NEED TO KNOW:
Updates on Latest Immigration Policies

Public Benefits Updates

The next installment of our “Need to Know’ series is here! In this edition of “Need to Know”, we are sharing the facts to bust myths surrounding the eligibility and use of public benefits by immigrant neighbors. Starting July 1, 2026, numerous federal and state policies and legislations have begun to significantly impact the public benefits programs.

At the federal level, Congress passed H.R. 1 (One Big Beautiful Bill) in July 2025. This legislation included revised language to outline eligibility for public benefits. In Indiana, the General Assembly passed SEA 1 recently and it went into effect on July 1, 2026. This law aligns with the federal laws limiting access to public benefits and outlines what information must be collected by Family and Social Services Administration.

MYTH:
People without a legal status use public benefits.

FACT: In 1996, Congress passed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) barring undocumented individuals from public benefits. Therefore, they cannot be approved for SNAP or non-emergency Medicaid. Regardless of status, anyone is able to access K-12 schooling, emergency Medicaid, and short-term disaster relief.

Due to the recent storms in Indiana, it's important to note individuals with many different statuses qualify for Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) disaster relief funds including: legal permanent residents, asylees, refugees, Cuban/Haitian entrants, T or U visa holders, and individuals whose deportation status is being withheld or they were paroled for one year for urgent humanitarian purposes.

MYTH:
All immigrants receive public benefits immediately upon arriving in the United States.

FACT: The 1996 PRWORA Act set a five-year waiting period for lawful permanent residents to be able to access public benefits. However, there were exemptions for refugees, asylees, and some military families.

The only groups now eligible for SNAP and Medicaid to legal permanent residents, Cuban and Haitian entrants (not TPS-related), and persons residing under Compassion of Free Association (an agreement with Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau).

Groups that have lost or will lose eligibility include refugees, asylees, DV victims with a pending or approved visa or application for cancellation of removal/suspension of deportation, victims of trafficking.

MYTH:
AImmigrants use benefits they don’t pay for.

FACT: As of 2023, the 426,500 immigrants in Indiana had a total household income of $16.4B which means they contributed $4.1B in taxes—$2.6B in federal taxes and $1.5B in state and local taxes. Additionally, our immigrant neighbors have contributed $1.7B annually to social security and $440M to Medicare.

It is notable that undocumented immigrants, despite paying into social security and Medicare systems, are not eligible to receive these retirement and health benefits. Further, the economic contributions of all immigrants outweigh the costs of public services they utilize including education and public safety.

Sources: Fact Sheet: Immigrants and Public Benefits in 2026 (National Immigration Forum), Overview of Immigrant Eligibility for Federal Programs (National Immigration Law Center), Immigrants’ Eligibility for U.S. Public Benefits: A Primer (Migration Policy Institute), Medicaid Enrollment Dashboard (Family And Social Services Administration), Immigrants in Indiana (American Immigration Council), QuickFacts - Indiana (U.S. Census Bureau)

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