

Refugees and Access to Funds & Benefits in the U.S.

A refugee is “a person who is unable to return his or her country of origin because of a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group.” A refugee legally resides in the country of resettlement and is eligible for federally funded cash assistance for up to 8 months. Refugees are resettled in the United States by the federal government and are afforded specific refugee assistance to help them rebuild their lives in America. This federal funding is limited in both duration and amount. It is important to note that most refugees arrive with very little in terms of possessions, beside a few bags of luggage, and if they are lucky, all of their family members.

Reception & Placement

All refugees arriving in the United States will receive \$900 when they first arrive. This is a one time only provision of initial resettlement money, which they can spend on whatever they wish (e.g. security deposits for an apartment, bus fare, winter coats, food, etc.). The spending of this money is often guided by advice from resettlement case managers who assist the families in getting resettled quickly and economically.

MATCH

Refugees who are able to quickly enter the job market can elect to participate in the Match program, a federal program for refugees geared towards employment and self-sufficiency. The Match program provides families with money for rent and basic living expenses for three months. Only 50 slots were allotted for Match enrollees in FY 2010, and enrollees consist of all members of the family, not only those able to work. An additional 50 slots will be allocated for the Match program in FY2011. Prior to and during participation in the Match program, refugees cannot access state or local assistance benefits. Adults are provided \$325 each/month for the three month program, and children are provided \$200 each/month for the three months.

Refugee Cash Assistance & Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

All refugees arriving in the United States are entitled to 8 months of Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) from the date of their U.S. arrival. The RCA amounts vary based on the size of the family: Single person (\$230/month), Family of 2 (\$363/Month), Family of 3 (\$485/month), Family of 4 (\$611/month), etc. If a family qualifies for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), offered by the Maine Department of Health and Human Services, they will not receive RCA funds, but will immediately begin receiving TANF funds, which provide the same amounts of funds as outlined above for families (Refugee or American), yet unlike RCA, there is 5 year time

limit to their receipt of funds which can be reviewed and extended depending on need. All TANF recipients must be participating in verified educational courses, volunteer placements, and/or employment searches in order to access these funds.

MaineCare

All refugees have access to MaineCare for up to 8 months from their U.S. arrival date. Their MaineCare is paid for out of Refugee Medical Assistance money granted by the U.S. federal government. Following the initial 8 months of MaineCare, only those who are elders (aged 65+) and those on TANF are eligible to remain on MaineCare.

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Benefits

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits are provided to refugee elders aged 65 and older in the amount of \$674/ month, which is similar to SSI received by American elders. These refugee elders often do not receive any of the other state benefits because they aren't raising children or participating in fast track employment programs. Refugee elders have been resettled later in their lives, which makes language acquisition very difficult, however many of the refugee elders participate in English language classes and pursue their U.S. citizenship.

Have questions? Call (207) 871-7437 or visit us online at www.ccmaine.org/ris

