
REFUGEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM MANUAL
REFUGEE MEDICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

CHAPTER III – REFUGEE CASH ASSISTANCE PROGRAM
CHANGE #1-2016
DECEMBER 1, 2016

I. INTRODUCTION

Refugees who resettle in the USA rarely have access to personal resources in their homeland or a source of income in this country when they first arrive. To sustain themselves until they become self-sufficient, refugees may apply for financial assistance at the local Departments of Social Services (DSS).

Refugee families with dependent children must first apply for, and if eligible, participate in the state TANF program, known in North Carolina as Work First Family Assistance (WFFA), or Work First. See Work First Manual to determine eligibility for WFFA.

Refugees 65 years of age or older, or who are blind or disabled, would meet criteria for the Supplemental Security Income (SSI). However, since the SSI approval process is typically a lengthy one, the state authorizes receipt of RCA until the refugee applicant is approved for SSI, or until the 8-month RCA eligibility period expires--whichever comes first.

The North Carolina **Refugee Cash Assistance Program (RCA)** was established to provide income to needy refugees who do not meet qualifications for WFFA or SSI. RCA is a short-term transitional program available for the first eight months a refugee resides in the USA. In determining eligibility for RCA, the county DSS (herein referred to as the agency) must comply with the policies and procedures described in this chapter of the NC Refugee Assistance Manual.

NOTE: Throughout this Chapter, the term “refugee” will refer to all groups below, who are Qualified Aliens, and potentially eligible for RCA. See Chapter I., III. for definitions.

- Refugees
- Asylees
- **Central American Minors (CAM) and Other Family Members granted Refugee Status**
- Certain Cuban and Haitian Entrants
- Certain Amerasians (from Vietnam)
- Victims of Human Trafficking
- Certain Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) Holders from Iraq and Afghanistan
- Lawful Permanent Residents (LPR) who hold one of the above statuses prior to adjusting to LPR status

REFUGEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM MANUAL
REFUGEE MEDICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

II. ELIGIBILITY GUIDELINES

After you have determined that the refugee household is not eligible for TANF (Work First - WF), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Old Age Assistance (OAA), Aid to the Blind (AB), Aid to the Permanently and Totally disabled (APTD), and Aid to the Blind and Disabled (AABD) programs, you are ready to determine eligibility for RCA. To be eligible for **RCA**, a refugee must:

- A. **Be unable to meet the eligibility requirements for WF, SSI, OAA, AB, APTD, and AABD programs; and,**
- B. Be in the USA 8 months or less, or have eligible status, such as Asylee, for 8 months or less; and
- D. **Have the proper immigration status and documentation or be the dependent child of, and part of the same family unit as, individuals who meet the proper immigration status; and**
- E. **Not be a full-time student in an institution of higher education; and**
- F. **Live in North Carolina with the intent to remain; and**
- G. **Enroll in Employment Services and cooperate with an Individualized Employability Plan; and**
- H. **Not, for the purpose of receiving or continuing assistance, have voluntarily quit a job or refused to apply for or accept an appropriate offer of employment or employment related training during the 30 days prior to applying for aid; and**
- I. **Meet the provisions of the North Carolina Work First Family Assistance program in regard to:**
 - 1. treatment of income and resources,
 - 2. determination of benefit amounts based on household size and income disregards.

<p>NOTE: References will be made, throughout this chapter, to the appropriate Section of the NC Work First Manual whenever the Work First and RCA programs have policies and procedures in common. Exceptions or special rules for RCA will be noted.</p>
--

REFUGEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM MANUAL
REFUGEE MEDICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

III. APPLICATION PROCESS

A. Application and Interview

Refer to Work First, Section 104. Apply cultural sensitivity in all communications. Apply the same NC Confidentiality Rules that pertain to the WFFA program in the administration of the RCA program. Maintain and retain operational records in accordance with the standards established by the NC Department of Health and Human Services Policy and Procedures Manual Section IV.

Additional requirements for Refugee households

1. An eligible refugee household may consist of a single adult, age 18 or older, or a married couple with no minor children.

NOTE: At age 18 a refugee is potentially eligible for Refugee Cash Assistance. Explore this option before considering Family and Children's Medicaid (MAF) or Family Planning MA only.

2. Applicant can have any person(s) of his or her choice participate in the interview
3. Information must be presented in a language the refugee understands.
4. Explain RCA in understandable terms, ensuring that the refugee understands his rights and responsibilities
4. Offer the refugee the opportunity to apply for food stamp benefits on the same day.
5. For refugees who came through a local affiliate, the agency must make provisions to receive from, and share with the local affiliate the following information:
 - a. applicant's address
 - b. applicant's telephone number or where he or she can be reached
 - c. confirmation that applicant has applied for cash assistance, and
 - d. the status and disposition of his or her application for cash assistance.
6. The refugee household has the additional responsibility to:
 - a. provide the name and mailing address of the referring local affiliate, if appropriate (this does not apply to refugees who were originally settled and received Reception and Placement in a state other than NC or those who did not come through a local affiliate);
 - b. report receipt of Match Grant. If receiving Match Grant, application for RCA must be denied since federal law prohibits simultaneous participation in both programs. (The refugee may still be eligible for Refugee Medical Assistance. Refer to Chapter II, Refugee Medical Assistance Program.);
 - c. unless exempt, participate in appropriate employment services (See V. Employment Services).

B. Processing Time Standard

You have **30 (THIRTY) DAYS** to complete the application unless there is applicant delay. The **30 CALENDAR DAYS** begin the day after the date of application and end on the day the check or denial notice is mailed. The date of application is the date the applicant, authorized representative, or someone acting on applicant's behalf, signs the application.

C. Processing Requirements

1. **State/County Residence** – accept applicant's statement. Do not request other verification such as post-marked mail, rental/utility records, etc., as newly arrived refugees are not likely to have these.
2. **Income and Resources** – the determination of initial and on-going eligibility (treatment of

REFUGEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM MANUAL
REFUGEE MEDICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

income and resources, budgeting methods, need standard). Follow instructions in WFFA Sections 114 and 115.

EXCEPTIONS

- Do not consider any resources remaining in the applicant's country of origin in determining eligibility,
 - Count only income from earnings, savings in US bank accounts, and other financial resources acquired while in the USA
 - Do not consider a sponsor's income and resources to be accessible to a refugee solely because the person is serving as a sponsor,
 - Do not consider any cash grant received by the applicant under the Department of State or Department of Justice Reception and Placement Program (R&P),
3. **Needs Assessment** - the determination of benefit amounts (payment levels based on size of the assistance unit, income disregards). Follow instructions in WFFA Section 114.

EXCEPTIONS

- The 100% Job Bonus deduction is not available for RCA cases.
 - Do not consider in-kind services and shelter provided to an applicant by a sponsor or local resettlement agency in determining eligibility for or RCA payment amount.
4. **Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA) Considerations**
- A refugee is not required to apply for, or receive RCA as a condition of eligibility for Refugee Medical Assistance
 - All recipients of RCA are automatically eligible for Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA).
 - Denial, reduction or termination of RCA is to have no effect on a refugee's RMA. If an RCA case loses eligibility because of employment earnings, transfer to RMA without a separate RMA determination for the remainder of the 8 month eligibility period. [Refer to Chapter II, Refugee Medical Assistance Program.]
5. **Rule to Apply for a Social Security Number** - Do not require that applicants for RCA provide Social Security Numbers or proof of application for an SSN.
6. **Alien Status** - An applicant for RCA must submit evidence of documentation issued by CIS, which indicates alien eligibility status. A child/ren who arrives with a parent(s) carries the same alien status as the parent(s). Secondary verification is not required. A list of acceptable CIS documentation most often presented by refugees is in Chapter I, II.
- a. Ask the applicant for a **written declaration** that he or she has an immigration status that makes him or her eligible for refugee cash benefits.
 - b. Review the documentation of immigration status as outlined in charts.
 - c. If status is supported by documents, assume the applicant has a qualified status and continue determining eligibility based on other requirements. **Do not** use the SAVE system unless you are unable to confirm status from the documents presented.
 - d. If unable to confirm status from documentation supplied by client, **approve RCA** if other eligibility requirements are met and use other methods to verify status, such as accessing the SAVE system, or calling the NC State Refugee Office at (919) 527-6300.

REFUGEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM MANUAL
REFUGEE MEDICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

IV. FINALIZE APPLICATION

- A. Eligible applicants are entitled to receive RCA coverage for up to eight (8) full months from the date of entry in the United States. To calculate the eligibility period:
1. **Determine start date** – Benefit payment begins on the first day of the month in which the application is made. Always enter the **first day of the month** as the Date of Application so that the RCA benefits are not prorated, and
 2. **Determine end date** -- Eligibility ends eight months after the refugee's date of entry, on the last day of that month. For an Asylee, the date of entry is the date asylum was granted.
 3. Assign the appropriate certification period, up to eight (8) months.

B. Notices

Once the determination of eligibility has been processed, the applicant must be notified of the results. If applicant was referred by a local resettlement affiliate, that affiliate must also be notified of the outcome.

1. NCFAST does not automatically generate, **Notice of Benefits (DSS-8108)**, to the RCA applicant regarding the disposition of the application. The notice is system generated but worker initiated. The worker must make sure they click on RCA, to specify the eligibility for the RCA recipient.
2. In addition to the system generated Notice of Benefits, Eligibility worker **MUST** also complete the, **Refugee Work Registration Certification, Employment/Refusal and Termination/Denial Notice (DSS-5022)** form to give to the newly authorized RCA recipient to provide to the local service provider (agency) in which they are working with for Employment Services referral (if applicable), to report the following:
 - a. that refugee has applied for Refugee Cash Assistance
 - b. The status and disposition of the application, and
 - c. the reason if assistance has been employment/refused, denied or terminated.

NOTE: If there is no Local Resettlement Agency (Local Affiliate) Available

When there is no refugee-specific employment service provider available through a local resettlement agencies (local affiliate) in the county in which the refugee resides, the local Department of Social Services is responsible for providing Employment Services; i.e. obtaining a signed MRA and for the development of both the Family Self-Sufficiency and Individual Employability Plans.

REFUGEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM MANUAL
REFUGEE MEDICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

V. EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

A. Within 30 days of receipt of RCA, recipients, unless exempt, must:

1. Participate in a refugee social service or targeted assistance program which provides job or language training in the area in which the refugee resides (see [Appendix A](#))
2. Enroll in Employment Services with an appropriate agency.
3. Go to a job interview which is arranged by that agency.
3. Accept appropriate employment.

If not in compliance with Employability Plan, applicant is not eligible for RCA. Terminate RCA. If RCA recipient is also receiving RMA benefits, RMA will continue and be uninterrupted.

B. Exemptions to the work requirement for Refugee Cash Assistance include anyone who is:

1. under the age of 18;
2. age 65 or older;
3. a parent or other relative who is caring for a child under two (2);
4. ill or incapacitated; or
5. required in the home to care for another member of the household who is ill or incapacitated.

NOTE: A refugee's inability to communicate in English is not a reason for exemption

C. Exemption Verification

1. Document age by examining the individual's I-94 or other documentation
2. Establish illness or incapacitation by,
 - a. the worker's observation and documentation of the physical and/or mental illness or incapacity of the individual, or
 - b. documentation of a psychological examination, if indicated, or
 - a. a medical report from a doctor or medical facility when the individual's condition is questionable. Document findings.

D. Employment Services

Appropriate employment services are those provided by local affiliates and other authorized refugee service providers that are specifically designed to assist refugees in becoming employed (see [Appendix A](#) and [B](#) for a list of authorized refugee service providers). Refer refugees by using the **Refugee Registration Certification, Employment/Refusal and Termination/Denial Notice (DSS-5022)**. These agencies will:

1. Provide proof of registration,
2. **Complete and sign [Refugee Mutual Responsibility Agreement \(MRA\) \(DSS-6239A\)](#). Agencies must take steps to ensure that RCA recipients can participate in a range of employment services tailored to meet the specific needs of each recipient.**

REFUGEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM MANUAL
REFUGEE MEDICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

3. Develop an **Individualized Employability Plan (DSS-6232)** that sets forth a program of services intended to result in the earliest possible employment of the refugee,
4. Complete a **Family Self-Sufficiency Plan (DSS-6230)** that addresses the employment related service needs of the employable members in a family for the purpose of enabling the family to become self-supporting through the employment of one or more family members.

E. No Local Resettlement Agency (Local Affiliate) Available

When there is no refugee-specific employment service provider **available through a local resettlement agency (local affiliate)** in the county in which the refugee resides, the **local Department of Social Services** is responsible for **obtaining a signed MRA and for the development of both the Family Self-Sufficiency and Individual Employability Plans.**

F. Work Registration

Allow applicant to register with the local Work First approved NC Works Career Center, if he or she chooses to do so. (Not required)

G. The Employability Plan must:

1. Be designed to lead to the earliest possible employment, and not be structured in such a way as to discourage or delay employment or job-seeking, and
2. Contain a definite employment goal, attainable in the shortest time period consistent with the employability of the refugee in relation to job openings in the area.

H. The employment services and employment must meet the following criteria:

1. All assignments must be within the scope of the individual's employability plan. The plan may be modified to reflect changed services or employment conditions.
2. The services or employment must be related to the capability of the individual to perform the task on a regular basis. Any claim of adverse effect on physical or mental health must be based on adequate medical testimony from a physician or licensed or certified psychologist indicating that participation would impair the individual's physical or mental health.
3. The total daily commuting time to and from home to the service or employment site must not normally exceed 2 hours, not including the transportation of a child to and from a child care facility, unless a longer commuting distance or time is generally accepted in the community, in which case the round trip commuting time must not exceed the generally accepted community standards.
4. When child care is required, the care must meet the standards normally required by the state in its work and training programs for Work First recipients [Reference the NC Child Care Subsidy Manual, DHHS, Division of Child Development].
5. The service or work site to which the individual is assigned must not be in violation of applicable federal, state, or local health and safety standards.
6. Assignments must not be made which are discriminatory in terms of age, sex, race, creed, color, or national origin.
7. Appropriate work may be temporary, permanent, full-time, part-time, or seasonal work, if such work meets the other standards listed above.

REFUGEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM MANUAL
REFUGEE MEDICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

8. The wage shall meet or exceed the federal or state minimum wage law, whichever is applicable, and the wage shall not be substantially less favorable than the wage normally paid for similar work in that labor market.
9. The daily hours of work and the weekly hours of work shall not exceed those customary to the occupation.
10. The quality of training must meet local employers' requirements so that the individual will be in a competitive position within the local labor market. The training must also be likely to lead to employment that will meet the appropriate work criteria.
11. No individual may be required to accept employment if:
 - a. the position offered is vacant due to strike, lockout, or other bona fide labor dispute; or
 - b. the individual would be required to work for an employer contrary to the conditions of his existing membership in the union governing that occupation, however, employment not governed by the rules of union in which she or he has membership may be deemed appropriate.
12. If an individual is a professional in need of professional refresher training and other recertification services in order to qualify to practice his or her profession in the United States, the training may consist of full-time attendance in a college or professional training program, provided that such training,
 - a. is part of the individual's employability plan by the agency,
 - b. does not exceed one year's duration (including any time enrolled prior to application for assistance),
 - c. is specifically intended to assist the professional in becoming relicensed in his or her profession, and if completed can realistically be expected to result in such relicensing. The training may only be available to individuals who are employed.
13. A refugee offered suitable employment is required to accept, without regard to whether such job would interrupt a program of services planned or in progress, unless the refugee is currently participating in a program in progress of on-the-job training, or vocational training that is being carried out as part of an approved employability plan.

I. Failure or Refusal to Accept Employment Services or Employment

If, without good cause, a non-exempt RCA recipient fails or refuses to comply with Employment Services, accept employment, or voluntarily quits a job, and:

1. The sanctioned refugee is the only member of the case, terminate cash assistance. Manually send a written timely **Notice of Stopping or Changing Public Assistance (DSS-8110)** (see Section 264 of the NC Work First Manual). The sanction shall remain in effect for 3 payment months for the first failure and 6 payment months for any subsequent failure. If RCA recipient is also receiving RMA benefits, RMA will continue and be uninterrupted.
2. The case includes another refugee, remove the sanctioned refugee and reduce the assistance. Do not consider the sanctioned refugee's needs in determining benefits. Manually send a written timely **Notice of Stopping or Changing Public Assistance (DSS-8110)**. (See Section 264 of the NC Work First Manual.) The sanction shall remain in effect for 3 payment months for the first failure and 6 payment months for any subsequent failure. Open a RMA case for the sanctioned refugee for the remainder of the 8 months eligibility period for refugee assistance.

REFUGEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM MANUAL
REFUGEE MEDICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

3. Good cause reasons for failure to comply with employment services or voluntarily quitting a job include:
 - a. discrimination by an employer based on race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, or political beliefs;
 - b. work demands or conditions that render continued employment unreasonable, such as not being paid on schedule or being required to work overtime and not being paid for it;
 - c. acceptance of another offer of employment as long as the new job meets the minimum requirement of this provision (20 or more hours per week or earnings equivalent to federal minimum wage times 20 hours);
 - d. resignation by the member under the age of 60 which is recognized by the employer as retirement;
 - e. acceptance of an offer of employment of 20 hours or more per week (or equivalent earnings) which because of circumstances beyond the control of the member does not materialize or results in employment which does not meet the suitability criteria specified in section V. H. above;
 - f. leaving a job in connection with patterns of employment. For example, migrant farm laborers or construction workers often go from one employer to another;
 - g. a significant family crisis or change, including, but not limited to, illness or death of a family member which requires the member's presence, household emergency, unavailability of transportation.

VI. CHANGE IN SITUATION

- A. A change in situation is any change the refugee family unit experiences that may affect who is included in the family unit, the family's RCA payment, or whether the family unit continues to qualify for RCA. Examples include a change in who lives in the home and starting or stopping employment.
- B. The refugee family unit is responsible for reporting changes. A change in situation must be reported within 10 calendar days of when the change is known.
- C. When a family reports a change, or the agency becomes aware of a change from any source, make the change in benefits as early as the month following the month of change but not later than the second month after the change. Changes are effective the month after the month in which the 10-day notice expires, unless the **family unit waives the 10-day notice.** **Follow instructions in WFFA Section 202.**

NOTE: RCA applicants/recipients must receive Timely notice of a reduction or termination.

EXAMPLE:

You are notified on January 8 that a refugee individual who receives RCA went to work. Verify the new wages, send a timely notice, and enter the change into EIS to be effective no later than March 1.

- D. Verify the change according to the verification procedures in the Work First Manual. Always document the change and verification on the Verification of Change in Situation Form (DSS-1662D) (see Section 202 of NC Work First Manual, Figure 1).

REFUGEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM MANUAL
REFUGEE MEDICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

- E. For income changes, refer to Section 114, Income and Needs Assessment, of the NC Work First Manual.
- F. Manually send a written timely Notice of Stopping or Changing Public Assistance (DSS-8110) (see Section 264 of the NC Work First Manual) to notify the household how the change affects their benefits. If the cash assistance terminates, transfer to RMA without a separate RMA determination for the remainder of the 8 month eligibility period for refugee assistance.

EXCEPTION:

If a refugee household reports a change of address and it is in another county, **do not transfer the case**. Continue to maintain the RCA in the county of application.

VII. REVIEW

Do not send a review notice. At the end of the refugee's eighth month in the US, terminate RCA assistance. Evaluate to determine if the refugee(s) is eligible for any other assistance and take the necessary applications or refer to the appropriate agency. In addition to notifying the refugee of the termination, the notice must indicate the determination of eligibility for other programs. Manually send a written timely Notice of Stopping or Changing Public Assistance (DSS-8110). (See Section 264 of the NC Work First Manual.)

REMEMBER:

Refugee Cash and Medical Assistance Programs are available to refugees for the first eight months after their date of entry in the U.S.A. and only if they are not eligible for other mainstream public assistance programs such as Work First.

VIII. NOTICE AND HEARINGS PROCESS

- A. All applicants for and recipients of RCA must be provided an opportunity for a hearing to contest adverse determinations. (See Section 264 of the NC Work First Manual).

EXCEPTIONS:

- The refugee may have a representative as well as a translator/interpreter attend the hearing.
 - The hearing decision must be provided in a language the refugee can understand or have translated/interpreted into such a language.
- B. A hearing need not be granted when RCA is terminated because the eligibility time period (8 months) imposed by law has been reached.

IX. OVERPAYMENTS AND UNDERPAYMENTS

Agencies must ensure recovery of overpayments and correction of underpayments.

- A. If it becomes known that a refugee received an underpayment of benefits, take the steps necessary to issue the lost benefit amount to the refugee. Document the case record and issue restored benefits within 30 days of the discovery.
- B. If it becomes known that a refugee received an overpayment of benefits:
1. If the refugee is associated with a local affiliate, contact them to review the information.

REFUGEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM MANUAL
REFUGEE CASH ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

2. Verify the information that causes the change in benefits, i.e., wages, other income, household composition.
 3. Establish the amount of overpayment by determining the amount the payment should have been had the information been known.
 4. Request that the refugee household repay the overpayment by:
 - a) paying a lump sum for the total amount of the overpayment, or
 - b) paying cash installments – get a signed repayment agreement from the household stating the payments amounts and frequency of payment.
- C. If an overpayment occurs due to county responsible overpayment (Agency Error - AE) in complying with program regulations, the overpayment must be reported and recouped by the state office for adjustment.

X. RECIPIENT FRAUD AND ABUSE

Because Refugee Assistance is not considered a program of public assistance under N. C. G. S. 108A-24, fraud cases must be prosecuted under N. C. G. S. 14-100, "False Pretense and Cheats." Follow procedures in Section 207 of the NC Work First Manual.