



DUBUQUE COUNTY GENERAL ASSISTANCE GUIDELINES

Updated July 2020

The Code of Iowa, [Chapter 252](#) imposes duties upon the counties of Iowa regarding general assistance. This Chapter directs the Dubuque County Board of Supervisors to develop a policy to provide for the assistance of poor persons in Dubuque County.

COUNTY GENERAL ASSISTANCE

The board of supervisors of each county shall provide for the assistance of poor persons lawfully in the county who are ineligible for, or are in immediate need and are awaiting approval and receipt of, assistance under programs provided by state or federal law, or whose actual needs cannot be fully met by the assistance furnished under those programs.

The Dubuque County Board of Supervisors will determine the form of relief and the amount of assistance will be determined by this policy.

GENERAL ASSISTANCE DIRECTOR

The board of supervisors in each county shall appoint or designate a general assistance director for the county, who shall have the powers and duties conferred by this chapter.

In Dubuque County, general assistance is called the General Assistance program.

General Assistance program provides short-term monetary help in the form of repayable loans to Dubuque County residents in extreme financial crisis. Dubuque County is the funder of last resort after all other reasonable options are exhausted. Iowa Code 252.13 allows for recovery of money expended by Dubuque County for the assistance or support of a poor person under this program.

General Assistance offers a safety net for those eligible and promotes community strength by encouraging individual stability, self-sufficiency and responsibility.

General Assistance promotes respect, compassion, and fairness in all of its interactions with persons seeking and receiving aid.

A. Eligibility

To be eligible for benefits in Dubuque County, a Dubuque County resident must comply with the following requirements established by the county board of supervisors:

1. Meet the definition of Poor or Needy:
 - a. POOR (defined by 252.1 of the Code as persons who have no property, exempt or otherwise, and are unable, because of physical or mental disabilities, to earn a living by labor.)
 - b. NEEDY persons who have some means but are in a crisis situation not attributable to actions on their part. If the Board is of the opinion that general assistance will be conducive to their welfare and the best interest of the public, it should be granted.
2. Must lawfully reside in Dubuque County. Residency will be defined to mean that a domicile has been established with the intent to remain. This is demonstrated by a current driver's license or state ID with a Dubuque County address plus the following - proof of local residence, (i.e. rent receipts, rental agreement, proof of mortgage interest due), enrollment of children in school, registration to vote, and other indicators of good faith residence verified by General Assistance staff.
3. Dubuque County is the funder of last resort. General Assistance staff will educate applicants of the other non-profits and charitable organizations that may be able to fulfill the applicant's need.
4. Must complete and sign the General Assistance Application form and all release forms.
5. If physically and mentally able to work, must register for employment with Iowa Workforce Development, and actively seek employment by completing a minimum of 3 applications per week. Applicant and all able bodied persons over age 18 in the household must make application for assessment and job placement.

The General Assistance staff will determine whether applicants have made application and will obtain reports of assessment and placement progress of the applicant.

6. If physically or mentally unable to work, client must provide doctor's written verification of diagnosis and length of illness.
7. If applicable, client will apply for all other public assistance programs prior to General Assistance being granted, such as FIP, Social Security,

SSI, Unemployment Compensation, Food Stamps, and Veterans Benefits, to include all available federal, state and local resources in the community.

8. Transients will be provided with transportation as per the transportation section of this policy, referred to other community organizations that deal with the transient and homeless, or will be provided with assistance to meet an immediate emergency need until such time as other arrangements can be made.
9. This assistance is provided in the form of a loan and is expected to be paid. State code requires that applicants will be informed of their liability to reimburse Dubuque County all assistance granted to them. All applicants are required to sign a form attesting to their knowledge of this policy.
10. Federal regulations now count general assistance as unearned income for food stamps effective February 1, 1988. Any assistance received may be reported to the applicant's food stamp worker upon inquiry.
11. Applicants are required to pursue the application completion process with due diligence. This includes keeping all scheduled appointments, pursuing all avenues for assistance, and returning requested information in a timely manner.

B. Administration

Duties of Personnel: The General Assistance staff will perform the following duties relative to applicant eligibility:

1. Accept applications for General Assistance from persons residing in Dubuque County and will supply standard application forms for this purpose.
2. Investigate the needs of each person filing an application for General Assistance and reinvestigate as necessary.
3. Determine the eligibility of each applicant according to the guidelines set out in this policy.
4. Arrange for General Assistance Director approval of vendor payments to be paid on behalf of the applicant per Iowa Code 252.35.
5. The staff will contact all landlords or the City and/or County Assessors' Office to obtain/verify the following information:

- a. Verification of correct landlord
 - b. Landlords interest in the property, i.e. own, buying, contract
 - c. Names of people living in the dwelling
 - d. The size of dwelling, i.e. sleeping room, 1, 2, 3, bedroom, house, etc.
 - e. Amount of rent
 - f. Any utilities included in the rent
 - g. Name and address to be placed on assistance check
6. Assist applicants to attain self-sufficiency and promote financial responsibility through referrals to other agencies or programs as appropriate.

Investigation Guideline and Determination of Eligibility: The General Assistance staff will investigate the factual statements made on an application or from other information made available.

1. The following are circumstances under which the staff would find it prudent to make further inquiry into an individual's eligibility status:
 - a. The person's situation indicates potential sources of support
 - b. Property or cash reserve are very near or equal to the financial limitations in this policy
 - c. Living expenses are greater than income, if there is no reasonable explanation of their income
 - d. The individual's condition indicates that some, if not all, of the eligibility factors need further inquiry or verification. This would include instances in which the individual:
 - i. Appears to be mentally confused;
 - ii. Is physically ill or disabled and unable to participate adequately in the eligibility determination process;
 - iii. Has a known history of misrepresentation;
 - iv. Changes addresses frequently, or has no permanent place of residence, or temporarily relocated for employment purposes
 - e. Applicant fails to secure and maintain employment
2. The following are considered to be intentional program violations. Persons found to have committed any intentional program violation will be determined ineligible for assistance for a period of **1 year**.

- a. The applicant/client makes false or misleading statements during the application process or on the forms
 - b. When applicant/client misrepresents, conceals or withholds facts/information on the application or during the application process
 - c. When an applicant/client is found to be gambling
3. If a person is found to have received assistance prior to the staff learning of an intentional program violation, the applicant will be notified by the Director in writing of the violation. Applicant will be notified in writing of his/her right to appeal. Outcome of the appeal could result in immediate repayment of the assistance already received and ineligibility for assistance for a period of **3 years**.

C. Resources

The eligibility process will include an examination of both real and personal resources to determine whether the individual or individuals' dependent(s) is poor or needy.

In order to qualify as a poor or needy person, no real or personal resources will be owned. The following items are exempt from consideration as resources:

1. Personal clothing, **items of personal necessity, household goods and furniture;**
2. Tools, equipment and specialized vehicles necessary for the applicant's usual occupation if the applicant is able and actively seeking work, if such work is reasonably available in the community so as to allow the continuance of the same trade;
3. Motor vehicles;
4. Burial lots and irrevocable funeral trust funds;
5. If an applicant has a resource resulting in a finding of ineligibility, assistance may be granted for up to three months if the applicant can prove that a good faith effort is being made to sell the resource. A lien may be placed by the County on the property being sold in order to insure repayment of any county assistance granted.

6. Any transfer of personal or real property within the last two years which was made for the purpose of receiving assistance renders the applicants ineligible for aid.
7. Primary residence with an equity value of less than \$5,000.

D. Employment requirements

As a condition of assistance, all physically and mentally abled persons 18 years and older and who are not needed in the home for dependent children or disabled adults must register for employment with Iowa Workforce Development, and actively seek employment. If an applicant receives a bona fide job offer, he/she must accept a position. Children under 18 attending school will be exempt from the work registration requirement.

8. If an applicant voluntarily quits or reduces hours at a job without reason, or is terminated from a job for just cause, he/she is not eligible to receive General Assistance for 6 months from the day of the quit or voluntary hours reduction. If the person secures comparable employment within 6 months, the ineligible period will be waived.
9. Applicant and all physically and mentally abled persons over age 18 in the household must actively seek employment by registering with Iowa Workforce Development and fill out at least 3 employment applications per week.
10. Applicant must attend financial/budgeting/job seeking class or other approved educational classes.
11. Applicant must sign a General Assistance repayment agreement.
12. The applicant will be required to sign a contract which states that they understand the requirements and expectations of the General Assistance program. Program requirements must be completed in a timely manner as determined by the staff.
13. The applicant will be required to comply with treatment recommended by a physician.
14. Any other requirements that General Assistance deems appropriate to meet the requirements of the program.

Acceptable reasons that persons are unavailable for employment and not required to register for work include:

1. Illness, either physical or mental, that prevents self-support.
2. Disabled due to old age, mental sub normality, or other factors rendering the person unemployable as defined by employment counselors.
3. Care of a dependent person whose needs are such that the person is needed in the home to care for the dependent. The dependent may include a child or disabled adult.
4. Persons determined to be unable to work must sign a Release of Information to be completed by their attending physician. The General Assistance Staff must be able to document that the applicant is unable to work, and the estimated length of the illness.

E. Income

All gross income in either cash or income received or readily available to the applicant or recipient in his/her family will be considered in determining the amount of General Assistance paid. In cases of self-employment, adjusted gross income from the latest Federal Income Tax Return would be used for verification. All income will be verified by the General Assistance staff.

The monthly eligibility for need determination will be 100% of the monthly Federal Poverty guidelines, updated annually on each July 1st based on the current guidelines from the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. Please refer to Appendix A for the current guidelines.

State and federal assistance programs, workmen's compensation, social security income, child support, alimony, retirement pensions, and all other sources of income, such as help from relatives, savings, 401k or other retirement account, interest, dividends, inheritance, tax return, property sales will be considered in entirety.

If an applicant's earned or unearned income is not being utilized to pay for basic needs prior to paying for luxury or non-essential items, the General Assistance staff will refer the applicant for either budget counseling, or in the case of State or Federal payments, report to the issuing agency that the monthly payment may be inappropriately utilized and request that they follow their established policies to correct the problem.

Special Allowances:

A special allowance may be granted by to prevent the shut-off of a utility in situations that involve minor children, sick or disabled adults or persons over 60 years of age.

F. Age

A person must be 18 years of age or a family member residing in the household of an applicant who is at least 18 years old to receive General Relief Assistance. The only exception to this policy is those persons, under age 18, who have reached their majority due to marriage. Any applicant under the age of 18 will be referred to the Department of Human Services for an assessment.

G. Assistance Amounts

General Assistance will be granted in accordance with a verified need with each applicant, recipient, or family, as set forth in this section. Married or unmarried couples living together as a family must both complete the application process, or assistance will be prorated as a single person applicant.

The maximum assistance that a household can receive in a 12-month period is as follows:

1. Assistance with no more than 2 monthly items in 12 months not necessarily in the same category, **and**
2. Total annual assistance for the above not to exceed (exclusive of burial)
 - a. \$1,000 for single applicant
 - b. \$2,000 for family

General Assistance does **NOT** assist with rental or utility deposits, first month's rent, phone bills, cable bills, mortgage payments, storage space rental, gasoline vouchers, propane/fuel oil fills over \$150.00, propane/fuel tank rental, dental bills, medical bills, or eye glasses.

1. Rent

- a. Rent will be paid only for housing that is currently being occupied by the family, except for temporary absence of the family for health purposes.
- b. Rent must be past due for current month in order to be considered.
- c. Rent will not be paid to responsible relatives, such as parents, grandparents, children, or grandchildren.

- d. Rent can be paid for temporary housing such as hotel, motel, campground or rooming house when approved by the General Assistance Director. Payments for temporary shelter will be for a reasonable amount charged by a vendor.
- e. When included in the rent, utilities mean gas and/or electric, and/or water.
- f. Maximum level for rent shall be on the following basis, not to exceed the actual one month rent for the applicant if less than the maximum shown:

Single person	\$290.00 per month without utilities
Single person	\$315.00 per month with utilities
Family	\$390.00 per month without utilities
Family	\$415.00 per month with utilities

- g. Lease must be in the name of the applicant. If the rent expense is being shared, the rent will be prorated for the applicant's share.

2. Utilities

- a. Utility payments include payments to gas, electric and water companies, payment for fuel oil or any other source required for cooking.
- b. Utility payment is limited to most current bill only and will be paid no more than 3 times in a 12- month period, only up to the maximum allowed annually.
- c. The amount authorized will be the amount billed by the utility company.
- d. The utility company will be contacted about setting up a payment plan – if one is accepted, the payment will be limited to the amount of the monthly payment plan.
- e. No hookup charges, deposits will be paid.
- f. Utilities must be in the name of the applicant, recipient, another member of the household, or in the name of the former spouse who is no longer living in the household. If the expense of the utilities is being shared, the utility will be prorated.
- g. Applicants must make an attempt to pay at least 40% of their billing from personal funds not including any other type of public assistance

in order to be considered for utility assistance. A billing and payment history from the utility company will be obtained.

3. Medical Services

- a. An applicant or recipient will be referred to any other community agency which determines eligibility and payment of medical expenses.
- b. For large medical expenses, the applicant will be referred to University Hospitals in Iowa City.

H. Repayment Provisions

All recipients of General Assistance (excluding burials) will agree to reimburse the county for any assistance granted. The provisions of section 252.13, Code of Iowa, for repayment of benefits to Dubuque County, are applicable to the services provided in the ordinance and the applicant will acknowledge the same in writing.

1. An agreement to reimburse Dubuque County will be signed at the date of application.
2. Any person making application for assistance who suffers no disability will agree, prior to the receipt of any assistance, to make reimbursement for any assistance received pursuant to the provisions of this ordinance.
3. Recovery efforts will begin as soon as applicant is able after the disbursement date, and funds must be paid in full within 2 years of disbursement.
4. No additional funds will be disbursed to applicant until current disbursement has been received in full.
5. If applicant does not attempt to meet the agreed obligation, the applicant will not be eligible for any further assistance.
6. The Dubuque County Board of Supervisors may, upon written application and with good cause, waive the repayment of part or all of the benefits received.
7. Payments will be accepted by the county from any person offering to repay assistance which has been provided to that person or to any other person pursuant to the provisions of this ordinance, or any previous ordinance or amendment in effect which made provision for assistance to the poor or needy.

8. Any person making application for assistance who applies for Supplemental Security Income and is entitled to a retroactive lump sum payment must agree to comply with the reimbursement provision of the State Supplemental Income program to be eligible for assistance under the provisions of this ordinance.

I. Burials

The assistance available through Dubuque County General Assistance program is intended to help cover costs of funeral home services associated with burial or cremation, as well as expenses related to the internment of remains (i.e. cemetery fees). The deceased must have met the residence requirements in Dubuque County in order to be eligible for burial assistance. The funeral home will work with the next of kin or officially designated representative to limit the services to meet the guidelines of this policy. Arrangements for burial will be done by funeral directors, who will obtain authorization for burials from the General Assistance staff prior to proceeding with the burial. A religious service is permitted at no cost to Dubuque County if the funeral home and church agree to provide at no cost.

1. Resources

All available resources are to be taken into consideration and may be deducted from the burial allowance, including **but not limited to**:

- a. Insurance payments
- b. Social Security Burial benefit paid to the surviving spouse
- c. Deceased person's cash savings, checking, bonds, etc.
- d. Any assets belonging to deceased that could be sold
- e. Contributions from the family
- f. Any VA allowances
- g. Death benefits may be available from employment, railroad retirement, pension plans, VA benefits, life insurance policies, prepaid burial agreements, or social security. The family of the deceased must apply for these benefits and apply them to the cost of the burial.
- h. Any and all funds generated from memorials must be applied to the burial costs.

If the family of the deceased discovers a death benefit, savings account, or other resources after the funeral, they are expected to notify the county and the funeral home. If the county deems the family of the deceased ineligible because of the resources, the family will be held responsible to reimburse actual costs of the burial services disbursed by the county on behalf of the deceased.

2. Covered Services

Direct Cremation Services not to exceed \$1950

- a. Transfer of deceased to funeral home within 25 miles
- b. Preparation service fees
- c. Medical examiners cremation permit fee
- d. Cremation fees
- e. Vehicle to crematory
- f. Abbreviated arrangement conference at the funeral home
- g. Minimal basic container for ashes, or place ashes into container provided by family
- h. Prepare and file death certificate
- i. Prepare and place minimum obituary in locate newspaper
- j. Prepare and file notification of death with Social Security Administration

Full Cremation Services not to exceed \$3080

- a. Transfer of deceased to funeral home within 25 miles
- b. Preparation service fees
- c. Medical examiners cremation permit fee
- d. Cremation fees
- e. Vehicle to crematory
- f. Abbreviated arrangement conference at the funeral home
- g. Minimal basic container for ashes, or place ashes into container provided by family
- h. Private memorial at funeral home not to exceed one hour for immediate family only; however no visitation of deceased prior to cremation
- i. Prepare and file death certificate
- j. Prepare and place minimum obituary in locate newspaper
- k. Prepare and file notification of death with Social Security Administration

Funeral Services not to exceed \$3330

- a. Transfer of deceased to funeral home within 25 miles

- b. Embalming/body preparation
- c. Basic casket
- d. Minimum grave receptacle
- e. Abbreviated arrangement conference at the funeral home
- f. Funeral coach to cemetery
- g. Prepare and file death certificate
- h. Prepare and place minimum obituary in locate newspaper
- i. Prepare and file notification of death with Social Security Administration
- j. Private visitation service at funeral home not to exceed one hour for immediate family only
- k. Committal service only at the cemetery

3. Exclusions

A county burial **does not include**:

- a. Flowers
- b. Thank you notes or other printed materials
- c. Clergy or music honorariums
- d. Transportation to church or other location for visitation
- e. Hairdresser/barber
- f. Certified death certificates
- g. Crucifix, flag display case, visitation book, or other memorial items
- h. Luncheon or reception charges
- i. Other cash advance items
- j. Additional cars or services
- k. Full obituary in the newspaper
- l. Any additional services not listed

A burial from Dubuque County cannot be added to or upgraded.

Director's Exception to Policy

The Director of General Assistance will have the authority to authorize assistance to an applicant who does not meet eligibility criteria in instances of extraordinary circumstances. Any such authorization provided through the director's exception will be so noted on the Notice of Decision provided to the applicant.

1. The client (deceased) is above the income/resources eligibility limitations, but special circumstances warrant the granting of assistance for up to a 30-day period.

2. The requested assistance exceeds the maximum expenditure permitted in a particular category, but special circumstances warrant the granting of assistance for up to a 30-day period.
3. Other requirements of these policies may be exempted for up to a 60-day period.
4. Burials- Director can override basic casket to oversized basic casket on case-by-case basis.
5. Director of General Assistance will not use director's exception to policy for any current county employee requests. Any current county employee requesting assistance who does not meet the standard assistance guidelines for any reason will be referred as an appeal to the Board of Supervisors.

K. Appeal Procedure

1. All applicants will be informed of their right to appeal any adverse decision of the General Assistance staff or director to the initial appeal committee. If initial appeal is denied, applicants will be informed in writing of their right to appeal to the board of supervisors.
2. Appeals must be filed in writing with the General Assistance Director or the board of supervisors within TEN days of the applicant's notification of the adverse decision. Assistance in filing the appeal will be provided to any applicant who has difficulty because of inability to read, write or understand the English language. Appeals filed more than ten days after notification of the adverse decision will not be considered.
3. Unless the written appeal contains a request for a hearing before the board of supervisors, the appeal will be decided without a hearing by the board of supervisors upon such information as the board of supervisors deems sufficient. The board of supervisors will deliberate in closed session pursuant to Iowa Code Sections 217.30(6) and 28A.5(1)(a). The decision will be rendered by the Board of Supervisors.
4. If a hearing is requested, the board of supervisors will fix a date and notify the applicant in writing, at the address provided by the applicant on the appeal form.
5. At any state of the appeal, the applicant will have the right to be represented by an advocate, who need not be an attorney, and to present any supporting documentary evidence.

6. If a hearing is requested, it will be held at a closed session of the board of supervisors, pursuant to Iowa Code Sections 217.30(6) and 28A.5 (1)(a). The applicant will have the right to have witnesses testify in his or her behalf and to have persons giving adverse evidence present for cross examination. The board of supervisors may impose reasonable restrictions on time and relevancy.
7. If a hearing is requested, the board of supervisors will render its decision within SEVEN days from the date of hearing.
8. The decision of the board of supervisors will be in writing and will be mailed to the applicant. The decision is not a public record and its disclosure will be governed by Iowa Code Section 217.30. Applicant may phone the General Assistance staff for a verbal explanation the day following a hearing. Judicial review of action of the board of supervisors is governed by Iowa Code Section 252.27.

L. STATEMENT OF NONDISCRIMINATION

Dubuque County will consider all applications without regard to race, religion, color, sex, national origin, age, physical or mental disability, political affiliation or sexual preference.

We reserve the right to amend, delete or make revisions to the General Assistance policy contained in this format at a future meeting of the board of supervisors. This policy supersedes any previous policy and applies to all existing and future applicant requests until the next revision.

Appendix A

**2020 POVERTY GUIDELINES
FOR THE 48 CONTIGUOUS STATES AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

<https://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty-guidelines>

Persons in family/household	Annual Poverty Guideline	Monthly Poverty Guideline
1	\$12,760	\$1,063
2	\$17,240	\$1,437
3	\$21,720	\$1,810
4	\$26,200	\$2,183
5	\$30,680	\$2,557
6	\$35,160	\$2,930
7	\$39,640	\$3,303
8	\$44,120	\$3,677
For families/households with more than 8 persons, add \$4,480 Annually for each additional person or \$373 Monthly.		