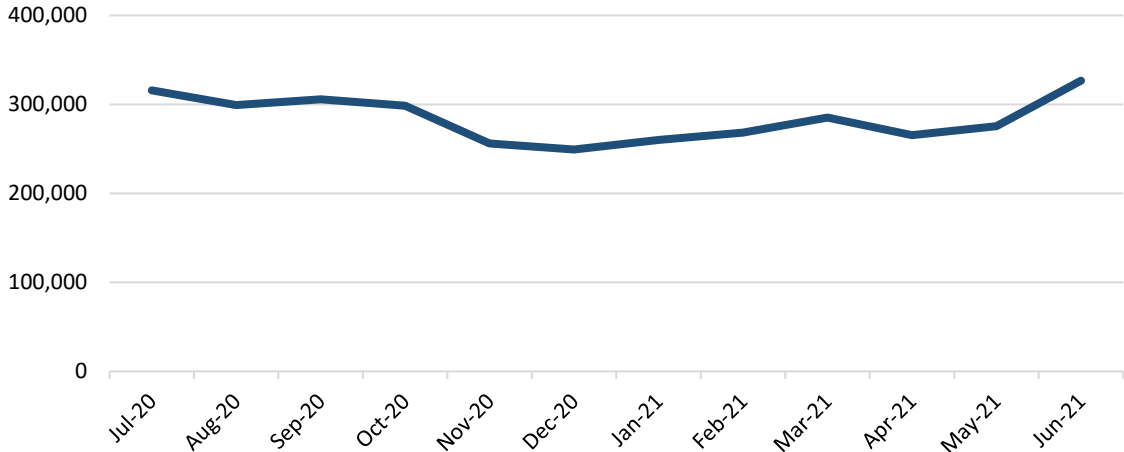
Call center volume and wait times:

After an initial spike in wait times as CSD transitioned to telework in March and April 2020, telephone queue wait times have remained at reasonably low levels as a result of CSD’s decision to transition all eligibility staff to phones. The charts below show the call volume² and also the Average Speed of Answer (ASA)³ for the SFY 2021 in the four main telephone queues for the Customer Service Contact Center (CSCC).

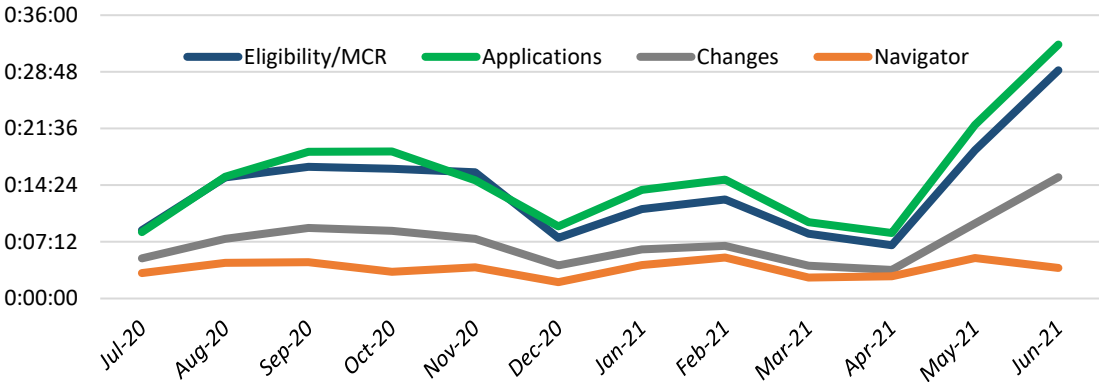
² The call volume in this chart refers to the total number of calls answered and excludes forced disconnects and abandoned calls.

³ Spikes in call volume and average speed of answer in May and June 2021 were attributed to CSD restarting the DCAP program on April 19, 2021. Average speed of answer is captured as H: MM: SS.

Customer Service Call Center - Volume by Month



CSCC - Average Speed of Answer (ASA)



Program Impacts

In response to COVID-19, ESA implemented numerous policy and program changes through emergency rule filings and federal waivers to ensure access to vital benefits during the ongoing national health crisis. These changes were supported through a combination of proclamations issued by the Governor, federal waiver approvals, and the passage of federal and state legislation and funding. Although some changes were possible due to existing flexibilities within programs, ESA could not have carried them out without adequate infusions of state and federal funding.

Basic Food

15% Increase to Food Allotments: In December 2020, the Consolidated Appropriations Act 2021 was signed into law providing states the ability to issue a 15% increase to monthly maximum Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) allotments from January 2021 through June 2021. This period was later expanded to September 30, 2021 as outlined in the American Rescue Plan Act 2021.

Statutory Authority: [The Consolidated Appropriations Act 2021](#), [and the American Rescue Plan Act 2021](#)

Emergency Allotment (EA) Food Supplements: DSHS issued monthly supplemental benefits to food assistance recipients beginning in March 2020 and continuing on a month-to-month basis with federal and state approval. SNAP and Food Assistance Program for Legal Immigrants (FAP) households received the difference between their regular monthly benefit allotment and the maximum amount for their household size. For example, a two-person household that typically received \$200 per month in food benefits, based on their household size, income, and deductions, received an additional \$230 in emergency benefits. This brought the monthly total to \$430, which is the maximum monthly benefit for the household size.

The table below shows the monthly number of cases (households) that received the Emergency Allotment (EA) food supplemental benefits between July 2020 and June 2021.

	# of Cases	# of Clients	Total Emergency Allotments	Average Emergency Allotment Per Case	Average Increase in Allotment Per Case
Jul-2020	294,528	565,783	\$52,895,038	\$179.59	\$160.71
Aug-2020	304,357	587,159	\$55,171,382	\$181.27	\$160.43
Sep-2020	311,450	602,443	\$57,683,087	\$185.21	\$157.66
Oct-2020	313,632	605,464	\$59,878,957	\$190.92	\$169.03
Nov-2020	323,137	624,804	\$62,566,897	\$193.62	\$168.93
Dec-2020	327,706	636,381	\$64,007,267	\$195.32	\$166.87
Jan-2021	333,516	650,018	\$69,288,523	\$207.75	\$319.28
Feb-2021	332,312	647,564	\$69,622,892	\$209.51	\$207.36
Mar-2021	333,269	650,328	\$70,941,788	\$212.87	\$204.90
Apr-2021	534,136	952,951	\$94,765,284	\$177.42	\$252.22
May-2021	525,110	912,781	\$86,707,343	\$165.12	\$256.37
Jun-2021	520,223	903,527	\$86,371,054	\$166.03	\$251.32

Statutory Authority: [H.R. 6201, Families First Coronavirus Response Act \(FFCRA\)](#), authorized the Secretary of Agriculture to allocate funds to increase SNAP household allotments to the maximum amount based on household size.

[RCW 74.08A.120](#) requires FAP to follow the same rules as SNAP, therefore, ESA sought and received authorization from the Office of Financial Management to issue EA supplements for FAP in alignment with those issued for SNAP.

Basic Food Employment and Training (BFET): BFET providers shifted to serving participants virtually and through limited in-person services, provided in accordance with statewide emergency proclamations, in order to ensure those participating in BFET maintained access to support services.

Abled-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDS): The US Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) approved a statewide ABAWD time limit waiver for June 2021 through May

2022. The waiver provides all ABAWDs an exemption from work requirements and helps ensure ongoing access to SNAP benefits.

Pandemic EBT (P-EBT): Pandemic EBT, or P-EBT, is a program that provides food benefits to children who are eligible for free or reduced price meals through the National School Lunch Program but had limited onsite meals at their school or childcare center due to the COVID-19 pandemic. P-EBT benefits help Washington families affected by these closures to buy food and support their basic nutritional needs. The method in which P-EBT was implemented changed significantly between the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years.

1. P-EBT 1.0 (Applications Accepted June 28, 2020 – September 30, 2020)

Approved through the [Families First Coronavirus Response Act](#) in March 2020, Washington received USDA approval to provide P-EBT benefits to families affected by school closures from March 2020 through June 2020. Beginning June 28, 2020, DSHS worked with the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to verify student eligibility for free or reduced price school meals and internally processed applications and determined benefits for households who applied.

DSHS accepted applications for P-EBT until September 30, 2020, although some cases were processed beyond this date. Additional information can be found in the SFY 2020 Briefing Book.

2. P-EBT 2.0 (2020-2021 School Year)

P-EBT continued to the 2020-21 school year (September 2020 through June 2021) with new provisions passed through [the Continuing Appropriations Act 2021 and Other Extensions Act](#), [the Consolidated Appropriations Act 2021](#), and [the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021](#). These acts provided new guidance to P-EBT, including the expansion to children under the age of six and summer P-EBT benefits. USDA approved Washington's school P-EBT plan in March 2021, children under six in June 2021, and summer P-EBT benefits in July 2021. For the new school year, DSHS shifted from internal eligibility determination to contracting with Accenture. Additionally, Accenture coordinated free and reduced price lunch eligibility with OSPI and individual school districts. This coordination enabled eligible children to receive P-EBT benefits directly using a unique P-EBT card outside of DSHS eligibility systems (ACES or Barcode). Benefits were issued without the application process used in the preceding school year when P-EBT 1.0 was implemented.

Children in School:

During the 2020-2021 school year, provision of onsite meal service varied at schools across the state. Working with Accenture and OSPI, a secure file transfer process was developed to allow schools to attest to their onsite meal service availability for the majority of students. The first benefits were issued on March 23, 2021 for the months of September 2020 to January 2021. Cards were sent in batches to eligible children.

P-EBT benefits were calculated using simplified assumptions based on a statewide average of 18 operating days per month, multiplied by the USDA’s Child Nutrition National School Lunch Program daily rate of \$6.82, and then multiplied by a percentage of meal service available to the majority of students at the school. A breakdown of these calculations is as follows:

Meal Service Reported	Calculation	Dollar Amount for the Month
Full remote learning or school closure	$\$6.82 \times 18 \times 100\%$	\$123
One day in-person	$\$6.82 \times 18 \times 80\%$	\$99
Two days in-person	$\$6.82 \times 18 \times 60\%$	\$74
Three days in-person	$\$6.82 \times 18 \times 40\%$	\$50
Four days in-person	$\$6.82 \times 18 \times 20\%$	\$25

Benefits varied based on the schools’ reported on-site meal services for each month of eligibility in the school year.

Pandemic EBT Cases (Households) and Expenditures⁴

	# of Eligible Children in School ⁵	Total P-EBT Dollars Issued	Average Dollars Per Case
Sep-20	549,225	\$64,880,336	\$118.13
Oct-20	549,318	\$64,828,825	\$118.02
Nov-20	547,272	\$64,611,601	\$118.06
Dec-20	547,584	\$64,679,390	\$118.12
Jan-21	547,447	\$64,618,334	\$118.04
Feb-21	504,263	\$53,888,779	\$106.87
Mar-21	504,256	\$53,828,074	\$106.75
Apr-21	466,939	\$44,695,873	\$95.72
May-21	466,939	\$44,695,873	\$95.72
Jun-21	466,939	\$44,686,568	\$95.70

⁴ Data provided by Accenture, October 2021

⁵ Includes students that are directly certified for free or reduced-price meals as a SNAP recipient.

Children under Six:

In accordance with the approved state plan, all children under the age of six and receiving food assistance were deemed to be enrolled in a childcare facility, making them eligible for P-EBT. Children on state-funded food assistance (FAP) received state funded P-EBT.

First benefits were issued on July 27, 2021 for the months of October 2020 through March 2021. P-EBT issuance for the month of April 2021 through June 2021 were issued in August 2021. Assumptions regarding the level of impact for child care facilities in a given county were based on information provided by schools regarding their onsite meal service. Based on the lowest meal service available in each county, all children under six and on SNAP/FAP received a standard benefit level for all children in the county. Benefits varied based on the county of residence, from \$37 to \$123.

Pandemic EBT Children Under Six Cases (Households) ⁶

	# of SNAP Eligible Children Under Six	Federal P-EBT Dollars Issued	# of FAP Eligible Children Under Six	State P-EBT Dollars Issued	Total # of Eligible Children Under Six	Total P-EBT Dollars Issued	Average Dollars Per Case
Oct-20	95,337	\$11,796,389	230	\$28,363	95,567	\$11,824,752	\$123.73
Nov-20	97,530	\$12,017,782	234	\$29,027	97,764	\$12,046,809	\$123.22
Dec-20	100,617	\$12,446,810	241	\$30,232	100,858	\$12,477,042	\$123.71
Jan-21	103,872	\$12,883,641	249	\$31,757	104,121	\$12,915,398	\$124.04
Feb-21	106,960	\$13,232,018	254	\$33,649	107,214	\$13,265,667	\$123.73
Mar-21	108,133	\$13,738,003	256	\$34,952	108,389	\$13,772,955	\$127.07
Apr-21	105,658	\$12,610,449	253	\$30,082	105,911	\$12,640,531	\$119.35
May-21	106,888	\$12,857,615	256	\$30,771	107,144	\$12,888,386	\$120.29
Jun-21	107,562	\$12,946,492	262	\$31,509	107,824	\$12,978,001	\$120.36

Statutory Authority: FFCRA was amended by the American Rescue Plan (H.R. 1319) to allow for the issuance of P-EBT in any school year in which there is a public health emergency declaration affecting the ability for schools and childcare centers to provide onsite meal services. State agencies submitted their plans to USDA for approval.

Governor Proclamations [20-08](#), [20-09](#) and [20-09.1](#)

⁶ Data provided by Accenture, October 2021

Disaster Cash Assistance Program

On April 17, 2020, DSHS activated the Disaster Cash Assistance Program (DCAP). DCAP was available to all Washington families and adults without children who met the income and resource limits of the program and who were not eligible for other cash programs. This phase of the program ended effective January 4, 2021. The 2021 legislature provided additional federal funding for DCAP under HB 1386 and made updates to the program in HB 1151. One notable change, making the program more responsive to long-term emergencies such as COVID-19, was to allow households to receive the benefit more than once in a 12-month period. On April 19, 2021, DSHS reactivated the program, which ran through June 30, 2021⁷.

To be eligible for DCAP, a one-person household needed to have less than \$363 in net income in the month of application, after deductions were applied. Eligible individuals with no income qualified up to the maximum payment amount of \$363 for their emergent basic needs.

Statutory Authority: On February 29, 2020, Governor Inslee issued a [State of Emergency Proclamation](#) (20-05) for all Washington counties, in response to COVID-19, directing state agencies to use all resources necessary to prepare for and respond to the outbreak. In subsequent proclamations, Governor Inslee directed DSHS to expand the Family Emergency Assistance Program⁸ to individuals and families impacted by COVID-19. The April 2021 proclamation reactivating the program allowed eligible households to receive the benefit monthly as long as they applied each month.

DCAP Cases (Households)

	# of CEAP/DCAP Applications ⁹	# of Cases ¹⁰	# of Clients	Grant Expenditures	Average Payment Per Case	Average Household Size
Jul-2020	9,890	7,514	7,834	\$2,436,251	\$324.23	1.0
Aug-2020	8,364	6,066	6,442	\$1,995,817	\$329.02	1.1
Sep-2020	6,249	4,413	4,623	\$1,445,215	\$327.49	1.0
Oct-2020	8,124	5,573	5,841	\$1,826,196	\$327.69	1.0
Nov-2020	8,058	5,240	5,449	\$1,725,268	\$329.25	1.0
Dec-2020	9,311	6,152	6,399	\$2,034,130	\$330.65	1.0
Jan-2021	686	681	701	\$225,100	\$330.54	1.0

⁷ Funds allocated to reinstate the DCAP in HB 1386 were exhausted as of June 3, 2021. Additional funds were authorized from the Governor’s Office Budget Stabilization Account to the DCAP program starting June 14, 2021 and running through June 30, 2021.

⁸ Family Emergency Assistance Program directs DSHS to create a Consolidated Emergency Assistance Program (CEAP) which provides one-time cash grants once within 12 months to families who are very low income but do not meet the eligibility requirements for other cash assistance programs. This also includes Disaster Cash Assistance Program during a declared state of emergency.

⁹ DCAP was first activated on April 17, 2020 to help eligible families with no dependents under 18 meet their basic needs during the COVID-19 state of emergency. This first phase of the program ended effective January 5, 2021. However, DCAP applications received by January 4, 2021 were processed as long as the required interview was completed and required documentation was provided within 30 days of January 4, 2021. This resulted in some cases receiving DCAP for the months of February and March 2021. The program was reactivated on April 19, 2021 and ended effective June 30, 2021 because available funding was exhausted. Similar to the initial phase of the program, applications received by June 30 were processed as long as the required interview was completed and required documentation was provided within 30 days (through July 30, 2021). As a result, some cases may receive benefits in July and August 2021.

¹⁰ Because each DCAP issuance in a given month is counted as a separate case, the case count may exceed the client count in some months.

Feb-2021	20	10	11	\$3,403	\$340.30	1.1
Mar-2021	6	Program Inactive				
Apr-2021	10,548	7,378	7,443	\$2,383,656	\$323.08	1.0
May-2021	25,470	20,356	20,287	\$6,703,901	\$329.33	1.0
Jun-2021	23,345	19,283	19,157	\$6,431,599	\$333.54	1.0

DCAP Cases¹¹ (Households) by County of Residence, SFY 2021

County	# of Cases	% of Total	# of Clients	% of Total	County	# of Cases	% of Total	# of Clients	% of Total
Adams	127	0.2%	105	0.2%	Lewis	1,060	1.3%	856	1.4%
Asotin	540	0.7%	395	0.7%	Lincoln	52	0.1%	48	0.1%
Benton	2,046	2.5%	1,568	2.6%	Mason	868	1.1%	666	1.1%
Chelan	669	0.8%	522	0.9%	Okanogan	882	1.1%	632	1.0%
Clallam	1,138	1.4%	817	1.4%	Pacific	314	0.4%	250	0.4%
Clark	4,441	5.4%	3,443	5.7%	Pend Oreille	254	0.3%	187	0.3%
Columbia	49	0.1%	39	0.1%	Pierce	11,357	13.8%	8,187	13.6%
Cowlitz	2,263	2.7%	1,582	2.6%	San Juan	75	0.1%	59	0.1%
Douglas	285	0.3%	250	0.4%	Skagit	1,387	1.7%	1,041	1.7%
Ferry	106	0.1%	97	0.2%	Skamania	100	0.1%	75	0.1%
Franklin	806	1.0%	614	1.0%	Snohomish	7,132	8.7%	5,136	8.5%
Garfield	11	<0.1%	16	<0.1%	Spokane	9,261	11.2%	6,487	10.7%
Grant	1,174	1.4%	1,061	1.8%	Stevens	614	0.7%	456	0.8%
Grays Harbor	1,979	2.4%	1,412	2.3%	Thurston	3,254	4.0%	2,377	3.9%
Island	418	0.5%	325	0.5%	Wahkiakum	25	<0.1%	23	<0.1%
Jefferson	222	0.3%	192	0.3%	Walla Walla	589	0.7%	443	0.7%
King	18,512	22.5%	13,570	22.5%	Whatcom	2,615	3.2%	1,831	3.0%
Kitsap	2,349	2.9%	1,735	2.9%	Whitman	189	0.2%	160	0.3%
Kittitas	237	0.3%	223	0.4%	Yakima	4,713	5.7%	3,297	5.5%
Klickitat	230	0.3%	190	0.3%	Not Reported/ Unidentifiable	0	0.0%	0	0.0%

¹¹ Because each DCAP issuance is counted as a separate case and the April 2021 proclamation reactivating the program allowed eligible households to receive the benefit monthly as long as they applied each month, the case count exceeds the client count in most counties.

DCAP Demographics, SFY 2021

Characteristic	All Clients		All Adults	
	Number	% of Total Clients	Number	% of Total Adults
Total Clients	60,367	100.0%	59,593	100.0%

Gender	All Clients		All Adults	
	Number	% of Total Clients	Number	% of Total Adults
Female	22,811	37.8%	22,423	37.6%
Male	37,550	62.2%	37,164	62.4%
Unknown	6	<0.1%	6	<0.1%

Race	All Clients		All Adults	
	Number	% of Total Clients	Number	% of Total Adults
Hispanic Origin	7,571	12.5%	7,274	12.2%
Not Hispanic or Latino¹²	52,796	87.5%	52,319	87.8%
White	36,883	61.1%	36,595	61.4%
Black/African American	6,543	10.8%	6,485	10.9%
Asian/Pacific Islander	2,179	3.6%	2,137	3.6%
American Indian/Alaska Native	3,565	5.9%	3,534	5.9%
Two or More Races	1,962	3.3%	1,950	3.3%
Not Reported/Unidentifiable	1,664	2.8%	1,618	2.7%

Marital Status (Adults Only)	All Clients		All Adults	
	Number	% of Total Clients	Number	% of Total Adults
Separated			4,307	7.2%
Married			2,277	3.8%
Never Married			37,043	62.2%
Divorced			11,084	18.6%
Widowed			1,019	1.7%
Not Reported/Unidentifiable			3,863	6.5%

Citizenship Status	All Clients		All Adults	
	Number	% of Total Clients	Number	% of Total Adults
U.S. Citizen	57,112	94.6%	56,546	94.9%
Resident Noncitizen	1,738	2.9%	1,725	2.9%
U.S. National¹³	102	0.2%	97	0.2%
Undocumented Noncitizen	1,188	2.0%	1,051	1.8%
Not Reported/Unidentifiable	227	0.4%	174	0.3%

¹² Includes clients not reporting whether or not they are of Hispanic or Latino origin.

¹³ U.S. National: A national of the United States or a person who, though not a citizen of the United States, owes permanent allegiance to the United States (e.g., persons born in American Samoa or Swains Island).

DCAP Demographics, SFY 2021 (continued)

Characteristic	All Clients		All Adults	
	Number	% of Total Clients	Number	% of Total Adults

Homeless Status	All Clients		All Adults	
Homeless ¹⁴	29,441	48.8%	29,385	49.3%

Education Status (Adults Only)	All Adults	
Less than a High School Diploma	14,984	25.1%
High School Graduate or GED	29,863	50.1%
Some College or College Degree	14,469	24.3%
Not Reported/Unidentifiable	277	0.5%

Age	All Clients		All Adults	
< 1 Year Old	12	<0.1%		
1 – 5 Years Old	262	0.4%		
6 – 10 Years Old	209	0.3%		
11 – 15 Years Old	207	0.3%		
16 – 17 Years Old	84	0.1%		
18 – 24 Years Old	6,922	11.5%	6,922	11.6%
25 – 34 Years Old	17,666	29.3%	17,666	29.6%
35 – 44 Years Old	15,443	25.6%	15,443	25.9%
45 – 54 Years Old	12,086	20.0%	12,086	20.3%
55 – 64 Years Old	7,109	11.8%	7,109	11.9%
65+ Years Old	367	0.6%	367	0.6%
Average Age of Children	8.5 Years			
Average Age of Adults	38.9 Years			

¹⁴ Homeless is defined (based on the self-reported living arrangement code in ACES) as: homeless without housing, homeless with housing (staying temporarily with family or friends—commonly referred to as "couch surfing"), emergency shelter, or domestic violence shelter.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families/WorkFirst

Time Limit Extensions: Effective April 1, 2020, DSHS expanded the criteria for TANF 60-month time limit extension to support families experiencing hardships due to the COVID-19 emergency. Families who exhausted 60 months on TANF cash assistance and experienced hardships due to COVID-19 were not terminated from or denied benefits.

The table below shows the resulting change in the number of TANF households with an adult recipient that were granted a time-limit extension.

Adult Recipient Cases with a Time-Limit Extension

	SFY 2020	SFY 2021	% Change
July	1,371	2,990	118.1%
August	1,415	3,168	123.9%
September	1,456	3,233	122.0%
October	1,498	3,301	120.4%
November	1,547	3,366	117.6%
December	1,529	3,501	129.0%
January	1,519	3,555	134.0%
February	1,541	3,570	131.7%
March	1,581	3,552	124.7%
April	2,010	3,511	74.7%
May	2,446	3,479	42.2%
June	2,813	3,520	25.1%

The table below shows the monthly number of TANF households with an adult recipient that were granted a time limit extension under the Caring for a Disabled Adult/COVID-19 category.

Adult Recipient Cases (Households) Granted a Time-Limit Extension for a Disabled Adult/COVID-19¹⁵

	# of Cases
Jul-2020	1,396
Aug-2020	1,629
Sep-2020	1,744
Oct-2020	1,863
Nov-2020	1,989
Dec-2020	2,165
Jan-2021	2,243
Feb-2021	2,319
Mar-2021	2,358
Apr-2021	2,350

¹⁵ Because ESA had less than a month to implement the new COVID-19 time-limit extension, ESA IT systems could not be updated quickly enough to separately track the number of families in a time-limit extension due to the pandemic. In order to monitor and document this population, the infrequently used Caring for a Disabled Adult extension category was temporarily repurposed. In the year prior to the pandemic, and a monthly average of 21 households were in this extension category.

May-2021	2,347
Jun-2021	2,349

WorkFirst participation good cause exemptions: Beginning on March 16, 2020, all WorkFirst participants were granted a temporary exemption from WorkFirst participation requirements. Although ESA continued to provide clients the option to participate—and provided support services and limited case management to enable clients’ participation—WorkFirst participants were not required to engage in program activities. DSHS staff used a COVID-19 related component code (CO) in cases where WorkFirst participants were unable to participate or participate fully for pandemic-related reasons. The table below shows the monthly number of WorkFirst participants coded with the CO component.

Cases with a Recipient Open in a COVID-19 Related Component Code (CO)

	# of Cases
Jul-2020	13,476
Aug-2020	13,898
Sep-2020	13,528
Oct-2020	13,309
Nov-2020	13,191
Dec-2020	14,516
Jan-2021	14,539
Feb-2021	14,278
Mar-2021	14,280
Apr-2021	13,687
May-2021	13,153
Jun-2021	13,082

WorkFirst Sanction Process and Home Visit Suspension: Effective March 16, 2020, DSHS also temporarily suspended WorkFirst sanction grant reduction and termination penalties. As described above, WorkFirst services were offered each month; however, no adverse action was taken as a result of non-participation. Sanction suspension eliminated the need for a home visit by staff as part of the sanction process. Clients who closed in sanction prior to March 16, 2020 and reapplied did not have to cure their sanction before regaining cash grant eligibility.

Teen Living Assessment Home Visits Suspension: On March 16, 2020, Teen Living Assessment home visits were suspended. Teen Living Assessments, which may include a home visit, are required for all unmarried, minor parents applying for TANF cash assistance, to determine suitability of living arrangements and offer support to the household. ESA continued to conduct Teen Living Assessments completing all required assessment screening tools in the office or over the phone.

Telephone WorkFirst Orientations: All WorkFirst orientations were conducted via the telephone.

WorkFirst Work-Study: WorkFirst work-study participants at some colleges continued to be employed and receive payment for a portion of the year even if they were temporarily unable to participate due to operational changes or closures as a result of COVID-19.

Statutory Authority: All TANF and WorkFirst changes were made in accordance with federal law and within existing statutory authority. As required, the state’s TANF Plan was updated to reflect temporary policy changes, and the revised plan was submitted to the federal Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Administration for Children and Families (ACF).

Pandemic Emergency Assistance Fund: The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 established a new \$1 billion Pandemic Emergency Assistance Fund (PEAF) to assist needy families impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The funding is required to be used for short-term non-recurring benefits and cannot supplant existing spending. Washington state applied for and received its full allotment of PEAFF of \$22,766,008. Washington will distribute PEAFF as a one-time, per child benefit to all children in households receiving TANF/SFA or SNAP/FAP and under 75% (Federal Poverty Level) FPL in the month of issuance. PEAFF is expected to be issued in a single month in the spring of 2022, once needed automation is completed, complying with the federal requirement that all funds be expended by September 30, 2022.

Aged, Blind, or Disabled (ABD) Cash Assistance/Housing Essential Needs (HEN) Referral Programs

Treatment monitoring suspension: Effective March 18, 2020, ESA temporarily extended good cause exemptions to clients who did not provide verification of their participation in medical and mental health treatment, substance use assessment and treatment, and participation in vocational rehabilitation.

Disability and Incapacity Reviews and Evaluations: Effective March 26, 2020, ESA temporarily postponed ABD disability reviews, modified HEN Referral incapacity reviews and expanded medical evidence rules for eligibility purposes.

Mental Incapacity Evaluation contracts were amended to allow for telephonic psychological evaluations.

Statutory Authority: All ABD and HEN Referral changes were made within existing statutory authority.

Classic Medicaid¹⁶ Eligibility

Certification periods scheduled to end in March 2020 are extended through the end of the Public Health Emergency in three month intervals. Benefits were maintained for recipients of Medicaid unless the individual requested termination, the individual was no longer a Washington state resident, or the individual was deceased.

Additional changes regarding Medicaid eligibility to support clients include:

- Reinstating Medicaid coverage if closed on or after March 18, 2020.
- Allowing a 30-day extension to provide verification of circumstances.
- Accepting self-attestation of income and resources at application, renewal and change of circumstances.
- Accepting self-attestation for medical expenses incurred needed to meet spenddown amounts for purposes of medically needy eligibility.

Statutory Authority: All Medicaid changes were made as directed by the Health Care Authority (HCA) and in accordance with Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS).

	Classic Medicaid Eligibility Review Extensions
Jul-2020	5,413
Aug-2020	4,943
Sep-2020	4,052
Oct-2020	6,164
Nov-2020	5,312
Dec-2020	8,581
Jan-2021	7,976
Feb-2021	7,952
Mar-2021	7,928
Apr-2021	6,907
May-2021	6,631
Jun-2021	6,763

¹⁶ Classic Medicaid includes Alien Emergency Medicaid (AEM), Healthcare for Workers with Disabilities, Long Term Care, Medicare Savings Program, Refugee Medical, SSI Medicaid, SSI Related Medicaid, and Medical Care Services.

Certification Waivers for TANF, SFA, ABD, HEN Referral, WFS, and Basic Food Assistance

The Continuing Appropriations Act maintained certification extensions for SNAP beginning November 2020 through February 2021. November and December 2020 certification periods were extended two months and January and February 2021 certification periods were extended four months. All Basic Food Mid-Certification Reviews were waived from November 2020 through June 30, 2021. To ensure customers continued to receive critical benefits and services, and to streamline program administration, ESA waived the certification periods for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, State Family Assistance, Aged, Blind or Disabled Cash Assistance, Housing Essential Needs Referral, Working Family Support, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and State Food Assistance Program.

Statutory Authority:

FFCRA authorized USDA’s Secretary of Agriculture to waive core interview and certification requirements for SNAP processing. USDA allowed state agencies to extend certification periods and temporarily waive periodic report form submissions for households whose certification periods expired in March, April or May 2020. The Continuing Appropriations Act maintained certification for SNAP beginning November 2020 through February 2021. The corresponding cash assistance changes were made within existing statutory authority.

	ABD Eligibility Review Extensions	HEN Referral Eligibility Review Extensions	ABD Mid-Certification Reviews Waived	HEN Referral Mid-Certification Reviews Waived
Jul-2020	0	0	2,012	376
Aug-2020	0	0	2,243	406
Sep-2020	0	0	1,874	263
Oct-2020	0	0	1,432	248
Nov-2020	2,113	375	875	197
Dec-2020	2,570	465	854	161
Jan-2021	1,567	315	1,551	230
Feb-2021	1,746	352	1,769	240
Mar-2021	0	0	1,887	259
Apr-2021	0	0	2,077	249
May-2021	0	0	1,065	139
Jun-2021	0	0	787	117

	SNAP/FAP Eligibility Review Extensions	SNAP/FAP Mid- Certification Reviews Waived	TANF/SFA Eligibility Review Extensions	TANF/SFA Mid- Certification Reviews Waived
Jul-2020	0	35,181	0	1,909
Aug-2020	0	45,627	0	2,403
Sep-2020	0	58,040	0	3,690
Oct-2020	0	30,781	0	2,436
Nov-2020	59,260	17,695	2,364	1,661
Dec-2020	65,145	15,642	2,737	1,467
Jan-2021	28,779	37,971	1,322	2,487
Feb-2021	35,757	36,782	1,668	2,381
Mar-2021	0	38,623	0	2,576
Apr-2021	0	52,839	0	2,798
May-2021	0	22,683	0	1,619
Jun-2021	0	16,581	0	1,106

Social Security Number Good Cause Waiver

On March 17, 2020, the U.S. Social Security Administration (SSA) suspended all face-to-face services to the public at field offices nationwide until further notice. Only limited, critical services were provided via phone, mail, and online. Applications for a non-work Social Security Number (SSN) due to immigration status were not considered a critical service by SSA, and were therefore suspended. State and federal regulations require each person who applies for or receives cash or food assistance benefits to provide an SSN or the proof of the SSN application to the Department.

Under USDA FNS regulations, SNAP participants are allowed a good cause period of up to two months to provide an SSN. On April 10, 2020, USDA FNS approved a waiver to extend the good cause period for an additional three months which allowed the Department to grant good cause for a period of up to five months. FNS approved this waiver through December 31, 2021. The state-administered programs TANF/SFA and ABD were able to establish this good cause waiver without seeking federal approval.

Statutory Authority: FFCRA authorized the Secretary of Agriculture to waive core interview and certification requirements for SNAP processing. USDA FNS approved waiver COVID-067 based on the determination that the adjustment was consistent with what is practicable under actual conditions in areas affected by the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency.

Select Cash, Food and Medical Program Clients¹⁷ and Cases¹⁸ with a Social Security Number Good Cause Waiver, July 2020 - June 2021

	All Selected Programs		ABD ¹⁹		Basic Food ²⁰		DCA ²¹	
	# Clients	# Cases	# Clients	# Cases	# Clients	# Cases	# Clients	# Cases
Jul-2020	18,273	19,721	15	15	2,228	1,571	2	1
Aug-2020	18,418	19,903	15	15	2,341	1,662	1	1
Sep-2020	18,522	20,132	14	14	2,459	1,776	0	0
Oct-2020	18,629	20,342	16	16	2,541	1,856	1	1
Nov-2020	18,702	20,594	15	15	2,683	2,047	1	1
Dec-2020	18,989	21,120	15	15	2,913	2,262	1	1
Jan-2021	19,277	21,618	16	16	3,118	2,465	1	1
Feb-2021	19,253	21,722	19	19	3,214	2,574	0	0
Mar-2021	19,405	21,921	21	21	3,294	2,645	0	0
Apr-2021	19,491	21,980	21	21	3,314	2,682	0	0
May-2021	19,678	22,182	17	17	3,328	2,684	0	0
Jun-2021	19,709	22,116	17	17	3,238	2,620	1	1

¹⁷Clients are unduplicated within each program. The total number of clients across “All Selected Programs” is also unduplicated and does not equal the sum of clients across all programs because some clients are participants in multiple programs.

¹⁸ Cases are unduplicated within each program and are those Assistance Units (AUs) with at least one recipient whose Social Security Number is coded as Good Cause.

¹⁹ ABD is Aged, Blind, or Disabled Cash Assistance.

²⁰ Basic Food includes Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Food Assistance Program for Legal Immigrants (FAP).

²¹ DCA is Diversion Cash Assistance.

	HEN Referral ²²		Medical ²³		RCA ²⁴	
	# Clients	# Cases	# Clients	# Cases	# Clients	# Cases
Jul-2020	2	2	17,564	17,591	25	21
Aug-2020	2	2	17,669	17,703	18	14
Sep-2020	2	2	17,791	17,815	36	29
Oct-2020	2	2	17,897	17,919	20	17
Nov-2020	1	1	17,940	17,962	14	13
Dec-2020	0	0	18,178	18,200	21	20
Jan-2021	2	2	18,414	18,434	21	20
Feb-2021	2	2	18,396	18,424	28	24
Mar-2021	0	0	18,527	18,554	29	26
Apr-2021	0	0	18,556	18,578	25	21
May-2021	1	1	18,746	18,778	27	22
Jun-2021	0	0	18,798	18,822	22	18

	SSP ²⁵		TANF/SFA ²⁶		WFS ²⁷	
	# Clients	# Cases	# Clients	# Cases	# Clients	# Cases
Jul-2020	8	8	704	504	8	8
Aug-2020	8	8	693	490	8	8
Sep-2020	8	8	702	480	8	8
Oct-2020	8	8	769	515	8	8
Nov-2020	5	5	772	545	5	5
Dec-2020	5	5	835	612	5	5
Jan-2021	5	5	892	670	5	5
Feb-2021	2	2	877	675	2	2
Mar-2021	2	2	874	671	2	2
Apr-2021	2	2	875	674	2	2
May-2021	2	2	877	676	2	2
Jun-2021	3	3	819	632	3	3

²² HEN Referral is a referral to the Housing and Essential Needs Program administered by the Department of Commerce.

²³ Medical includes both classic and Modified Adjusted Gross Income (MAGI) medical programs served by ESA, Aging and Long-Term Support Administration (AL TSA), and Health Care Authority (HCA). Some clients are in multiple Assistance Units (AUs) in the same month due to participation in multiple medical coverage groups.

²⁴ RCA is Refugee Cash Assistance.

²⁵ SSP is State Supplemental Payment.

²⁶ TANF is Temporary Assistance for Needy Families; SFA is State Family Assistance.

²⁷ WFS is Working Family Support.

Domestic Violence (DV) Victim Services

Family Violence Prevention Services Act (FVPSA): The DV Victim Services program awarded supplemental FVPSA CARES Act funding to 43 ESA contracted domestic violence programs. The supplemental funds were intended to address domestic violence victim service needs related to COVID-19, including but not limited to:

- Providing temporary housing and assistance (e.g., hotel stays or other emergency sheltering services).
- Responding to immediate needs of victims.
- Equipping victim service staff to provide advocacy services from home (e.g., cell phones, meeting software, and laptops, etc.).
- Purchasing cleaning services and personal protective supplies to protect staff and clients at the shelter and during provision of in-person services.

Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance (ORIA)

COVID-19 Response Services

In response to COVID-19, Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance (ORIA) contracted service providers offered a menu of different service options to meet the emergent needs of immigrants and refugees in our communities. These services include the following:

- Needs assessments that address overall financial stability, housing, employment, health, social and emotional well-being of the entire family.
- Information and referrals on resources for COVID-19, 2020 Census, public benefits and new stimulus programs and updates on available services and resources.
- Providing and/or connecting with new services, including helping people apply for Unemployment Insurance Benefits, addressing food insecurity, addressing gaps in child care and facilitating employer outreach and engagement.
- Providing education and client engagement by offering opportunities to address social isolation through remote options, engaging volunteers to support new community members remotely and providing distance-learning options for civics and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes.

COVID-19 Emergency Support Services for Refugees Fund

ORIA established a fund to provide resources for refugees and other eligible immigrants to receive short-term assistance to cover immediate needs, including rent, utilities, internet and other approved costs. Eligible participants were able to access these resources by applying through one of ORIA's contracted services providers.

Extension of Refugee Cash Assistance and Refugee Medical Assistance

Through a waiver from the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement, Washington state extended Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) for single or married refugees or humanitarian immigrants without children, and Refugee Medical Assistance for those ineligible for Washington Apple Health. The waiver expanded eligibility for these benefits beyond eight months. For more information, please refer to the [program announcement](#).

Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Pathway Clients Who Received COVID-19 Related Services, SFY 2021

SFY 2021	# of Clients
July	327
August	299
September	273
October	404
November	337
December	328
January	436
February	334
March	345
April	403
May	380
June	351
Mo. Avg.	351
Annual Unduplicated	1,268

Naturalization Service Clients Who Received COVID-19 Related Services, SFY 2021

SFY 2021	# of Clients
July	70
August	66
September	89
October	65
November	46
December	41
January	55
February	52
March	117
April	92
May	65
June	164
Mo. Avg.	77
Annual Unduplicated	910

PRIME Clients Who Received COVID-19 Related Services, SFY 2021

SFY 2021	# of Clients
July	33
August	17
September	11
October	11
November	12
December	19
January	14
February	10
March	40
April	30
May	36
June	49
Mo. Avg.	24
Annual Unduplicated	208

Division of Child Support (DCS)

Operational Impacts

Office Lobby Closures

On March 19, 2020, all nine Child Support field offices located across the state and the headquarters location closed in-person access to customers. The offices posted a variety of signage with information regarding:

- Phone numbers to access child support services
- Alternate payment methods
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) guidelines

Payments Received Over-the-Counter

The closure of office lobbies also impacted payments that DCS would typically receive over-the-counter by customers. Signage posted at each office provided information for alternate means of making payments.

In the 12 months preceding COVID-19, the average volume of payments received from Alternate Payment Vendors was 1,397 per month. This count included a relatively stable upward trend of about 10% over that 12-month period. Following the office lobby closures in March 2020, there was an initial increase in April 2020.

Mail, Payment Handling, and Other Office Functions

While lobbies were closed to the public since March 19, 2020, staff remained in each office to maintain functions that could not be completed in a telework environment. These functions included, but were not limited to:

- Receiving and processing mail
- Processing payments received through the mail
- Receiving deliveries

Effective June 19, 2020, a process was established for field offices to begin routing non-cash payments to the centralized payment address so they could be processed in the Central Services Department located in the headquarters building. Prior to COVID, payments mailed to local office mailing addresses were received and processed, and then an informational letter was sent to the sender with the correct payment mailing address of PO Box 45868, Olympia, WA 98504.

Non-Assistance Applications

When office lobbies are open, customers have the option to request and drop off non-assistance applications over-the-counter. Effective March 19, 2020, these options were suspended due to office lobby closures.

- In the 12 months preceding COVID-19, DCS was receiving an average of 1,095 non-assistance applications per month.
- Starting with March 2020 and the months following, this monthly average decreased to 696.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the primary methods customers had available to receive documents needed to apply for DCS services included:

- Printing applicable forms from the DCS website
- Calling the 800 number to request an application be mailed
- Visiting a DCS field office to request an application over-the-counter

Applications could then be mailed, faxed, or dropped off at a field office. There is now an additional link on the DCS website for customers to complete a request form for a non-assistance application to be mailed to them. Customers can now enter their name and address and request the application. As a result, staff are now seeing an increase in average monthly non-assistance applications received.

Emergency Rule for Service of Process

On March 20, 2020, the United States Postal Service made temporary changes to its certified mail signature-gathering procedures. In response, DCS adopted an emergency rule to address the impact of these changes on the Division’s efforts to establish and enforce child support obligations.

The emergency rule states that DCS considers service by certified mail, return receipt requested (CMRR) valid ten days after the notice is sent to the non-custodial or custodial parent with restricted delivery, and the USPS employee signed the receipt on behalf of the individual taking delivery. The emergency rule requires restricted delivery when serving by certified mail, return receipt requested.

Internal Revenue Offsets

DCS regularly reports to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) for a federal offset against any possible income tax return for which a non-custodial parent may be entitled. In 2020, DCS received a tremendous increase of IRS offsets due to the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. The CARES act provided cash economic impact payments, also known as stimulus payments, to US citizens. The CARES Act provided for child support debts to be offset from these payments. Subsequent aid provided via the Consolidated Appropriations Act were not subject to offsets for child support debts.

The chart below shows the volume and dollar amounts received in early January 2020 through June 2020 compared to the same time period in 2021.

	1/6/2020 – 6/29/2020	1/5/2021 – 6/28/2021	Percent Decrease (2020 to 2021)
Volume of intercepts received (by trace numbers) ²⁸	90,112	31,330	65.23%
Intercept amounts	\$114,629,185	\$47,592,127	58.48%

DCS Policy Clarification Memo 20-003 – How DCS Works with Individuals Impacted by COVID-19

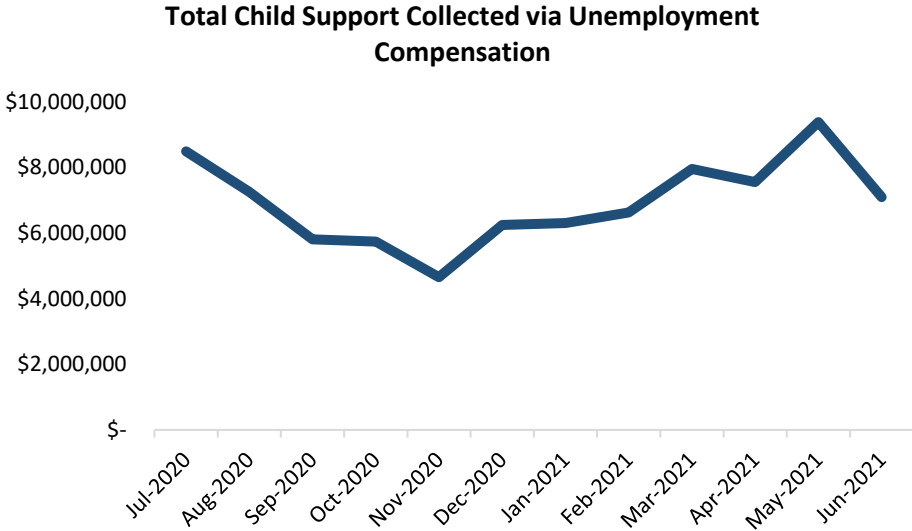
COVID-19 is having an economic impact on people with child support orders leading to both short-term

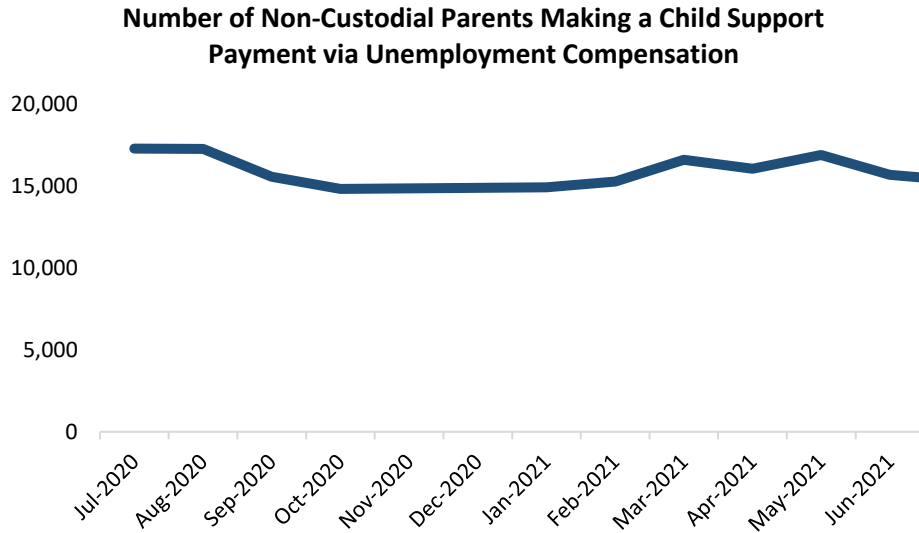
²⁸ DCS certifies arrears debt to the IRS as DSHS and custodial parent (CP) arrears. The IRS sends intercepts back, each having a unique identifier known as a trace number. A non-custodial parent (NCP) can have 2 or more trace numbers for one offset. Our system combines the separate trace number amounts into one payment before it is posted to cases.

and long-term financial uncertainty. Loss of income due to COVID-19 can lead to even greater economic disparities for families already struggling financially or in poverty. In response, DCS issued new guidance to respond to situations where COVID-19 has impacted a family’s financial circumstances. This guidance outlines ways for DCS staff to incorporate additional considerations when evaluating enforcement actions.

Unemployment Compensation Payments

The Federal CARES Act was signed into law on March 27, 2020. This Act provided enhanced Unemployment Compensation (UC) benefits and Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA). One considerable benefit was a possible additional \$600 per week on top of any regular UC benefit, a supplement which was reduced to \$300 per week during July 2020. Those additional benefits ended on September 4, 2021. The additional non-custodial parents eligible for UC benefits and then the additional monetary benefit made a significant impact on UC payments received as a result of wage withholdings sent to the Employment Security Department. These wage withholdings were for payment of current and back support owed by non-custodial parents.





Grants

Several DCS grant programs were directly impacted by COVID-19.

- Families Forward Washington was paused from March 25, 2020 through May 15, 2020 while training providers were closed and remote enrollment procedures were developed and approved.
- Access and Visitation providers were unable to serve customers while offices were closed and virtual delivery methods were developed.
- Digital Marketing streaming radio ads were postponed within the Digital Marketing grant to reconsider messaging and timing.

Parentage Program

- COVID-19 has directly affected administrative parentage establishment by Acknowledgment of Parentage (AOP). Many hospitals have limited patient contact, reducing their ability to assist families with the completion of the AOP. DCS is working with hospitals to ensure AOPs are completed and filed with the Department of Health (DOH), Center for Health Statistics (CHS). DCS staff are unable to assist parents with the completion of AOPs in the office and are only able to work with parents by phone, regular mail and email to ensure the AOP will be accepted and successfully filed by DOH. Without in-person assistance, time is added to the AOP filing process. Our partners at DOH/CHS have also been impacted by COVID-19. The DOH/CHS customer service counter has been closed to the public since March 2020. DOH/CHS encountered staffing challenges as several staff filled project positions to support the surveillance system for COVID 19. DCS Parentage Program staff continue to work with DOH/CHS partners to ensure AOPs are filed.

Support Change Orders

- The Division of Child Support experienced a record number of support change orders instigated by the mass lay-offs experienced by thousands of parents across the state and was further inundated with delays and processing revisions to account for new ESD fraud identification and prevention procedures