

THE PRE-TANF PROGRAM

1. INTRODUCTION

Most people applying for cash assistance in the state of Oregon start out in the Pre-TANF Program (formerly the Assessment Program). This flyer explains what the Pre-TANF Program is, what benefits you can get while in the Pre-TANF Program, and your rights under this program.

2. WHAT IS THE PRE-TANF PROGRAM?

If you are applying for cash assistance in Oregon, you probably will be placed in the Pre-TANF Program. The purpose of the Pre-TANF Program is to help you in finding work, if you are able to work, to find out whether you need special help in order to be able to work and to help meet your family's living expenses before you begin receiving cash assistance (TANF).

3. HOW DOES THE PRE-TANF PROGRAM WORK?

After you apply for TANF, a case manager will meet with you to talk about what you need to do in order to support your family. You will talk about what you can do and what DHS and other agencies can do to help you. You will be asked to participate in an "assessment" of your needs. If you have special needs, such as physical or mental health issues, drug or alcohol problems, learning disabilities, and domestic violence, DHS and other agencies will be able to help you address these needs. You have a right to screenings and assessments in each of these areas

to help you identify whether you need extra help or accommodations.

You and your case manager will then write a case plan. If you have special needs, you and your case manager should talk about how these needs will be met in your case plan. This written plan will state your personal goals and what you and DHS will do to achieve it.

You will also talk about your financial needs. Your case worker will talk to you about the bills you have and how DHS can pay your bills while you are in the Pre-TANF Program.

OAR 461-135-0475

4. WHAT WILL GO INTO MY CASE PLAN?

The case plan most often involves looking for a job. DHS can help you with your job search. However, if you are not ready to look for work, or if you need some extra help, your case plan should involve things that will help you become more employable such as education or training, family counseling, treatment for drug addiction or alcoholism, or dealing with problems of domestic violence.

The case plan will say what steps you will take to reach your goal and what community resources are available to assist you. It will also say what DHS agrees to do to help you. DHS can help you pay your bills and also help you with the expenses you will have for doing the activities listed in your case plan.

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These “support service payments” and “basic living expense payments” could include paying for childcare, transportation expenses, uniforms or even rent if you are at risk of being homeless. It is important that such payments be listed on your written case plan. If the payments are not listed, DHS may refuse to pay them.

OAR 461-190-0151, 0211

Your case plan should also address and accommodate any disabilities, barriers or hardships that you or your family members face, such as physical or mental health issues, drug or alcohol problems, learning disabilities, and domestic violence.

5. WHAT IF I DISAGREE WITH THE CASE PLAN?

You may ask for a “**re-engagement meeting**” if you disagree with your case plan. This meeting is to work out problems you see. Other people from DHS besides your caseworker may meet with you as well. You can ask a relative or any other person to be there to help you. If you need help with the Pre-TANF Program or have questions, call the **Public Benefits Hotline (1-800-520-5292)** or contact your local legal aid office for advice or possible representation. Go to www.oregonlawhelp.org for a directory of legal aid programs.

At the re-engagement meeting, you and your worker may agree to change the case plan. If you cannot agree and you refuse to comply with your case plan, your case manager may send a Notice of Disqualification. You have a right to a hearing after you receive the Notice of Disqualification.

OAR 461-025-0315

See the section on requesting a hearing, below.

6. WHAT HAPPENS IF I DO NOT DO WHAT I AM REQUIRED TO ON THE CASE PLAN?

If you do not cooperate with DHS and do the activities on your case plan, you will be asked to go to a re-engagement meeting with your case manager. At the re-engagement meeting, the case manager will want to know why you did not cooperate. If you do not have a good reason, your case manager will close the Pre-TANF Program for you and open your TANF grant, but there will be a penalty for your failure to cooperate with the case plan.

The penalty for not “cooperating” after you go through re-engagement, is called “disqualification” (also known as sanctioning). It is a progressive penalty which means it gets worse as it goes.

A penalty means although you will receive a cash grant, it will be lower than what you would have gotten if you cooperated. You will also lose your “cooperation incentive” payment which is extra cash you receive when you are doing the activities required in your case plan.

If you receive a penalty for not cooperating in the Pre-TANF Program, your TANF grant is opened at the first level of disqualification. At the 1st, 2nd and 3rd level of disqualification, your portion will be taken out of the grant. That means that your TANF grant will be reduced by the grant amount for one person. The fourth level is closure of the entire grant.

At any stage in the disqualification process, you will receive a full grant when you begin “cooperating” again, by signing a new case plan and cooperating with your case plan for two weeks. Once you have cooperated for two

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weeks, your grant will be restored back to the date you signed your new case plan.

Disqualifications are progressive. This means that if you do not agree to cooperate, your disqualification automatically goes to the next level of disqualification at the beginning of every month until you get to the level where your grant is closed.

Even if you agree to cooperate, you will always have the disqualification on your record. That means that the next time you don't cooperate, you will be disqualified at the next level.

OAR 461-135-0210; 461-130-0330; 461-130-0335.

You have a right to a hearing after you receive the Notice of Disqualification.

See the section on requesting a hearing, below.

7. HOW CAN I GET HELP WITH MY BILLS?

Even though you won't get a regular cash grant while you are in the Pre-TANF Program, DHS can give you "basic living expense payments" for any basic living expenses that you have while you are going through the Pre-TANF Program. This includes help with rent, utilities, household supplies, and other personal needs, such as soap, toilet paper, laundry, and diapers.

You can also get "support service" payments for expenses that you have while you are looking for a job or when you get a job. This can include a bus pass, gas money, auto repair and insurance, childcare or clothing that you need for work.

The amount you get for basic living expenses cannot be more than two times the amount of a TANF cash assistance grant for your family size. There is no limit to the amount DHS can give

you for support service payments that are needed to help you find work.

When you request any basic living expense or support service payments, you should put it in writing and give it to your worker. Save a copy for your own records. It is very important to keep a record of what services you request from your case manager.

Remember, you must have a case plan to get help with your bills. If you have an emergency with your bills, you should ask your worker to write your case plan right away.

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8. WHAT IF MY CASE MANAGER WON'T GIVE ME HELP WITH MY BILLS?

If the basic living expense payments or support service payments you ask for are denied, your case manager must send you a written notice telling you why. You may ask for a hearing if you do not agree with your case manager's decision to deny you help. You may ask for a hearing *right away, even if you don't get a notice that your request for help has been denied.*

In addition to asking for a hearing, you can also talk to your case manager's supervisor to try to solve the problem before your hearing.

Your worker will still expect you to cooperate with the case plan while you are waiting for your hearing if there are case plan requirements that you are able to meet without the disputed support service payment.

OAR 461-190-0231

See the section on requesting a hearing, below.

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9. HOW LONG DOES THE PRE-TANF PROGRAM LAST?

The Pre-TANF Program begins when you sign the case plan. It will last no more than 45 days from the date you asked for assistance, but it can end sooner if you find a job or if your case manager decides you are not likely to benefit from the Pre-TANF Program. You begin receiving TANF benefits when the Pre-TANF Program ends if you still need TANF and are found to be eligible. Your case manager must process your TANF application while you are in the Pre-TANF Program.

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10. WHAT OTHER BENEFITS CAN I GET WHILE I AM IN THE PRE-TANF PROGRAM?

In addition to Pre-TANF Program payments, you may be eligible for food stamps (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, “SNAP”) and the Oregon Health Plan (OHP). Your application for cash assistance is also treated as an application for food stamps and the Oregon Health Plan if you want those benefits. DHS should process your application and you should begin to receive food stamps and your medical card while you are still in the Pre-TANF Program.

For more information, call the **Public Benefits Hotline (1-800-520-5292)** or your local Legal Aid Services Office for advice or possible representation. Go to www.oregonlawhelp.org for a directory of legal aid programs.

11. REQUESTING A HEARING

If you have received a notice of disqualification, you have a right to a hearing. You must request a hearing within **90 days**.

If you have been denied help with your bills or expenses (basic living expense payments or support service payments), you have a right to an “expedited” hearing. The hearing must be held within five days. The Administrative Law Judge must send out a decision within three days.

In order to have a hearing, you must fill out a hearing request form. To obtain this form go to your local DHS office and ask the receptionist for a **DHS Form 443 (Administrative Hearing Request)** or get it on the Internet. (Go to www.dhs.state.or.us. Click on “Forms” at the top. Then click on “Find a DHS Form.” Type in “443” for the number and click on “Search.”).

If your request involves help with bills or expenses, mark the box on the hearing request form for an expedited hearing.

Immediately fill out the form and give it to the receptionist. *Ask the receptionist for a receipt to prove you turned in the form.*

You can represent yourself at the hearing. If you want to have an attorney represent you, call the **Public Benefits Hotline (1-800-520-5292)** or contact your local legal aid office for advice or possible representation. Go to www.oregonlawhelp.org for a directory of legal aid programs.

6-10

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