



Administrative Policies and Procedures: 23.00

Subject Families First/Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Application Process

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Approved by

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Authority

45 C.F.R. § 206.10;

Tenn. Code Ann. § 71-3-118

Tenn. Comp. R. & Regs. 1240-1-14; 1240-1-15; 1240-1-17; 1240-1-45

Application Family Assistance Eligibility Staff

Policy Statement

The Tennessee Department of Human Services (TDHS) shall allow any individual who wishes to apply for Families First the opportunity to file an application and have a determination of eligibility within forty-five (45) calendar days.

Purpose

This policy was developed to outline the process for individuals to obtain and file an application, as well as the application and interview process.

Procedures

A. Right to apply for Families First

1. Any person wishing to do so shall have the opportunity to apply for Families First. The right to file an application shall not be denied to any person even though it is apparent that eligibility for Families First benefits does not exist.
2. Information about the Families First program administered by TDHS shall be provided to any person requesting it.
3. A customer may be assisted by any individual of his/her choosing in completing and submitting the application, interviewing with the assigned TDHS staff, and submitting verifications.
4. It is unlawful to charge or receive anything of value, either directly or indirectly, for providing application assistance to a person requesting

Families First.

5. Proof of eligibility is not required prior to filing an application.

B. Availability of Applications

The Families First application process begins with a signed request for assistance on TDHS's Family Assistance application (Form(s) [HS-0169 Application for Assistance](#), [HS-2775 Application for Assistance \(Spanish\)](#), or the [Family Assistance Online Application](#) as applicable).

1. Applications will be available to any person who requests an application in person at all TDHS county offices.
2. The application will be mailed on the same business day an application request is received by mail, phone, fax, or electronically.
3. Any person making an inquiry about an application should be advised of his/her right to same-day filing to protect the application start date.

C. Filing an Application

1. TDHS will accept signed and dated applications received in the county office, and applications should be filed in the customer's county of residence.
 - a. The application may be received in person, by mail, by fax, or electronically.
 - b. The application must be filed by the customer, his/her authorized representative, designated agent, or someone acting responsibly for him/her.
 - c. The application file date will be the date the application is received by the county office during normal business hours either by mail, in person, by fax, or other electronic transmission. TDHS will designate the date of the application as the next business day for applications received outside of normal business hours.
 - d. The application date for an application received via fax or electronically on a holiday and/or weekend will be the next business day.
 - e. Applications that contain the customer's name and signature are acceptable.
 - f. Receipt of an original application in addition to the fax or electronic copy is not required.
2. The application can be used for all Family Assistance programs. The customer indicates the particular program for which he/she wishes to apply on the application form.
3. The customer may voluntarily withdraw the application at any time prior to the determination of eligibility.

D. Timeliness Standards

1. The standard for completing applications for Families First/TANF will be no later than forty-five (45) calendar days from the date the customer or the customer's representative files the application. TDHS is under Federal court order to process all applications timely. Any application for Families First/TANF that is not processed and authorized on the forty-ninth (49th) calendar day will be issued interim benefits based on the information that is available in the case record so that the customer's benefits are issued no later than the fiftieth (50th) day.

2. An opportunity to participate in the Families First/TANF Program consists of providing eligible assistance units (AU) with a cash payment within forty-five (45) calendar days after the completed application is filed. An opportunity to participate has been provided if the Families First benefits are authorized prior to or on the forty-fifth (45th) calendar day after the application is filed. Benefits are issued the first business day following the day the authorization is completed.
3. The authorization action will consist of approval or denial. Denial must be based on ineligibility for the program, failure to develop and/or sign a Personal Responsibility Plan, loss of contact, withdrawal of the application, or death of the customer.

E. Scheduling Interviews

1. TDHS will schedule an interview as promptly as possible after the filing of the application in order to ensure that benefits are issued by the forty-fifth (45th) calendar day following the application file date.
2. A customer who misses an interview will be notified that an appointment can be rescheduled if necessary via the eligibility and case management system. A second (2nd) interview will not be automatically scheduled. An application that is pending will be denied on the forty-fifth (45th) calendar day if the customer does not reschedule a missed interview.
3. If eligible, the AU will have an annual renewal interview.
 - a. The Eligibility and Case Management System will provide an appointment notice to the AU the month before the AU renewal is due. The notice will contain [HS-3026 Family Assistance Renewal Application](#).
 - b. The renewal application must be received by TDHS before the renewal interview can be conducted.
 - If the application is received and the customer misses the interview, the customer will receive a missed appointment notice.
 - If the application is not received, the eligibility counselor must attempt to contact the customer by phone to advise that an application must be filed and the appointment rescheduled.
 - c. If the customer does not complete an application and/or misses their renewal interview, the case must be closed on or before the fifteenth (15th) of the month.

F. Interviewing for Eligibility

The customer or the customer's designee must complete an interactive interview with the eligibility staff at initial application. The initial interview cannot be completed by phone unless the face-to-face interview has been waived due to a barrier. At annual renewal the interview can be completed face-to-face or by phone. Home visits are not mandatory, but may be used when no alternative accommodations can be made or are appropriate for the situation. The interviews are designed to:

1. Allow the eligibility staff to assist the customer in understanding TDHS and its programs, clarify the customer's questions about eligibility, and determine eligibility in an organized manner while allowing the customer the opportunity to present information in his/her own words.
2. Allow the eligibility staff and the customer an opportunity to discuss the

customer's goals, specific needs, and potential support services needed to help the family move toward self-sufficiency.

3. Provide the opportunity to discuss the customer's rights and responsibilities.
4. Staff will ensure that the Families First/TANF Drug Screening is completed in accordance with policy [23.02 Families First Drug Testing Policy](#).
5. Provide an opportunity to discuss other resources that may be of assistance to the customer.
6. Provide the eligibility counselor with the information needed to determine which one (1) of the four (4) paths through the program is most appropriate for the customer.
 - a. Child-Only
 - b. Work Exempt
 - c. Diversion
 - d. Work and/or Education Activity

NOTE: A single interview may be conducted for all Family Assistance programs. If there are multiple AUs in the residence group, the head of each AU must be interviewed.

G. Determination of Eligibility

The following must be established during the application process:

1. Technical Eligibility
 - a. Enumeration ([Families First Online Policy Manual](#) Chapter 9)
 - b. Residence ([Families First Online Policy Manual](#) Chapter 10)
 - c. Citizenship Status ([Families First Online Policy Manual](#) Chapter 11)
 - d. Age ([Families First Online Policy Manual](#) Chapter 12)
 - e. Relationship ([Families First Online Policy Manual](#) Chapter 13)
 - f. Living in the home of a relative ([Families First Online Policy Manual](#) Chapter 14)
2. Income Eligibility ([Policy 23.06 Families First Income Eligibility](#))
3. Resource Eligibility ([Policy 23.05 Families First Resource Eligibility](#))
4. The Personal Responsibility Plan ([Policy 23.07 Families First Personal Responsibility Plans](#))
5. If the customer either fails or refuses to cooperate in the eligibility determination process, it will result in case closure or application denial.

H. Providing Notice of Eligibility Determination

The eligibility and case management system will generate a notice to the customer on the first (1st) business day following the day the Families First/TANF AU has been authorized.

1. The reason for the approval/denial will generate the text for the approval or denial notice of the Families First/TANF AU.
2. The denial notice will contain an explanation of why the application was denied and of the right to reapply at any time.
3. The approval notice will contain:

- a. The ongoing monthly benefit amount and the amount for the application period.
 - b. The month the cash payment will begin.
 - c. A reminder to report changes within ten (10) calendar days of the change.
4. A fair hearing statement is included with all notices. The fair hearing statement contains a name and telephone number of the person to contact for additional information. If there is an individual or organization that provides free legal representation, the AU will be advised of the availability of that service.

I. Reapplication after Denial

If an AU files an application within three (3) months of case closure or the denial of an application:

1. The customer must be interviewed and have all points of eligibility reviewed.
2. All matches must be resolved.
3. Verify the following factors of eligibility:
 - a. That the point(s) of eligibility which caused the previous denial or closure no longer exists;
 - b. AU composition;
 - c. Income;
 - d. Deductible expenses; and
 - e. Resources, if questionable.

NOTE: The eligibility and case management system will require that all eligibility factors be verified. Unless the information is questionable or has changed at the time of the interview, accept the previous verification and the statement of the customer for the verification other than those listed above.

4. Review the need for drug screening as outlined in [Policy 23.02 Families First Drug Testing Policy](#).
5. Renegotiate the Personal Responsibility Plan.

J. Customers Who Appear to be Eligible for SSI

When the Families First/TANF customer appears to be potentially eligible for Supplemental Security Income (SSI), the customer will be asked whether an application for SSI has been filed. If an application for SSI has not been filed, a brief explanation of the program will be provided to the customer.

1. The customer will be included in the AU and, if he/she chooses to apply for SSI and becomes eligible, he/she will be removed from the AU at the time eligibility for SSI is attained.
2. If the customer wishes to relinquish SSI and be included in the Families First/TANF AU, the eligibility counselor will explain the differences in benefits. If the individual chooses to be in the Families First/TANF budget, the eligibility counselor will ask the individual to talk to a Social Security Office representative. When the State Data Exchange (SDX) verifies that the individual no longer receives SSI, the individual may be added to the Families First/TANF AU.

Forms	<p>HS-0169 Application for Assistance (ENGLISH)</p> <p>HS-0169 Addendum Application for Assistance (ENGLISH) Client information booklet</p> <p>HS-0169 Application for Assistance (ARABIC) Client information booklet attached</p> <p>HS-0169 Application for Assistance (SOMALI) Client information booklet attached</p> <p>HS-2775 Application for Assistance (SPANISH)</p> <p>HS-2775 Addendum Application for Assistance (SPANISH) Client information booklet</p> <p>HS-3026 Family Assistance Renewal Application</p> <p>HS-3026sp Family Assistance Renewal Application (Spanish)</p> <p>Family Assistance Online Application</p>
Collateral Documents	<p>Families First Online Policy Manual Chapters 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14</p> <p>23.03-17.00 Families First/TANF Application Process Procedures</p> <p>23.03-17.01 Rights and Responsibilities</p> <p>23.02 Families First Drug Testing Policy</p> <p>Policy 23.05 Families First Resource Eligibility</p> <p>Policy 23.06 Families First Income Eligibility</p> <p>Policy 23.07 Families First Personal Responsibility Plans</p>
Additional Resources	None
Retention of Records	Pending
Glossary	
Term	Definition
Child only	The caretaker is a non-parental relative, not included in the AU, or an SSI caretaker.
Diversion	The Families First/TANF Diversion payment is designed to address immediate and compelling financial needs and help a customer secure or maintain employment. The Diversion payment does not exceed twelve (12) months of Families First/TANF benefits.

Family Assistance Eligibility Staff	Any Family Assistance staff that may interview the customer and/or determine program eligibility. This may include Eligibility Assistants, Eligibility Counselors, and/or Client Representatives.
Interim Benefits	Temporary benefits issued to customers whose application has not been processed timely due to no fault of the customer.
Work Exempt	The caretaker is a mandatory member of the AU but is unable to work because he/she is: sixty-five (65) years old or older, disabled, temporarily incapacitated, caring for an in-home disabled relative, a parent in a two (2) parent household caring for an infant less than sixteen (16) weeks of age, or a single parent caring for an infant less than one (1) year of age.
Work and/or Education Activity	The caretaker is a mandatory member of the AU but is not exempt from the work and/or education activity and either does not meet diversion criteria or does not choose diversion.

Acronyms

Abbreviation	Expansion
AU	Assistance Unit
SDX	State Data Exchange
SSI	Supplemental Security Income
TANF	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
TDHS	Tennessee Department of Human Services