

JOHNSON COUNTY GENERAL ASSISTANCE GUIDELINES and POLICY

(Adopted by the Board of Supervisors on September 25, 2024; effective on October 15, 2024 for assistance month November 2024 and beyond)

General Assistance is offered through the Social Services Department. The program provides a safety net for individuals and families with emergency needs. General Assistance staff provide service with respect, compassion, and fairness.

Iowa Code Chapter 252 imposes duties upon the counties of Iowa regarding County General Assistance. The code directs the Johnson County Board of Supervisors to provide for the assistance of poor persons lawfully in Johnson County, enables the Board of Supervisors to provide for the assistance of needy persons, and requires the establishment of general rules as deemed necessary to properly discharge the Board's responsibilities.

The General Assistance Program shall:

- Provide aid to meet the needs of persons who are poor. Poor persons may be ineligible for or in immediate need and awaiting approval and receipt of assistance under programs provided by state or federal law. Poor persons may also be persons whose actual needs cannot be fully met by the assistance furnished under those programs.

Because the Board has determined it is in the best interests of the public and individual and family well-being, the Program may also provide assistance for needy persons who meet the eligibility standards as specified in these guidelines.

All assistance shall be provided in accordance with the rules described herein.

I. Administration

The Johnson County General Assistance Program shall be administered by the Social Services Director, acting as the General Assistance Director, who is appointed by and responsible to the Johnson County Board of Supervisors. Duties of the Director and/or designee shall include the following:

- A. Accept applications
- B. Determine eligibility for each applicant according to the guidelines
- C. Arrange for vendor authorization and payment for each eligible applicant
- D. Assess household needs. Assist applicants with connecting to additional services.
Provide follow up to check on the status of the referrals and ongoing needs of the applicant.
- E. Maintain confidentiality for persons applying for General Assistance and all corresponding records associated with the applicant. Obtain a signed Release of Information prior to disclosure of any information or records.
- F. Accept appeals from applicants who have been determined ineligible for assistance.
Ensure General Assistance appeal process is followed according to guidelines.

II. Definitions

- A. **General Assistance** - A county payment or payments made on behalf of an eligible person or household for rent, utilities, provisions, medical supplies, transportation and

- services, prescriptions, in exceptional cases other emergency needs, and burial or cremation services.
- B. **Household** - All related persons, unmarried couples who share a child in common, common-law spouses, and domestic partners who reside or cohabitate together in the same household. Unrelated persons living in a roommate situation and listed on the lease may constitute a separate household with eligibility based on meeting General Assistance guidelines.
 - C. **Domestic Partner** – Either member of an unmarried, adult couple in a committed, mutual relationship who maintains a common residence and responsibility for each other’s common welfare and financial obligations and are not married to or the domestic partner of anyone else.
 - D. **Area Median Income (AMI)** is defined as the mid-point of specific area’s income distribution and is calculated on an annual basis by the Department of Housing and Urban development (HUD)
 - E. **Earned Income** – This type of income is typically gained through employment, including self-employment, independent contractor, and freelance work, including, but not limited to, wages, salaries, tips, professional service, and self-employment.
 - F. **Unearned Income** – This type of income is received from a source other than employment or self-employment and may include child support payments, alimony, inheritances, gifts, public assistance, retirement and pension funds, Social Security, unemployment benefits, and loans.
 - G. **Gross Pay** – All money earned before taxes, benefits, and any deductions are withheld from wages.
 - H. **Lump-Sum Payments** – A lump sum payment refers to a sum of money paid at once or spread out over time. Lump sum payments may include but are not limited to, state and federal tax refunds, settlements, inheritance, pensions and retirement plans, lottery winnings, SSI retroactive payment, life insurance, and annuities.
 - I. **Needy Person** – A person who has some means, is not a poor person as defined herein, and meets the eligibility requirements set out herein for aid. Iowa Code § 252.1
 - J. **Poor Person** – A person who has no property, exempt or otherwise, and is unable because of physical or mental disabilities, to earn a living by labor. Iowa Code § 252.1
 - K. **Resident of Johnson County** - A person who is living in Johnson County and has established an ongoing presence with the declared, good faith intention of living in the county for a permanent or indefinite period of time. A homeless person’s county of residence is determined by where they usually sleep. A resident of another county who comes to Johnson County for the purpose of receiving services or residing in a hospital, correctional facility, halfway house for community-based corrections or substance-related treatment, nursing facility, intermediate care facility, residential care facility, or for the purpose of attending a college or university is not considered a Resident of Johnson County.
 - M. **Resource** – any non-exempt property of the applicant or the applicant’s household. It can be real property, personal property, or other property.

III. General Eligibility

- A. Resident of Johnson County, Iowa
- B. Must be at least 18 years of age. If not, then must be either: married, an unaccompanied minor, or an emancipated minor.
- C. Must be a U.S. citizen or be lawfully present within the United States as shown by documented legal status. Households that include a combination of individuals with

documented status and undocumented status must report the income of all individuals in the household. Only household members with documented legal status who are lawfully present within the United States will be counted when determining household size for eligibility purposes.

- D. If not currently employed or employed less than full-time (40 hours/week), applicant and all adult members in the household must be actively seeking employment sufficient to exceed the General Assistance Income Guidelines, by applying for a minimum of two jobs per week. Individuals receiving retirement Social Security benefits must complete required job searches unless approved for a medical exemption.
- E. Applicants who state they are unable to work due to a mental or physical illness may be required to submit a Medical Verification Form completed by a medical provider in order to obtain subsequent months of assistance. Approved medical providers include, licensed physician, physician assistant and nurse practitioner. Social workers and therapists are not approved medical providers. Verification must state the primary health condition, if the inability to work is temporary or permanent, and the approximate date (if applicable) the applicant may return to employment.
- F. **Applicants must apply for and follow through with all other assistance programs** for which they may be eligible including but not limited to: Veterans Affairs (JCVA), Family Investment Program (FIP), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid, Housing Choice Voucher and all other state and federal rent and utility assistance programs, Iowa City Utility Discount Program, Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), Social Security, Supplemental Security Income, and Unemployment.
- G. Applicants who are eligible for or have received maximum assistance benefits from Johnson County Veteran's Affairs are not eligible for General Assistance.
- H. An applicant, or household member of an applicant, who has voluntarily terminated employment or is terminated for poor work attendance (without sufficient explanation) shall not be eligible for General Assistance for a period of three (3) months after the termination. If the applicant or household member obtains a new ongoing job and provides verification of hire, eligibility may be considered. Consideration will be made for a person who is needed in the home to care for a dependent child or adult with special needs in exceptional circumstances.
- I. **An applicant, or household member of an applicant, who is registered in post high school training or education is not eligible for assistance.** This does not include applicants working towards their high school diploma, HiSET, or engaged in unpaid vocational training provided through their employer, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, or a transitional support services program.

IV. Financial Eligibility

A. Income and Resources

1. All earned and unearned income of the household unit for the previous 30 days will be considered when determining eligibility. Verification of all income and resources is required in order to determine eligibility for General Assistance benefits.
2. Applicant household must have income and resources at or below 30% of the Area Median Income which is updated annually by Housing and Urban Development (HUD).
3. Lump sum payments received by a household up to (3) three months preceding the application for General Assistance, will be considered a resource. A period of ineligibility, in months, shall be equal to the expenditure of the lump sum payment at 30% Area Median Income for the applicable household.

B. Resources

For applicants applying for assistance, all real, personal, and other property of the household shall be considered in making the eligibility determination, except the following:

1. Homestead
2. Household furniture and personal possessions
3. Tools and equipment used for home and family maintenance or support
4. Burial lots and funeral trust funds

V. Standards for Provision of Assistance

Applicant must meet the eligibility guidelines in Sections III and IV. Total monthly assistance, excluding transportation assistance, will not exceed:

- \$700 - 1 person household
- \$750 - 2 person household
- \$800 - 3 person household
- \$850 - 4 or more person household

With the exception of individuals enrolled in the Interim Assistance Reimbursement Program, no applicant may receive more than three months of assistance in a twelve (12) month period.

A new application is required for each month in which assistance is requested.

- VI. General Assistance Exception to Policy** - Emergency assistance may be approved for an applicant who does not meet the above eligibility criteria, in instances of extraordinary circumstances determined to be non-recurring in nature. Exceptions will not be granted for applicants with income exceeding the eligibility guidelines set forth herein. The amount of assistance granted will not exceed the guideline amounts set out in Section V. At the Director's discretion, assistance for emergency needs not outlined in the General Assistance Guidelines may be granted in exceptional circumstances and when no other funding supports are available. An applicant will not receive more than one exception in a twelve (12) month period.

The following considerations may be used to determine the extension of assistance:

- 1) Help cannot be obtained from any other source
- 2) The applicant clearly demonstrates the inability to meet this emergency
- 3) The applicant agrees to follow the recommended case plan of the Social Services worker to assure the non-repetition of this situation, and
- 4) The applicant can demonstrate the ability to maintain their living situation through their own resources following the receipt of General Assistance benefits
- 5) Applicant's health or housing stability are threatened without assistance

- VII. Assistance** - General Assistance may be provided to help with rent, utilities, provisions, prescription medications, medical supplies, transportation, and funeral expenses.

A. Rent

1. Rent payment shall only be paid to property owner or their designee such as the property manager. Property ownership will be verified by General Assistance.
2. Rent will not be paid to businesses that operate for the primary purpose of providing short-term lodging, such as hotels.

3. Applicants must provide a copy of a current, formal written lease when applying for rental assistance from General Assistance. The lease be signed by a member of the Applicant's household and the landlord (property owner or their designee).
4. Rent shall not be paid to parents, grandparents, children or grandchildren of the applying household.
5. Rent Assistance will not be used to supplement Section 8 Housing Assistance (Housing Choice Voucher) or other federally subsidized units unless a General Assistance worker determines the situation is exceptional in nature (Section VI.)
6. General Assistance will not be granted for rental arrears, late fees, deposits, taxes, interest, house payments (mortgage) or other payments not directly necessary for support and maintenance of home.
7. Applications for rental assistance will not be accepted prior to the 15th of the month preceding the month in which assistance is requested.
8. No applicant shall receive assistance as both a landlord and a tenant in a 12-month period.

B. Utilities

1. Utility assistance may include fuel or electricity for purpose of heating and cooling, cooking, lights and water.
2. Utility assistance shall not exceed \$200. Assistance will not be granted unless assistance and other resources of the applicant are such that the utility provider will agree to continued or reinstated service.
3. Assistance shall not be granted for utilities for housing units that are subsidized by the federal government or other programs where a utility allowance is included in calculating the rent paid by the applying household.
4. Utility bills must be in the name of the applicant or another member of the household or family unit. If the expense of utilities is being shared, the utility amount will be prorated.
5. The applicant must show that they have made payments toward their bill within the previous six-month period.
6. General Assistance will not be granted for deposits, bills more than six months old, or bills accrued at prior addresses.

C. Provisions

1. Food vouchers will not be provided to supplement SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program).
2. Applicants must apply for SNAP through the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services.
3. All applicants will be referred to local food pantries and local dining sites.
4. Financial assistance with food may be provided through a voucher to a local grocery store in amounts not to exceed the following:

Single Household	\$25.00/week
Two Person Household	\$45.00/week
Three Person Household	\$65.00/week
Four Person Household	\$85.00/week
Five or More	\$20.00/week for each additional member
5. Non-food vouchers may be used for items including paper products, household cleaning supplies, diapers and wipes, and personal hygiene items. Non-food vouchers will not exceed \$35/month. Non-covered items include, but are not limited to

cigarettes, alcoholic beverages, and bottle or can deposits. Over the counter items (pain medications, cold medications, supplements, etc.) cannot be covered.

6. A voucher may be obtained for the purchase of pet food, not to exceed \$25/month.
7. If provision vouchers are used to purchase items that are not covered, the applicant may be barred from receiving such vouchers for a period of two years.

D. Medical

1. Eye exam, frame repair, and glasses when recommended by a physician and assistance is not available through the Free Medical Clinic or Community Crisis Services.
2. Prescription or non-prescription items when recommended by physician. The applicant will utilize the discount prescription savings plan that provides the lowest price for eligible prescriptions.
3. Payment of medical supplies such as hearing aids, orthopedic shoes, and items that may improve health outcomes including an air purifier, humidifier, vacuum etc. when these items are not available through other sources.

E. Transportation

1. A monthly bus pass for Iowa City, Coralville or SEATS will be provided upon request or
2. A gas voucher for up to \$35. A maximum of two gas vouchers will be provided in a twelve (12) month period.

VIII. Interim Assistance Reimbursement Program

The Interim Assistance Reimbursement (IAR) Program provides ongoing assistance for those **applying for** disability benefits through **Supplemental Security Income (SSI)** of the Social Security Administration. An eligible applicant may receive monthly assistance not to exceed the current General Assistance benefit per month for the duration of eligibility. Upon approval of SSI benefits, Social Security will reimburse Johnson County the total amount that the client received in benefits from the IAR program. The remainder of the SSI back pay will be paid directly to the client.

Eligibility Requirements:

1. The applicant must suffer from a mental or physical illness which prevents or greatly diminishes employment for a minimum of 12 months. Applicant will be required to submit a physician completed *General Assistance Medical Verification* form. When applying for SSI due to multiple medical diagnoses, a completed form may be required from each specialist involved in the applicant's treatment plan. Approved medical providers include, licensed physician, physician assistant and nurse practitioner. Social workers and therapists are not approved medical providers.
2. Applicant must have a household income at or below 100% of Federal Poverty Guidelines and have insufficient resources to meet basic needs.
3. Applicant will provide verification from the Social Security Administration on the status of their application.
4. If applicant has previously applied for SSI or SSDI, they must provide copies of their written denials from the Social Security Administration.
5. Applicant must complete & sign the *Authorization for Reimbursement of Interim Assistance Reimbursement Claim* (Form 1950).

6. To maintain eligibility for on-going assistance, the applicant will:
 - a. Submit an application and meet with General Assistance worker a minimum of once every three months or more frequently as determined by the worker.
 - b. Submit the *General Assistance Medical Verification form*, signed by a physician, at a minimum of every six months. When applying due to multiple medical diagnoses, forms may be required from each specialist involved in the applicants' treatment plan.
 - c. If denied by the Social Security Administration, the applicant must provide a copy of the written denial and verification that the denied decision has been **appealed** before further assistance can be granted.
 - d. Verify ability to meet remainder of living expenses.
 - e. Provide verification of application, November through March, for LIHEAP for utility bills in applicant's name or if the heat is included in their rent. The money received for LIHEAP when heat is included in the rent is to be put towards paying applicant's rent.
 - f. Apply for and follow through with all other assistance programs for which they may be eligible. See General Eligibility Section III. F.
 - g. Pursue their application with due diligence including keeping scheduled appointments for state and federal programs, returning requested information in a timely manner, and following through with prescribed medical treatments.
 - h. Provide letter of representation from the attorney representing the applicant's SSI case, if one has been secured.
7. Applicants approved for the Interim Assistance Reimbursement Program and who diligently pursue SSI benefits may continue to receive assistance until their application is successful or until a determination is made at the Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) level. IAR benefits will terminate upon dismissal of an application for SSI benefits at the ALJ level. A reapplication for benefits for the same disability does not entitle the applicant to additional assistance under this section. Failure to comply with IAR General Assistance guidelines will result in termination from the program. Program participants terminated from the Program due to lack of compliance are ineligible for General Assistance or Interim Assistance Reimbursement for a period of twelve (12) months from the date of termination. The General Assistance Director has the authority to issue an exception to the twelve (12) month sanction for extraordinary circumstances.
8. If an applicant is determined ineligible for the IAR program, a new application will not be processed for a period of three (3) months from the date of the denial unless a change in medical condition can be verified.

IX. Burial and Cremation

Johnson County will pay for basic funeral expenses not to exceed the amount established by the Board of Supervisors and set out in the General Assistance Guidelines. The next of kin or officially designated representative must work with the funeral home to identify eligible burial and cremation services.

Application

1. The next of kin or an officially designated representative of the decedent's estate must submit application for County funded funeral assistance with a Johnson County General Assistance Specialist.
2. Next of kin or officially designated representative will work with the funeral home to identify eligible burial and cremation services. County funded funeral benefits cover limited funeral services and products. Arrangements for burial and/or cremation services

- will be done with funeral directors, who will obtain authorization for County funded funeral services from the General Assistance specialist prior to proceeding with services.
3. Payment for funeral expenses will be made directly to the funeral home.

Eligibility

1. Decedent must be a resident of Johnson County. Resident is defined as a person who is living in Johnson County and has established an ongoing presence with the declared, good faith intention of living in the county for a permanent or indefinite period of time. A homeless person's county of residence is determined by where they usually sleep. A resident of another county, who comes to Johnson County for the purpose of receiving services or residing in a hospital, correctional facility, halfway house for community-based corrections or substance-related treatment, nursing facility, intermediate care facility, residential care facility, or to attend a college or university is not considered a resident of Johnson County.
2. Decedent's household income, resources, and lump sum payments must not exceed 175% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines. The total income of the household unit (decedent, spouse/domestic partner, parents and children) for the previous 30 days will be considered when determining eligibility. Household income includes, but is not limited to, income, cash-on-hand, child support, retirement and disability benefits, gifts, loans, cash assistance received from private and public entities, including fundraising and crowdsourcing.
3. Death benefits may be available from employment, railroad retirement, pension plans, Veteran's Affairs, life insurance policies, prepaid burial agreements or Social Security. The family of the deceased must apply for these benefits to assist with the burial expenses. Any funds generated from memorials, fundraising and crowdsourcing must be applied to the funeral expenses. If the family of the deceased discovers a death benefit, savings account or other resources after the funeral, they must notify General Assistance immediately. If the County deems the family of the deceased ineligible because of the resources, the family will be held responsible to reimburse the funeral expenses disbursed by the County on behalf of the deceased.

Description of Funeral Benefits

- A. Funeral service expenses for cremation – up to a maximum of \$2,200.
 - i. Funeral home services
 - ii. Use of funeral service provider facilities
 - iii. Memorial service
 - iv. Embalming and preparation of the body
 - v. Cremation
 - vi. Basic Urn
 - vii. Fees and permits
 - viii. Preparation and filing of the death certificate
 - ix. Transfer of decedent to funeral home
- B. Funeral service expenses for burial up to a maximum of \$3,200
 - i. Funeral home services
 - ii. Use of funeral service provider facilities
 - iii. Memorial service
 - iv. Embalming and preparation of the body
 - v. Basic casket and grave liner
 - vi. Fees and permits

- vii. Preparation and filing of the death certificate
- viii. Transfer of decedent to funeral home and cemetery
- C. Cemetery expenses – up to a maximum of \$1,000
 - i. Plot purchase
 - ii. Opening and closing of the gravesite
- D. The family is financially responsible for any printed materials, clergy or music honorariums, flowers, limousines or family cars, copies of the death certificate, and luncheon or reception charges.
- E. The funding provided through the General Assistance Program is considered payment in full for funeral home services associated with burial or cremation, as well as expenses related to the interment of remains (i.e. cemetery fees). The funeral home will work with the next of kin or officially designated representative to limit the services to meet this requirement.
- F. The funeral home and/ or cemetery must furnish complete and accurate invoices to General Assistance as well as the next of kin or officially designated representative. The total billable expenses for funeral and burial services will not exceed \$3,200 (\$4,200 when cemetery is used). This benefit represents payment in full, and the burden for any cost in excess of this total shall be the responsibility of the funeral home, cemetery or participating vendors.
- G. Payment for out-of-state funerals will not be provided.
- H. General Assistance will pay \$250 for burial or cremation of decedents deemed non-resident transients, as per Iowa Code § 252.27.

X. Further Inquiry - The General Assistance Director or that officer's designee may make further inquiry of factual details regarding eligibility. Examples of when such inquiry may be done include but are not limited to:

- A. A person's situation indicates they may have additional resources
- B. Living expenses exceed income
- C. The individual's condition indicates that the eligibility factors need further inquiry or verification including, but not limited to, instances in which the applicant:
 - 1. May be physically ill or disabled and unable to participate adequately in the eligibility determination process
 - 2. Has a known history of misrepresentation

XI. Enforcement

- A. All applications shall be verified by the applicant under the penalty of perjury and in compliance with Iowa Code chapter 622.
- B. In the event that Johnson County General Assistance staff suspect fraudulent activity, they may request additional information or documentation in order to verify application materials submitted.
- C. Any applicant knowingly providing false or inaccurate information, including but not limited to, failure to report income or financial resources, for the purpose of qualifying for General Assistance or who is found to have misused or otherwise received assistance in a fraudulent manner shall be subject to prosecution under any and all applicable state and local laws. In addition, the applicant shall be subject to repayment for fraudulently received benefits and the applicant and all adult members of the applying household shall be subject to ineligibility for further assistance for a period of two years from the date of discovery.

XII. Appeals

Applicants to General Assistance shall be informed of their right to appeal their eligibility for assistance or the amount of assistance. The applicant shall be informed of the process to file an appeal and their right to represent themselves or obtain a representative of their choice.

- A. An applicant wishing to appeal may file, with the General Assistance Director, a written request for review of the application. Appeal must be filed within (10) ten days of the Notice of Decision and include the applicant's name, current address, telephone number, and reasons for the appeal. The Director shall review the application and issue a subsequent Director's Decision within (10) ten business days of the receipt of the written request for review. If the applicant provides a valid mailing address the decision shall be mailed to the applicant. Otherwise, the decision shall be held for at least one week at the office of the General Assistance Director for pick up by the applicant.
- B. An applicant wishing to appeal the General Assistance Director's Decision may file a written request for review within (10) ten days of this decision. The appeal shall be forwarded by the Director to the Board of Supervisors and placed on the agenda for the next regularly scheduled Board meeting, provided that such appeal shall not be heard sooner than (5) five days after appeal is taken, unless requested by the applicant. If the applicant provides a valid mailing address or telephone number, the applicant shall be informed by the Director either by telephone or mail of the date and time of the hearing before the Board. Otherwise, the date and time of the hearing shall be available to the applicant at the office of the General Assistance Director.
- C. The Board of Supervisors shall hear the applicant's appeal at the time scheduled unless a continuance is requested by applicant—which request may be granted at the discretion of the Board Chairperson. Applicant shall be permitted to present evidence in support of the appeal including testifying, offering documentary evidence and cross examination of other witnesses. Technical rules of evidence shall not apply. The Board may set a reasonable length of time for presentations by the parties. The Board may question the applicant, and the Director shall present the reasons for the Director's determination. The hearing will be recorded. The hearing before the Board will be closed in accordance with Iowa Code sections 21.5(1)(a), 217.30, and 252.25. Information about the applicant which is disclosed during the hearing shall remain confidential. Applicant's failure to attend the meeting at which the applicant's appeal is heard by the Board may result in a dismissal of applicant's appeal.
- D. The Board's findings shall be based solely upon evidence presented at the hearing. The Board shall issue their decision in writing, as promptly as possible, and within five (5) business days of the hearing date. If the applicant provides a valid mailing address the decision will be mailed to the applicant. Otherwise, the decision shall be held for at least one week at the office of the General Assistance Director for pick up by the applicant.

2024 – Income Eligibility

Number of Household Members								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Interim Assistance Reimbursement Program								
100% FPG	\$1,255	\$1,703	\$2,152	\$2,600	\$3,048	\$3,497	\$3,945	\$4,393
Funeral Assistance								
175% FPG	\$2,196	\$2,980	\$3,766	\$4,550	\$5,334	\$6,120	\$6,904	\$7,688
General Assistance								
30% AMI	\$2,008	\$2,296	\$2,583	\$2,833	\$3,100	\$3,497	\$3,945	\$4,393

General Assistance								
Number of Household Members								
	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
30% AMI	\$4,842	\$5,290	\$5,738	\$6,187	\$6,635	\$7,083	\$7,532	\$7,980