

NATIONAL IMMIGRATION LAW CENTER

Major Benefit Programs Available to Immigrants in California

September 2026

PROGRAM	“QUALIFIED” IMMIGRANTS ¹ WHO ENTERED THE U.S. BEFORE AUG. 22, 1996	“QUALIFIED” IMMIGRANTS WHO ENTERED THE U.S. ON OR AFTER AUG. 22, 1996	“NOT QUALIFIED” IMMIGRANTS ²
Supplemental Security Income & State Supplemental Payment (SSI/SSP)	Eligible only if: - Receiving SSI (or application pending) on Aug. 22, 1996, or - Qualify as disabled,^{3*} or - Refugee, asylee, granted withholding of deportation, Cuban/Haitian entrant, Amerasian, victim of trafficking, <i>but only during first 7 years after the status was granted</i>, or - Citizens of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and Palau (residing under COFA), or - Lawful permanent resident with credit for 40 quarters of work,⁴ or - Veteran, active-duty military, their spouse, unremarried surviving spouse, or child,* or	Eligible only if: - Refugee, asylee, granted withholding of deportation, Cuban/Haitian entrant, Amerasian, Iraqi or Afghan special immigrants, victim of trafficking, <i>but only during first 7 years after the status was granted</i>, or - Certain Afghan or Ukrainian parolees,¹ or - Citizens of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and Palau (residing under COFA), or - Lawful permanent resident with credit for 40 quarters of work (but must wait until 5 years after entry before applying),⁴ or - Veteran, active-duty military, their spouse, unremarried surviving spouse, or child,* or	Eligible only if: - Receiving SSI (or application pending) on Aug. 22, 1996, or - Victim of trafficking (certified or recognized by HHS), <i>during first 7 years after the status was granted</i>, or - Certain Afghan or Ukrainian parolees,¹ or - American Indian born in Canada or other Native American tribal member born outside U.S.

¹ Qualified immigrants are: (1) lawful permanent residents (LPRs), including Amerasian immigrants; (2) refugees, asylees, persons granted withholding of deportation, conditional entry (in effect prior to Apr. 1, 1980), or paroled for at least one year; (3) Cuban/Haitian entrants (as defined in 45 C.F.R. §401.2); (4) battered spouses and children with a prima facie case determination on or an approved (a) self-petition for an immigrant visa, or (b) immigrant visa filed for a spouse or child by a U.S. citizen or LPR, or (c) application for cancellation of removal/suspension of deportation, whose need for benefits has a substantial connection to the battery or cruelty (parent/child of such battered child/spouse are also qualified); (5) victims of trafficking and their derivative beneficiaries who have obtained a T visa or whose application for a T visa sets forth a prima facie case. (A broader category of trafficking victims who are certified by or receive an eligibility letter from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services are eligible for federal benefits to the same extent as refugees, without regard to their immigration status.); and (6) Individuals who lawfully reside in the U.S. pursuant to a Compact of Free Association (COFA). Iraqi and Afghan special immigrant visa holders (SIV) are eligible for federal benefits to the same extent as refugees. Other Afghans granted parole between July 31, 2021, and September 30, 2023 -- and their spouses and children, and parents/guardians of unaccompanied children granted parole after September 30, 2022 — also are eligible for federal benefits to the same extent as refugees, until the end of their parole term. Ukrainians paroled into the U.S. between February 24, 2022, and September 30, 2023 – and their spouses and children, and parents, guardians or primary caregivers of unaccompanied children paroled into the U.S. after September 30, 2023 – are eligible for federal benefits to the same extent as refugees. Benefits are available to this group regardless of the length of their parole period - but eligibility continues only until their parole is terminated.

² “Not qualified” immigrants include all noncitizens who do not fit within the “qualified immigrant” categories.

³ Must have been lawfully residing in the U.S. on August 22, 1996.

⁴ LPRs can earn credit if they have worked 40 qualifying quarters. Immigrants also get credit toward their 40 quarters for work performed (1) by parents when the immigrant was under 18, and (2) by spouse during the marriage (unless the marriage ended in divorce or annulment). No credit is given for a quarter worked after December 31, 1996, if a federal means-tested public benefit (SSI, Medi-Cal, SNAP, or CalWORKs) was received in that quarter.

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	American Indian born in Canada or other Native American tribal member born outside U.S.	American Indian born in Canada or other Native American tribal member born outside U.S.	
Cash Assistance Program for Immigrants (CAPI)	Eligible if: Are a senior or person with disabilities who does not meet the immigrant eligibility criteria for federal SSI (above). ^{5*}	Eligible if: Are a senior or person with disabilities who does not meet immigrant eligibility criteria for federal SSI (above). [*]	Eligible only if: - Permanently residing in the U.S. under color of law (PRUCOL), and either 65 years or older or a person with disabilities, or - Victim of trafficking, applicant for U visa and U visa holders⁶ (includes derivative relatives).
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or CalFresh	New applicants, and recipients at recertification must be a: - Cuban/Haitian entrant - Citizen of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and Palau (residing under COFA) - Lawful Permanent Resident who: - was previously granted refugee status, asylum or withholding of deportation/removal, or Amerasian immigrant, or - has been in “qualified” immigrant status for 5 years, or - has credit for 40 quarters of work history,⁴ or - is receiving disability-related assistance,⁷ or - was 65 years or older on Aug. 22, 1996,⁸ or	New applicants, and recipients at recertification must be a: - Cuban/Haitian entrant - Citizen of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands and Palau (residing under COFA) - Lawful Permanent Resident who: - is under 18 years old, or - has been in qualified immigrant status for 5 years or more,[†] or - was previously granted refugee, asylum, withholding of deportation/removal, Amerasian immigrant, victim of trafficking, Iraqi or Afghan special immigrant status, certain Afghan or Ukrainian parolees,¹ or - has credit for 40 quarters of work,⁴ or	Not Eligible

⁵ Qualified immigrants who were lawfully residing in the U.S. on Aug. 22, 1996, can receive SSI if they can show that they have a disability. Seniors who have applied for SSI on this basis can receive CAPI while they are waiting for a disability determination from the Social Security Administration.

⁶ Victims of trafficking may be eligible for state or local benefits (CAPI, CalWORKs, CFAP, Medi-Cal, IHSS, GA, Refugee Cash Assistance, Refugee Medical, Refugee Social Services) pending certification for federal benefits. Applicants for U visas and U visa holders may also be eligible for these services. See www.dss.cahwnet.gov/getinfo/acl06/pdf/06-60.pdf.

⁷ Disability-related benefits include: Social Security disability, state disability or retirement pension, railroad retirement disability, veteran’s disability, disability-based Medi-Cal, or possibly General Assistance for certain immigrants with disabilities.

⁸ Must have been lawfully residing in the U.S. on August 22, 1996.

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	Lawful Permanent Resident who is: • a veteran, active-duty military, their spouse, unremarried surviving spouse, or child, or • a member of a Hmong or Laotian tribe during Vietnam era, when the tribe militarily assisted the U.S.; their spouse, surviving spouse or child, or • an American Indian born in Canada or other Native American tribal member born outside U.S.	Lawful Permanent Resident who is: • receiving disability-related assistance,^{7‡} or • a veteran, active-duty military, their spouse, unremarried surviving spouse,[†] or child, or • a member of Hmong or Laotian tribe during Vietnam era, when the tribe militarily assisted the U.S.; their spouse, surviving spouse,[†] or child, or • an American Indian born in Canada or other Native American tribal member born outside U.S.	
California Food Assistance Program (CFAP)	New applicants, and recipients at recertification must be ineligible for SNAP due to immigration status, and must be: • a Lawful Permanent Resident, or • an adult Paroled into the U.S. for a year or longer (during first 5 years), or • a “Battered” immigrant	New applicants, and recipients at recertification must be ineligible for SNAP due to immigration status, and must be: • a Lawful Permanent Resident,[†] or • an adult Paroled into the U.S. for a year or longer (during first 5 years), or • a “Battered” immigrant	New applicants, and recipients at recertification must be: • Lawful temporary resident (status granted under the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986), or • Paroled into U.S. for less than a year, or • Victim of trafficking prior to ORR/OTIP certification, applicant for U visa, or U visa holder⁶ (includes derivative relatives), or • potentially, Special Immigrant Juvenile
Child Nutrition Programs: • Women, Infants and Children (WIC) • School Lunch & Breakfast • Summer Food	Eligible	Eligible	Eligible
CalWORKs	Eligible	Eligible [§]	Eligible only if: • Victim of trafficking, applicant for U visa or U visa holder⁶ (includes derivative relatives), or • Granted indefinite stay of removal, indefinite voluntary departure, paroled into U.S. for less than a year, or

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			• Permanently residing in the U.S. under color of law (PRUCOL).
Covered California	Eligible if over-income for “free” Medi-Cal	Eligible if over-income for “free” Medi-Cal	Eligible if over-income for “free” Medi-Cal, and lawfully present in the U.S. ⁹
Full-Scope Medi-Cal <i>No share of cost for low-income residents.</i>	Eligible	Eligible	Eligible if: • Enrolled by January 1, 2026, or • Under 19 years old, or • Lawfully residing under 21 years old, or • Current or former foster care youth under 26 years old, or • Pregnant, including 12 months post-partum, or • Permanently residing in the U.S. under color of law (PRUCOL), or • Victim of trafficking, applicant for U visa or U visa holder⁶ (includes derivative relatives).
In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS)	Eligible	Eligible	Eligible if: • Enrolled by January 1, 2026, or • Under 19 years old, or • Current or former foster care youth under 26 years old, or • Pregnant, including 12 months post-partum, or • Permanently residing in the U.S. under color of law (PRUCOL), or • Victim of trafficking, applicant for U visa or U visa holder⁶ (includes derivative relatives).
Medi-Cal Access Program (MCAP)	Eligible	Eligible	Eligible
California Children’s Services (CCS)	Eligible	Eligible	Eligible

⁹ The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ lawful presence definition, at 45 C.F.R. §155.20, includes persons granted deferred action, but excludes persons granted relief under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program (DACA). Covered California uses this definition.

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Children’s Presumptive Eligibility (CPE)	Eligible	Eligible	Eligible
Breast and Cervical Cancer Programs	Eligible	Eligible	Eligible
Prostate Cancer Treatment Program (IMPACT) 12 months treatment if uninsured & ineligible for Medi-Cal or Medicare	Eligible	Eligible	Eligible
Medicare (“Premium Free”) Eligibility is based on work history. Part A (hospitalization) is premium-free; Part B (outpatient) can be purchased.	Eligible only if: • Lawful permanent Resident, or • Cuban/Haitian entrant, or • Citizen of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands and Palau (residing under COFA), or • Entitled to or enrolled in Medicare on July 4, 2025 (covered until Jan. 4, 2027)	Eligible only if: • Lawful permanent Resident, or • Cuban/Haitian entrant, or • Citizen of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands and Palau (residing under COFA), or • Entitled to or enrolled in Medicare on July 4, 2025 (covered until Jan. 4, 2027)	Eligible only if: • Lawfully present¹⁰ and entitled to or enrolled in Medicare on July 4, 2025 (covered until Jan. 4, 2027)
Premium “Buy-In” Medicare¹¹	Eligible only if: • Lawful permanent resident who has resided continuously in the U.S. for at least 5 years.	Eligible only if: • Lawful permanent resident who has resided continuously in the U.S. for at least 5 years.	Not eligible
County Medical Services¹²	Eligible	Eligible	Varies by county
General Assistance	Eligible**	Eligible [§]	Varies by county

¹⁰ For Medicare purposes, lawfully present is defined at 8 C.F.R. §1.3.

¹¹ The same immigrant rules apply to the **Qualified Medicare Beneficiary**, **Specified Low-Income Medicare Beneficiary**, and **QI-1** programs.

¹² Several counties provide health coverage or care to low- or moderate-income residents, regardless of their immigration status.

“Deeming” Rules

*** Eligibility for SSI and CAPI may be affected by deeming.** A sponsor’s income/resources may be added to the immigrant’s in determining eligibility. For SSI, an LPR whose sponsor signed a traditional affidavit of support (I-134) is subject to deeming for 3 years after gaining LPR status. Deeming is not applied if the immigrant becomes disabled after becoming an LPR. An LPR whose sponsor signs an I-864 affidavit of support is subject to deeming until he or she becomes a citizen or has credit for 40 quarters of work — with 12-month renewable exception for immigrants who would go hungry or homeless without assistance, and domestic violence victims (exception extended if abuse has been recognized by court, administrative law judge, or U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security). The deeming rules in the Cash Assistance Program for Immigrants (CAPI) are identical to the SSI rules, except that, regardless of which affidavit was signed, (1) victims of abuse are exempt, and (2) post–Aug. 22, 1996, entrants (whose sponsors do not have a disability) are subject to 10 years of deeming.

† Eligibility for SNAP/CalFresh and CFAP may be affected by deeming. A sponsor’s income/resources may be added to the immigrant’s in determining eligibility. LPRs whose sponsor signed an I-864 affidavit of support are subject to deeming until they become a citizen or have credit for 40 quarters of work — with 12-month renewable exception for immigrants who would go hungry or homeless without assistance, and domestic violence victims (exception extended if abuse recognized by court, administrative law judge, or U.S. Department of Homeland Security).

‡ Eligibility for SNAP/CalFresh and CFAP may be affected by deeming. A sponsor’s income/resources may be added to the immigrant’s in determining eligibility. LPRs whose sponsor signed an I-864 affidavit of support are subject to deeming until they become a citizen or have credit for 40 quarters of work — with 12-month renewable exception for immigrants who would go hungry or homeless without assistance, and domestic violence victims (exception extended if abuse recognized by court, administrative law judge, or U.S. Department of Homeland Security).

§ Eligibility for CalWORKs may be affected by deeming. A sponsor’s income/resources may be added to the immigrant’s in determining eligibility. LPRs whose sponsor signed an I-864 affidavit of support are subject to deeming until they become a citizen or have credit for 40 quarters of work — with 12-month exception for immigrants who would go hungry or homeless without assistance, and domestic violence victims (exception extended if abuse recognized by court, administrative law judge, or U.S. Department of Homeland Security).

**** Eligibility for General Assistance may be affected by deeming.** A sponsor’s income/resources may be added to the immigrant’s in determining eligibility. Deeming may apply during the 3-year period after the immigrant gains LPR status. Deeming does not apply if the sponsors have abandoned their duty to support the immigrant. Such circumstances include but are not limited to abuse, battery, neglect, or refusal to support.