



Opportunities to Prosper

Resource Guide

Statewide Poverty Action Network
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Who is Poverty Action? The Statewide Poverty Action Network fights to ensure everyone in Washington State is able to meet basic needs and has the opportunity to prosper.

We believe things need to change. People are working harder for less. The rising cost of health care, education and child care are putting the squeeze on families. Most of us pay more in taxes – to keep our communities healthy for everyone – while the wealthy pay less and less.

Poverty Action is working in Olympia. We want the governor, legislators, regulators and other decision-makers in the state to hear our voices, your voice.

This resource guide lists some of the programs that can help you make ends meet or to start your way to prosperity. It also lists the way that Poverty Action has worked to make change happen. On the back of this booklet are 5 ways that you can join us in this struggle.

If you have any questions about this guide or how to get involved, please don't hesitate to call us toll free at 1-866-789-7726.

Owe money to payday lenders? Tell them that you want a payment plan.

New bills have just been passed to help stop the cycle of high-cost, long-term debt by giving you more options and time to repay your payday loans.

Poverty Action is leading the fight against predatory lending. In 2009, we helped protect borrowers with a law expected to save Washington consumers \$100 million a year in fees!



A new law, effective on Jan 1, 2010 protects you by:

- Ensuring that you have enough time to pay back loans:
 - At any time, you can request a longer repayment plan: 90 days for loans under \$400; 180 days for loans over \$400
 - The minimum term of a loan is your next paycheck unless that is less than 7 days. If it is less than 7 days, the minimum term is your next following pay date.
- Making sure you do not exceed the amount that you can reasonably pay back:
 - Loans can only be 30% of your income or \$700, whichever is less.
- Reducing the need for additional loans to pay back the original loan:
 - Lenders cannot legally loan individuals more than 8 loans in a given year. If you are unable to repay a loan, you can enter into a repayment plan instead of taking out a new loan.

Effective July 26, 2009, new rules stop lenders from harassing customers

Lenders must limit the number of times they contact you to collect payment to no more than 3 times in a single week and they cannot threaten, intimidate or embarrass you.

Who is eligible?

Everyone who takes out a payday loan is eligible for the terms listed above. If a lender is not following these terms, or if you feel that you are being harassed by your lender, contact Poverty Action: Danielle@povertyaction.org or 1-866-789-7726.

SPEAK UP!

Thank your legislators for taking steps toward making payday lenders act responsibly. Tell them your story about how these new laws are helping you and your community.

Need help saving for your big goal like buying a home, getting a degree or starting a business?

Look into the matched savings account called **Individual Development Accounts (IDAs)**. For each dollar you save, the state matches a dollar (up to \$4,000). The IDA program helps people begin building financial security.

Account holders also receive training in homebuying and/or how to start a small business and how to plan a family budget.

Account-holders can use money to:

- Buy a first home
- Make home improvements or repairs
- Get a post-secondary education
- Buy a car or computer for work or school
- Start a small business
- Buy technology for work-related needs

In 2005, Poverty Action helped establish the IDA program through the passage of the Savings, Earnings and Enabling Dreams (SEED) Act.

Who is eligible?

You must have a household income that is at or below 80% of Area Median Income (AMI) or 200% of Federal Poverty Line (FPL), whichever is greater in your local area. See page 9 to figure out if you might be eligible.

How do I enroll?

In 2009, the IDA program did not get the funding needed to open new accounts. New accounts will not be opened in 2009.

SPEAK UP!

Tell your legislators that IDAs can help people get out of poverty. Ask them to continue funding this program so that more people can save for economic security!

Although no new IDAs are being opened, asset building programs can help you in other ways. They provide financial literacy and homebuying classes, credit and mortgage counseling, and access to financial products that can help you get out of debt and start saving toward your goals.

Call us toll free 866-789-7726 or email info@povertyaction.org to find out about asset building coalitions and programs.

Want to go to college?

You might be eligible to receive an **Opportunity Grant** toward your education so that you can advance in your career. Opportunity Grants provide financial aid to cover the cost of tuition, books, school supplies and fees for 45 credits of study in an approved training program.

Since 2007, Poverty Action has helped secure the funding for Opportunity Grants, so that everyone can pursue an education.



Opportunity Grant programs include certificates, credentials and degree programs that provide students with direct links to high-demand jobs through partnerships with business and labor.

An additional \$1500 of financial aid may also be provided to pay for support services such as tutoring, career counseling, emergency childcare, and emergency transportation.

Who is eligible?

Washington residents who:

- Have a family income that is at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level*
- Enroll in an eligible opportunity grant program of study
- Demonstrate a commitment to complete the program and maintain at least a 2.0 cumulative grade point average

How do I apply?

For more information or to apply, contact your local Community College. Each College offers different classes and programs that qualify, so ask to speak to a counselor that can tell you about Opportunity Grants available at their school.

*see page 9 for poverty guidelines

SPEAK UP!

Do you believe that everyone should have the chance to go to college? Call your legislators and tell them to expand funding for Opportunity Grants, which will help make this a reality.

Do you earn *too little* to pay *so much* in taxes?

You may be eligible for the **Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)**. The EITC is an additional tax credit or rebate that you may receive with your tax return from the IRS (Internal Revenue Service).

Who is eligible?

- People who are working and make less than the income limits* AND
 - cannot be claimed as a dependent by another person
 - have a dependant child who is under the age of 18
 - OR any age if she or he has a permanent disability
 - OR under the age of 23 if she or he is a student who is enrolled full time
- You (and your spouse, if you are filing a joint return) and any qualifying children must also have valid social security numbers.

Find out if you are eligible for EITC by completing the worksheets included in your standard tax instruction booklet. These worksheets will help you in finding out your correct filing status, figuring out whether your children meet the qualifications, and estimating the amount of credit that you may receive.

Do you need help completing the tax forms? Between Jan-Apr, you can dial 2-1-1 to find the closest FREE tax preparation site.

The EITC has no effect on certain welfare benefits. In most cases, EITC payments will not be used to determine eligibility for Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), food stamps, low-income housing or most Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) payments.

How do I enroll?

You must file a tax return, even if you did not earn enough money to be obligated to file a tax return.

In 2008, Poverty Action spearheaded the campaign that signed the Working Families Tax Rebate (WFTR) into law. This is a state-funded tax return that is figured at 10% of your EITC.

SPEAK UP!

In 2009, the first year that the WFTR would have been paid out, the legislature did not fund the program. Call your legislators now and tell them to fund the Working Families Tax Rebate, which will help working families and put money back into local communities!

* see page 9 for income limits

Completed your felony sentence and want to vote?

If you have completed your sentence, your right to vote is restored starting July 26, 2009. Before this law was passed, reinstating your right to vote relied on your ability to pay all court fines.

Poverty Action was instrumental in restoring the civil right to vote to an estimated 100,000 people who have completed their sentences.

Under the new law, you are still responsible for all the terms of your sentence, but your right and duty to vote no longer depend on your ability to pay your legal financial obligations (LFOs).

Who is eligible?

- If you were convicted in a federal or state court outside the state of Washington, once you are no longer in prison your right to vote is restored.
- If you were convicted within the state of Washington, once you are no longer in prison or under the supervision of the Department of Corrections (meaning that you are no longer under community custody), your right to vote is restored.

If you are unsure if you are under community custody, call the DOC at 1-360-725-8213.

It is a felony to register to vote if you are still under community custody, so if you are not sure of your status, make sure to check with the DOC first.

SPEAK UP!

Register to vote and weigh in on the important policy decisions being made – decisions that affect you and your community!
Contact Poverty Action so that your voice can be heard in Olympia!

How do I use my right to vote?

- You must register 30 days before the election.
 - To register, you must provide both a residence AND a mailing address.
 - If you are homeless, you can use the address of the shelter, park, or intersection where you are staying as your residence address. For mailing address, you can use a post office box, or the mailing address of a friend or relative, or general delivery at your city's main post office, or any address where you can pick up your mail.

Starting in 2009, Washington state (except for Pierce county) shifted to voting by mail. You no longer have the option of going to a polling station. Your ballot will be mailed to you and it must be returned via mail or in a drop box by election day.

Need help meeting your family's basic needs?

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) provides temporary cash and medical support for families in need. This program helps families during periods of unemployment or medical emergencies.



Your TANF benefits are based on your family size and income. For example, in Washington state, a family of three with no income would receive a monthly TANF grant of \$546.

In 2008, Poverty Action helped to achieve a 3% increase in TANF benefits, the first increase in 15 years!

Each state has different eligibility requirements and benefits. What is described here applies only to Washington state.

Who is eligible?

Washington state residents who:

- Meet income & resource requirements*
- Meet citizenship or immigration requirements
- Are responsible for the care of children
 - OR who are pregnant
 - OR are caring for a relative's child
 - OR are legal guardians
 - OR are acting in the place of a parent.

*Income and resource requirements:

You cannot have more than \$1000 in resources, including income. Certain items, such as the home you live in or vehicle worth up to \$5,000 are not counted. Your case manager will help you understand what income and resources are considered and how it will affect your case.

In order to receive TANF, you may be required to participate in the WorkFirst program, which can help you by paying for child care expenses, helping with your job search through resume writing and job interview skills, and providing access to training to increase your skills and get a better job. You are expected to participate in job search and work preparation activities and complete all requested interviews.

Time limitations:

Some TANF families are limited to sixty months of benefits in their lifetime.

How do I apply?

You can apply for TANF at the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS). Find your local Community Services Office by dialing 2-1-1 or through the DSHS website: <http://www.dshs.wa.gov> where you can also apply online using the Online Application for Services.



SPEAK UP!

Thank your lawmakers for increasing TANF and tell them how it helps your family. Let them know how important and needed this program is.

Do you need TANF but do not qualify? Contact Poverty Action and share your story with us so that we can educate the public and lawmakers about how eligibility requirements effect people who need this program.

Unable to work due to a disability?

General Assistance Unemployable (GAU) is a state-funded program that provides cash and medical benefits for people who are physically and/or mentally unable to work for 90 days from the date of application.

Who is eligible?

Washington residents who:

- Are unable to work
- Are at least 18 years old, unless married
- Meet income and resource requirements*
- Are citizens or meet immigration status requirements
- Agree to have their needs for medical treatment and referral assessed

Legislators regularly threaten to cut funding for GAU. Since 1998, Poverty Action has successfully helped to stop the elimination of this crucial program.

You cannot get GAU benefits if:

- You are eligible for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) benefits or State Family Assistance (SFA) benefits or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits
- You are eligible for SSI or are an ineligible spouse of an SSI recipient
- You were denied benefits or your benefits were terminated by the Social Security Administration for failing to follow a program rule or application requirement.

*Income and resource requirements:

You cannot have more than \$1000 in resources, including income. Certain items, such as the home you live in or vehicle worth up to \$5,000 are not counted.

How do I apply?

You can apply for GAU at the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS). Find your local Community Services Office by dialing 2-1-1 or through the DSHS website: <http://www.dshs.wa.gov> where you can also apply online using the Online Application for Services.

SPEAK UP!

Do you currently receive GAU? Or do you need GAU but do not qualify? Contact Poverty Action and share your story with us so that we can educate the public and lawmakers about how GAU helps and how eligibility requirements can affect people who need this program.

WAYS TO SPEAK UP

To contact your lawmakers, call the legislative hotline: 1-800-562-6000. This will connect you to an operator so that you can leave messages for your representatives and the governor.

To contact Poverty Action, call us at: 1-866-789-7726 or email info@povertyaction.org.

2009 Federal Poverty Guidelines

Number of persons in household	2009 Federal Poverty Level (Annual income)	200% Federal Poverty Level (Annual Income)
1	\$10,830	\$21,660
2	14,570	29,140
3	18,310	36,620
4	22,050	44,100
5	25,790	51,580
6	29,530	59,060
7	33,270	66,540
8	37,010	74,020
for the 48 contiguous states and DC		

2008 EITC Income Limits

You may be able to take the Earned Income Tax Credit if:

- You have more than one qualifying child and you earned less than \$38,646 (\$41,646 if married filing jointly), OR
- You have one qualifying child and you earned less than \$33,995 (\$36,995 if married filing jointly), OR
- You do not have a qualifying child and you earned less than \$12,880 (\$15,880 if married filing jointly).

5 actions you can take now to help end poverty

1. Contact your state legislators.

Tell them about poverty and inequality in your community. Weigh in on issues that matter to you. You can reach all three of your representatives and the governor by calling the legislative hotline at 1-800-562-6000.

2. Sign up for the Network News.

Get our email alerts and take action on the issues that you care about. Keep up to date on what's happening in Olympia. Contact us by email at info@povertyaction.org or phone at 1-866-789-7726.

3. Join.

Strengthen your voice in the state capitol by becoming a member of Poverty Action. For as little as \$10 a year, you can help us achieve crucial victories.

4. Volunteer.

Put your skills and passion to use by volunteering your time. Help us connect with and mobilize people across the state. Contact us by email at volunteer@povertyaction.org or phone at 1-866-789-7726.

5. Share your story.

Help us educate the public and lawmakers: call us and share your experience. Contact us by email at speak@povertyaction.org or phone at 1-866-789-7726.



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