



OVERVIEW: PUBLIC BENEFITS FOR NONCITIZENS IN CALIFORNIA

A brief guide about which state and local benefits are available to immigrants in the Golden State

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In California, there are many state and local programs that help low-income families, including immigrants, meet their basic needs. Some are limited to lawful permanent residents (green card holders) and people who hold certain types of visas or immigration status while others are available to all people regardless of their immigration status, including those who are undocumented. Here is an overview of some of the benefits available to noncitizens in California. Note that some of these benefits require applicants to also meet income and additional eligibility criteria to qualify.

PUBLIC BENEFITS OPEN TO ALL NONCITIZENS REGARDLESS OF STATUS:

IN-STATE TUITION AND FINANCIAL AID

California allows students who qualify as California residents to pay in-state tuition at the University of California, California State Universities, and California Community Colleges. Immigrants who are California residents may qualify for in-state tuition if they have certain types of immigration status.

If they are undocumented, they may still qualify for in-state tuition, as allowed under **California Assembly Bill 540**. If you have any questions about in-state tuition for a specific institution, schools' websites often offer information and resources specifically for undocumented students. The campus admissions office may be able

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to offer more insights, too.

California also allows certain undocumented students to apply for and receive statebased financial aid and institutional scholarships at California colleges and universities.

Additionally, California Community College and California State University students can get FREE immigration legal services and fee support that covers the cost of filing DACA or naturalization applications. More info at the bottom of this guide.

MEDI-CAL (CALIFORNIA'S MEDICAID PROGRAM)

In California, emergency Medi-Cal coverage is available to all individuals regardless of immigration status. Undocumented pregnant and postpartum noncitizens are eligible for prenatal Medi-Cal coverage and pregnancy-related coverage for up to a year. Additionally, undocumented children, individuals age 50 or older, human trafficking survivors, U visa applicants, and U visa holders in California can qualify for full-scope Medi-Cal. California has recently expanded full-scope Medi-Cal coverage to undocumented adults ages 26 through 49.

To find out more, visit [**this Community Alert**](#). Full-scope Medi-Cal includes primary, behavioral health, long-term, dental and vision care to those who meet certain eligibility guidelines such as household income based on the federal poverty level.

OTHER HEALTH PROGRAMS

Undocumented Californians may also be eligible for In Home Support Services, Early Breast Cancer Detection and Breast and Cervical Cancer Treatment, Family PACT comprehensive family planning services, and Improving Access Counseling and Treatment for Californians with Prostate Cancer (IMPACT).

FOOD AND NUTRITION ASSISTANCE

Undocumented immigrants are eligible for the Women with Infants and Children program (WIC) as well as free or reduced school meals. People who have children with U.S. citizenship or lawful status may apply for CalFresh food assistance on

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behalf of their children and do not need to provide any information about their own immigration status.

PUBLIC BENEFITS LIMITED TO GREEN CARD HOLDERS AND OTHER QUALIFIED IMMIGRANTS:

Some federal public benefits are only available to certain “qualified” immigrants. Qualified immigrants include certain green card holders and people with certain other types of immigration status. Many qualified immigrants have to go through a five-year waiting period before they become eligible for benefits. Refugees, asylees, certain Afghan and Ukrainian nationals, survivors of trafficking, domestic violence, and certain types of crimes may be eligible for some federal benefits as well.

PUBLIC BENEFITS AVAILABLE TO “QUALIFIED” IMMIGRANTS INCLUDE:

- ▶ Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- ▶ Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), or CalFresh in California
- ▶ Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), or California Work Opportunities & Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) in California
- ▶ Social Security

Immigrants who are “not qualified” may still be eligible for certain benefits because they are known to the U.S. immigration authorities and considered “Permanently Residing Under Color of Law” (PRUCOL) and therefore at lower risk of deportation.

CALIFORNIA BENEFITS PROGRAMS AVAILABLE TO “NOT QUALIFIED” IMMIGRANTS INCLUDE:

- ▶ **Cash Assistance for Program for Immigrants (CAPI):** CAPI provides basic cash assistance for low-income elderly and/or disabled immigrants who are not yet eligible for SSI.
- ▶ **California Food Assistance Program (CFAP):** CFAP is a food assistance program



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that runs parallel to the CalFresh program, serving low-income green card holders who are not yet eligible for federal food stamp benefits.

WILL APPLYING FOR PUBLIC BENEFITS TRIGGER THE PUBLIC CHARGE RULE?

Under the federal government’s current definition of public charge, many of the programs listed above will not trigger the public charge rule. **For example**, use Medi-Cal, CalFresh, housing programs, WIC, emergency and disaster relief, Head Start, free and reduced-cost school meals, stimulus checks, tax credits, and many other benefits are **not** part of the public charge test. See the ILRC’s ***Public Charge Safe to Use*** handout for a list of some of the most common public benefits programs that do not count for public charge. It can be found by visiting: <https://www.ilrc.org/public-charge-safe-use-list>.

Some forms of cash assistance, such as TANF and CalWORKs, SSI, and long-term institutionalized care may be considered under the public charge rule. However, many noncitizens who are subject to the public charge test are not eligible for these programs in the first place.

For more information, consult the ILRC resource, ***Public Charge What the Community Needs to Know*** which can be found here: <https://www.ilrc.org/public-charge-what-community-needs-know>.

Are you a California Community College (CCC) or a California State University (CSU) student? If so, you qualify for FREE immigration legal services!		Discover more community explainers, toolkits, & alerts about immigration law.	
FIND OUT MORE	CCC: findyourally.com	CSU: findyourally.com/csu	FOLLOW US    