

Program Integrity and Fraud Prevention

Washington State Department of Social and Health Services
Economic Services Administration

Approximately one in four Washington residents rely on assistance such as cash grants, food, child support, disability determination and supports for transition to employment among other services administered by the Department of Social and Health Services' Economic Services Administration.

As we pursue our shared mission of reducing poverty 50% by 2025, a strong program integrity effort is vital for the public to have trust and confidence that ESA programs, policies and processes work together to achieve accurate results for the people we serve. By collaborating with internal and external stakeholders, we improve our processes, identify gaps and balance program integrity risks with timely and equitable recipient access to benefits.

What are some ways we help prevent fraud?

- **Recipient education** – We explain the allowable use of food and cash benefits using forms such as “Your DSHS Cash or Food Benefits” and the “Client Rights and Responsibilities,” which require recipient signature. These complement the distribution of various messages related to appropriate use of benefits, program requirements and ways to report suspected fraud.
- **Electronic Benefit Transfer card monitoring** – Recipients who receive multiple replacement EBT cards are provided additional information about appropriate card use and their responsibility to keep the card secure, and are informed that transactions are closely monitored for potential trafficking and misuse. We also monitor for out-of-state EBT usage, high balance accounts and inactivity.
- **Fraud Early Detection** – Eligibility staff identify potential or suspected fraud and make a case referral to the Office of Fraud and Accountability for investigation.
- **Risk mitigation services** – Division of Child Support uses risk mitigation services through their banking contract to reduce issuance and liability of forged or fraudulent funds.
- **Administrative data matching** – Approximately two dozen data matching systems are used to cross-check eligibility data elements. This enables us to identify recipients who are deceased or incarcerated and take appropriate action for any open benefits. We also access the National Directory of New Hires to identify recipients with potential unreported income. Many of these systems are integrated within our eligibility system for real-time access when customers apply.
- **Interstate data sharing** – When an interstate match indicates a recipient has received benefits in more than one state, we collaborate with staff in the other state to verify residency and other pertinent case details. This may result in establishment of benefit overpayments or further fraud investigation.
- **Program Disqualification** – We address Intentional Program Violations by asking the recipient to sign a Disqualification Consent Agreement. This eliminates the need to attend an administrative hearing and results in the client agreeing to be barred from receiving program benefits during a penalty period.
- **Online application monitoring** – We review online application activity to flag potentially fraudulent requests for benefits. These are examined to verify legitimacy and prevent erroneous issuances as early as possible as well as improve front-end fraud prevention efforts.

More information:

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