



DATE: ~~August 19, 2020~~ ~~December 30, 2020~~ ~~February 26, 2021~~, June 30, 2021

OPERATIONS MEMORANDUM # 20-08-02

SUBJECT: **Revised** Extended Refugee Cash Assistance and Refugee Medical Assistance

TO: Executive Directors

FROM: Paula Copeland
Acting Director
Bureau of Operations

PURPOSE

To announce that the Department of Human Services (DHS) will **begin continue** issuing extended Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) and Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA) benefits until ~~September 30, 2020~~ ~~January 31, 2021~~ ~~April 30, 2021~~ **September 30, 2021** and to provide instructions on how to process benefits for qualifying refugee and asylee clients.

BACKGROUND

Current federal policy states that RCA and RMA are available for up to 8 months for eligible clients.

Income

The CAO will apply the TANF requirements and exclusions of the [Cash Assistance Handbook Chapter 150, Income](#), to determine the refugee's income eligibility. The CAO will not consider any resources remaining in the applicant's country of origin in determining income eligibility. The CAO will not deem income from the resettlement agency or sponsor to determine the refugee's eligibility for RCA. The CAO will consider only income actually made available to the refugee.

RESET Requirement

All RCA individuals are mandatory to complete an Agreement of Mutual Responsibility (AMR) and participate in the Road to Economic Self-Sufficiency through Employment and Training (RESET) unless they have an exemption or good cause reason. For more detailed information please review Supplemental Handbook [730.4](#).

DISCUSSION

On April 22, 2020 the Administration for Children and Families, Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), released *Policy Letter (PL) 20-03, COVID-19 Extended Assistance for ORR Populations* (Attachment A). This policy letter provided states a waiver option to extend the Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) and Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA) eligibility periods due to the negative impact of COVID-19. Pennsylvania applied and was approved for these waivers.

On April 24, 2020, the ORR issued *Policy Letter 20-04, Assistance for ORR Populations Affected by COVID-19* (Attachment B). This policy letter outlined a series of policy changes that ORR would allow due to COVID-19. Those changes ~~will~~ were scheduled to remain in effect until September 30, 2020. On September 30, 2020, ORR released *PL 20-06, Extended Assistance for ORR Populations Affected by COVID-19* (Attachment E) to announce that, due to the continued impact of COVID-19, they are extending waivers to certain ORR regulations. On January 20, 2021, ORR then released *PL 21-01, Continued Assistance for ORR Populations Affected by COVID-19* (Attachment F) to announce that, due to the continued impact of COVID-19, they are further extending waivers to certain ORR regulations. On April 30, 2021, ORR further released *PL 21-05, Continued Assistance for ORR Populations Affected by COVID-19, through September 30, 2021* (Attachment G) to announce that, due to the continued impact of COVID-19, they are further extending waivers to certain ORR regulations.

NOTE: For policy questions related to PL 20-03 or 20-04, please see Attachment D: *Frequently Asked Questions: Policy Letters (PLs) 20-03 and 20-04*

As a result of waiver approvals from ORR, effective immediately through ~~September 30, 2020~~ ~~January 31, 2021~~ ~~September 30, 2021~~, Pennsylvania will be extending the RCA and RMA eligibility periods ~~from eight months up to eighteen months~~ for individuals who became eligible for RCA and RMA between April 1, 2019 and ~~January~~ ~~May~~ ~~August 31, 2020~~ ~~January 31, 2021~~. These eligibility adjustments are for clients who are about to terminate from RCA and RMA or who have successfully exited the program and subsequently: ~~lost employment, sustained a reduction in hours, are unable to maintain current employment, or are unable to gain employment and who are unable to access other assistance such as unemployment insurance or COVID-19 pandemic unemployment assistance either lost employment or sustained a reduction in hours that would requalify them for RCA or RMA.~~

The aforementioned policy letters allow CAO staff the ability to make the following accommodations for refugee populations. These accommodations remain in effect until ~~September 30, 2020~~ ~~January 31, 2021~~ ~~April 30, 2021~~ ~~September 30, 2021~~.

Non-financial Eligibility Requirements

If state offices or non-governmental agencies are closed due to the COVID-19 response, the applicant's eligibility can be confirmed via:

- electronic database query (such as SAVE) or other electronic means;
- written declaration, under penalty of perjury, containing name, date of birth, alien registration number, immigration status, date of entry, most recent address, and an acknowledgement that the individual has been impacted by COVID-19;
- verbal declaration, if a written declaration is not possible. The CAO will accept a verbal declaration and narrate in case comments; however, this must be supported with a subsequent written declaration as soon as possible. The written declaration must contain name, date of birth, alien registration number, immigration status, date of entry, most recent address, and acknowledgement that the individual has been impacted by COVID-19;
- collateral contact of the Resettlement Agency (RA) may be utilized and narrated in case comments until such time as the appropriate documentation can be obtained and scanned into imaging.

The CAO may conclude that the applicant is eligible for ORR benefits and services via any method outlined above. Regardless of the method utilized, all ORR required documentation must be obtained by ~~September 30, 2020~~ ~~January 31, 2021~~ ~~April 30, 2021~~ ~~September 30, 2021~~.

REMINDER: Per ORR, SAVE alone is not considered sufficient documentation of an individual's qualifying refugee status. Please review [Refugee Qualifying Immigrant Status Desk Guide](#) for more information.

Income

Certain portions of an applicant's income should be disregarded when considering eligibility for RCA. Examples include certain COVID-19 emergency assistance payments like the 2020 Economic Impact Payments (Stimulus Checks of \$1,200 for individuals or \$2,400 for married couples and up to \$500 for each qualifying child), and financial assistance from refugee service providers for payment of utilities).

NOTE: States should not disregard unemployment insurance or COVID-19 pandemic unemployment assistance, except for Lost Wages Allowance (LWA). As per Policy Clarification 20115-150, the \$300 per week LWA payment will be excluded as income and resource for cash benefits determination. The CAO should enter the income in the

Electronic Client Information System with the correct exclusion code for all programs and must narrate in the case record that the income is excluded and was not used in determining eligibility.

Required Documentation

1. Proof of income, verified by pay stubs.
2. Proof of resources, verified by bank statements. Include vehicle equity value from KBB.com.

RESET Requirement

ORR would like to ensure that all RCA recipients are referred and enrolled for employment and training (E&T) services. Information Memorandum COVID-19 Reopening Phase Procedures applies to RCA recipients and refugee employment program providers. During this time, refugee employment program providers are expected to provide E&T programming for RCA recipients. However, if these services are not available or appropriate, these individuals may be granted good cause based on their individual circumstance and the phase of reopening of the county in which they reside.

PROCEDURE

See Attachment D: Procedure to Process RCA and RMA.

NEXT STEPS

1. Share this Operations Memorandum and Attachments with appropriate staff.
2. Questions about this Memorandum can be directed to the Refugee Resettlement Program at RA-PWREFUGEEPROGRAM@pa.gov.

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment A: [Policy Letter \(PL\) 20-03, COVID-19 Extended Assistance for ORR Populations](#)
- Attachment B: [Policy Letter \(PL\) 20-04, Assistance for ORR Populations Affected by COVID-19](#)
- Attachment C: [Frequently Asked Questions: Policy Letters \(PLs\) 20-03 and 20-04](#)
- Attachment D: Procedure to Process Extended RCA and RMA
- Attachment E: [Policy Letter \(PL\) 20-06 Extended Assistance for ORR Populations Affected by COVID-19](#)
- Attachment F: [Policy Letter \(PL\) 21-01 Continued Assistance for ORR Populations Affected by COVID-19](#)

Attachment G: Policy Letter (PL) 21-05 Continued Assistance for ORR Populations Affected by COVID-19, through September 30, 2021