Income Screening as a Certification Requirement

Purpose

To provide documentation that an applicant's income eligibility was determined accurately.

Authority

7 CFR Part 246.7; 25 TAC §31.22

Policy

When determining program eligibility, the local agency (LA) shall determine and document the applicant's total household gross income and household size at each certification. If the applicant is currently a recipient of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), or Medicaid, refer to Policy CS:08.0.

LAs are required to verify all information that is questionable or when verification is specifically required by this policy. In addition, an LA may require verification of any information to ensure income eligibility is determined accurately.

Definitions

Household - all persons, related or unrelated, living together in the same dwelling, with the exception of the following special situations: foster child, individuals who qualify as a separate economic unit, and residents of a homeless facility or other residential institution.

Income - gross income earned by all members of a household, including any amount received or withdrawn from any source, including savings, unless excluded from the definition of income by federal regulations as described in Policy CS:09.0. Exception: for farmers and self-employed individuals, use net income - the income after the deduction of business expenses.
In-kind benefit - benefits received by the household, which are provided in the form of goods and/or services. Example: woman resides with another family and provides childcare in exchange for food and shelter. This in-kind value is excluded from the income determination.

Instream migrants- migrant farm workers who follow a route or agricultural work from state to state and who are currently not at their home base.

Verification of income - a process whereby the information presented by an applicant as documentation of income is validated through an external source of information other than the applicant.

True income - an accurate reflection of household income within the previous 30 days prior to the date the application for WIC benefits is made.

Current income - all household income that was available in the previous 30 days prior to the date the application for WIC benefits is made.

Prospective income- all household income that will be available in the next 30 days.

New Money - Money received within the previous 30 days and not received on a regular basis.

Provisional Certification – a 30-day certification and up to 30 days of benefits for an applicant/participant who meets all eligibility criteria at certification, but fails to bring one of the acceptable proofs of identification, residency or income, including adjunctive eligibility proof.

Disaster Expedited Certification – a certification process where anthropometrics and blood work are optional but must be obtained within 90 days from certification. This may be allowed during a disaster situation.
Procedures

I. At each certification, WIC applicants or parent/guardians applying on behalf of a child shall declare the number of persons that comprise the applicant’s household size and provide acceptable documentation of the amount of ALL gross income received by each member of the household, unless the applicant is adjunctively income eligible, in which case income eligibility is determined under the provisions of Policy CS:08.0.

A. Staff shall obtain verbal confirmation from the applicant that the documented income and household size have not changed.

B. If income has been documented for one family member within the last 30 calendar days, it may be used for other family members being certified within that 30-day period. Staff shall obtain verbal confirmation from the applicant that the documented and household size has not changed. The 30-day period does not apply to those determined adjunctively eligible (see Policy CS:08.0). C. A copy or image (electronic) of the income document(s) shall be downloaded or printed and scanned and attached to the notes in the Family Record of the MIS.

II. Provisional Certification (30 day) shall be given to an applicant who does not provide proof of income at the time of the certification appointment. If applicant states that income proof exists, but did not bring to the appointment, staff shall proceed with the certification screening.

A. If applicant/parent/guardian meets all other eligibility requirements:
   1. The MIS will allow up to 30 days issuance of food benefits.
   2. If the applicant/parent/guardian returns with correct proof within 30 days and is found eligible, the MIS will establish the certification period.
   3. If the applicant fails to return within 30 days with correct proof, the applicant is ineligible and automatically terminated by the MIS.
B. Under no circumstances shall a second subsequent Provisional Certification be used if the applicant fails to provide the required documentation within the 30 days.

III. WIC applicants shall provide acceptable documentation of the amount(s) of all income received by each member of the household. Amounts should reflect all usual gross income.
   - Documentation shall be dated within the previous 30 days from the date of the eligibility determination.
   - The applicant or parent/guardian may present a copy or facsimile (fax) or image of the original document.
   - All income documents shall be scanned and attached to Family Page of the MIS.
   - Exceptions are identified in this policy where written documentation is not required.
   - All documents within the previous 30 days shall be requested from each source of income (e.g. weekly pay requires the previous four paycheck stubs).
   - Acceptable documents for proof of income include:

A. Paycheck stubs – with the current amount of gross earnings
   1. The paycheck stub(s) must indicate the pay period or pay date and employee’s name.
      a. Weekly pay – previous four paycheck stubs are required.
      b. Bi-weekly/every 2 weeks – previous two paycheck stubs are required.
      c. Twice Monthly – Previous two paycheck stubs are required.
      d. Monthly – most recent paycheck stub.
   2. Do not accept a paycheck stub that has a different name than the applicant’s or household member’s name. Allow applicant to complete a WIC-32, Applicant’s Statement of Farm/Self-Employment Form. (See III. K. in this policy)
   3. The employer may be contacted, with the applicant’s or parent/guardian’s permission, to clarify information on the paycheck stubs. Information from the employer shall be used to
determine income and documented in the Income Section of Family Page of the MIS.

B. **Signed statement from employer** - (business letterhead is not required). The statement shall reflect current gross income, the pay period, and/or the pay date within the previous 30 days. Employer name, phone number, signature, date are all required on the statement.

C. **WIC-19a** - Assistance Documentation Form.
   1. Section I shall be completed when:
      a. money or financial support is received from a source outside the household such as parents, relatives, or friends. If money is received occasionally, refer to Procedure II. J. of this policy.
      b. there is more than one provider of assistance, each provider shall complete a separate WIC-19a.
      c. the applicant receives financial support in addition to their wages from someone who does not reside with them.
   2. Section II shall be completed by a third party when no one in the household has a source of income and the household does not receive outside assistance.
      a. Examples of a third party include but are not limited to: staff of a church or school, social service agency, legal-aid, lawyer, public health nurse, doctor, and elected public officials.
      b. The third-party cannot be an employee of the WIC Program, an individual related to the applicant/parent/guardian, or a member of the applicant’s household. The staff shall confirm this information verbally with the applicant.

D. **WIC-19b** - Employment Verification Form is acceptable, if the applicant and/or members of the applicant’s household do not have acceptable documentation of wages. LA staff should only clarify information that is provided on the form by the employer and not add information that is missing. An applicant who has physically started a new job but has not received his/her first paycheck shall have a WIC-19b completed or have a written statement from their employer. If the employer refuses to complete the WIC-19b the
self-declaration form shall be used, refer to Procedure III. K. in this policy.

E. **WIC-32**- If an applicant (or member of the household) who is self-employed does not have the most recent IRS tax return, the applicant’s Statement of Farm/Self-Employment Form, shall be completed. (See section III. K. in this policy). This form may also be used if an applicant or member of the household is paid in cash and the employer will not provide documentation, or the applicant or member of the household cannot provide a paycheck stub(s) in his/her name. The form should be completed to reflect the applicant’s or a member of the household’s true income.

F. **Bank statement**- Applicant can provide checking or savings statement if they declare they are living off savings or checking account. The checking or savings account statement must be reflective of current gross income within the previous 30 days. Example: An applicant is living off their savings. The amount withdrawn monthly to pay for their expenses plus a month’s worth of interest shall be considered as their monthly household income. The total dollar amount in savings is not to be considered. A bank statement can be used as documentation as long as the date on the statement is from the previous 30 days and accurately represents current income available to the household within the previous 30 days.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total amount of savings</td>
<td>$30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount withdrawn to cover monthly expenses for one month</td>
<td>$1,150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One month of interest</td>
<td>$  25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total monthly income: $1150 + $25 =</td>
<td>$  1,175</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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G. **Tax records (Any IRS 1040)** - Most recent filed IRS tax form. If the applicant or household member has not filed for the most recent tax year, then the most recently filed tax form is required. Staff shall use the adjusted gross income figure indicated on the completed Federal tax return for individuals that are not self-
employed. If applicant indicates that they are Self-Employed the adjusted net income figure indicated on the completed Federal tax return should be used. Staff shall ask applicant/parent/guardian to verbally confirm the tax record reflects current income and retain a copy of the section of the documents used to determine income.

H. Foster child placement letter - All foster children must be screened for income eligibility, see Policy CS:11.0 Certification of Foster Children. A verbal declaration of the amount paid to the family for the care of the foster child shall be obtained if the amount is not indicated on the placement letter. If a foster child receives income, whether from a job or outside financial resource, it must be included in the income determination. Income screening shall be done at every certification for foster children, even if they have not changed foster homes.

I. Child Support and/or Alimony - Documentation shall be obtained in the following order (i.e., staff shall obtain the highest level of documentation, if it exists, with #1 constituting the highest level and so forth):
1. Court order, divorce decree or information from Office of Attorney General (800-252-8014);  
2. Receipts or copies of checks; 
3. Signed and dated statement from the person providing support; or 
4. Signed and dated statement from person receiving support.

J. Lump Sum/New Money - New money is money received within the previous 30 days and not received on a regular basis. Examples include, but are not limited to: gifts, inheritance, bonuses, and lottery winnings.

K. Self-Declaration - An applicant or a parent/guardian applying on behalf of a child, who is a victim of theft, loss, or disaster and/or does not have a source of income shall complete a Self-Declaration form. This form shall be used as the lowest level of documentation
for prospective income. This form shall be scanned and attached to Family Page of the MIS.

1. Homelessness - see Homeless policy
2. Zero income - should be prompted to describe in detail their living circumstance and how they obtain basic living necessities such as food, shelter, medical care and clothing. Examples include but are not limited to: unpaid leave status including maternal leave, person on strike.
3. Cash on hand – self-declaration of income within 30 days.

L. Additional - The following are acceptable as proofs of income and are listed in the MIS. Examples include, but are not limited to:
1. Workers Compensation letters, or Unemployment Insurance Benefits;
2. Severance, pension payments, or retirement benefits;
3. 401K or other investments;
4. Social security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
5. Student Financial aid

IV. Exceptions include the following:
A. Overtime: If the overtime pay was a one-time occurrence, within the last 30 days, use the normal wages paid to calculate income and do not include the overtime.

B. Income Varies:
1. Annual income may be a better reflection of the applicant’s true income for an applicant or family member who is on maternity leave; individuals (e.g., teachers) who are paid on a 9-10 month basis and are temporarily on leave for the summer; college students who work only during the summer months and/or school breaks; and individuals who receive frequent and consistent overtime pay.
2. Documentation shall be obtained in the following order (i.e., staff shall obtain the highest level of
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V. Applicants or parents/guardians who are victims of theft or loss shall complete the WIC Self-Declaration Form for Identification, Residence, Zero Income and Proof of Income. Staff shall scan and attach to Family Page in the MIS.

VI. Current participants and applicants who qualify for expedited certification and/or who are victims of a disaster shall complete the electronic WIC Self-Declaration Form for Disaster Victims in the MIS.

VII. Income eligibility of migrants:
A. Certain instream migrant families with an expired Verification of Certification (VOC) shall be considered income eligible if income eligibility was determined within the previous 12 months. The date the migrant family’s income was last determined shall be documented on the Family Page of the MIS.

B. The income eligibility of migrant families who are not instream, defined as migrant farmworkers at their home base, shall be determined and documented on Family Page of the MIS at each certification.

VIII. To assess the income eligibility of an unemployed person (whether the person quit, was fired, or experienced a lay-off) all amounts of financial support received from any of the sources listed in this policy shall be determined and appropriate documentation obtained. If the income assessment is being done prospectively (e.g. the sole support of the family was laid off and was authorized to receive unemployment benefits for the next six months) “current” refers to income that will be
available to the family in the next 30 days. If the person is living off their savings refer to II. F. of this policy.

IX. Income eligibility of pregnant women: Refer to Policy CS:10.0, Economic Unit for Income.

X. The LA has no responsibility to monitor the continued income eligibility of the participant during the current WIC certification period.

XI. Participants are not required to report income changes within certification periods nor are LAs required to inquire about such changes. However, during a certification period, if the local agency receives information from any party regarding a change in income eligibility, a reassessment of program eligibility shall be conducted during the certification period unless the information concerns possible program fraud or abuse. When fraud or abuse is suspected, refer to Policy GA:12 for instructions on reporting to the state agency. Reassessments are not required when there are 90 days or less before the expiration of the certification period. If the individual is determined ineligible, the LA shall disqualify the individual and any other family members participating in WIC at the time of the reassessment unless they are adjunctively eligible, refer to Policy CS:08.0.

A. Some examples of situations which trigger a mandatory reassessment by the LA include:
   1. family member certified and income or adjunctive income eligibility has changed;
   2. an increase in income reported by a participant;
   3. a change in custody and/or household size and/or
   4. A complaint alleging ineligibility.

B. WIC staff should contact the individual to bring documentation of their continued income or adjunctive program eligibility to their next appointment.
   1. If the individual fails to bring the proof of income or if proof of participation in an adjunctive program cannot be verified, then
the individual and other family members participating in WIC at the time of the reassessment shall be determined ineligible and terminated from the Program. Refer to Policy CS:23.0 Notification of Ineligibility, Termination or Expiration of Eligibility.

C. If the individual is income eligible through adjunctive eligibility, refer to Policy CS:08.0.

D. Refer to Policy GA:12.0 for instructions on handling citizen complaints about a participant’s eligibility.

E. Refer to Policy CR:03.0 for guidance on a participant's right to appeal any decision which results in the denial, disqualification, or termination of their participation in the Program.

F. LA staff shall provide written notification of termination to participant(s) found ineligible. Refer to Policy CS:23.0 for instructions.

XII. Special Circumstances for income eligibility of a military family when parent(s) is deployed during times of crisis or on temporary assignment.

A. Military personnel absent (e.g., deployed overseas) shall be counted as members of the household.

B. Whenever possible, a recent (within the past 120 days) Leave and Earnings Statement (LES) shall be obtained as documentation of the soldier’s contribution to the household's gross income. If the funds are direct deposited into a bank account in lieu of having an LES statement, request a bank statement from the applicant. The applicant shall document the amount of gross income. The statement shall be signed by the applicant/parent/guardian and include a statement explaining why he/she cannot provide documentation of income.

C. Exclusions from income include, but are not limited to:
1. Military allowances
   a. Any basic allowance for quarters or housing (BAQ or BAH) received by military services personnel residing on/off military installations; and
   b. cost of living allowance (COLA) received by military personnel residing outside the United States.
   c. Family Subsistence Supplemental Allowance (FSSA) payments to members of the Armed Services provided by the Department of Defense under the provisions of Public Law 109-163, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2006.
   d. Other types of Entitlement pay, that can be excluded, but are not limited to:
      i. Combat Pay and Hostile Fire Pay - must be excluded from income if it meets the following three requirements.
         • Received in addition to service member’s basic pay;
         • Received as a result of the service member’s deployment to or service in an area that is designated a combat zone; and
         • Not received by the service member prior to deployment to or service in the designated combat zone.
      ii. Family Separation Housing (FSH) and overseas housing allowance (OHA) when parent is deployed or on temporary assignment

D. Additional temporary compensation - The Local Agency needs to explore the circumstances under which military service personnel is receiving each additional allowance in order to decide if they should include or exclude the payment. The requirements above need to be met.
   1. Front Line Pay received shall be averaged Determine the average by dividing the total pay by 12 months.
Example: Front Line Pay is $200/month, received for past 5 months. $1000 ($200 X 5 months) is divided by 12 = $83.33 month. Add $83.33 to monthly income.

New money that is received once per year, including but not limited to Clothing Allowance and Enlistment Bonus shall entered in the MIS.

E. When children are in temporary care of friends or relatives due to military parents being deployed or on temporary assignment and financial support is being provided by the military parents:
   1. When the LESs are available, parents and children are a separate economic unit (SEU) within the household of the temporary caretaker. Income is assessed for the SEU.
   2. When LESs are unavailable, the source of financial support for the children determines the documentation necessary.
      a. If financial support is being provided by the military parents, the children will be considered an SEU with income in the amount provided for their care. Written documentation from the caretaker should designate the amount received from the military parents, either in a letter or written note or in LES statements when available.
      b. If the caretaker holds a credit card for necessary expenses or has access to direct deposited funds, have the caretaker declare the amount being used to care for the child(ren). The child(ren) will be considered a separate economic unit with income in the amount declared.