
Welcome Michelle Berney, New Director of the Benefits Plus Learning Center

Greetings – it is an honor to serve as the new Director of the Benefits Plus Learning Center (BPLC) at the Community Service Society of New York. While new to BPLC, my past role at CSS was with the ACES Project, where I first became passionate about public benefits. I look forward to working with you to make sure you have the tools and resources needed to help your clients with all matters related to public benefit and housing programs.

I appreciate that individual benefits are nuanced; and then understanding the coordination of benefits can be even more complex. The BPLC team is here to help you understand each and every piece of the benefit puzzle, as well as how the benefits work together. Whether you use Benefits Plus for information, participate in our trainings, or contact us for consultation services, we are here to help.



BPLC has been at the forefront of providing up-to-date information on benefits related to the COVID-19 public health emergency. We expect there will be many changes to these benefits as the months progress; please be in touch with us should you have any question on these changes.

I look forward to connecting with you and ensuring you have the information you need to access benefit/housing programs on behalf of your clients.

HRA Pilot: Application Process While Incarcerated

The NYC Human Resources Administration (HRA) announced a pilot to reform the benefits application process for New Yorkers involved in the criminal justice system who are incarcerated in State prisons and are returning home to NYC.

Currently, individuals leaving State prisons who need access to benefits (such as cash and food) would apply for these benefits upon release. However, as part of the pilot, waivers granted from the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) and the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), will permit individuals to begin the application process while incarcerated, which includes conducting eligibility interviews.

HRA is implementing the pilot at two State prisons: Queensboro Correctional Facility and Edgecombe Residential Treatment. This pilot was developed in partnership with the National Executive Council (NEC) at Columbia University's Center for Justice and the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (NY DOCCS). New York City will continue to work with NEC during the implementation of the pilot. For more information [click here](#).

Did you know? In New York, Medicaid is suspended for individuals who are incarcerated in a New York State Department of Correctional Services or local correctional facility for 30 days or more. Medicaid coverage is reinstated upon release.

NYS Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT)

The NYS P-EBT program has been approved for the 2020-2021 school year. Distribution of benefits have begun for eligible households. Benefit amounts are based on the number of days the school was closed, or that in-person attendance was reduced due to COVID-19. For details on benefit amount and distribution go to <https://bplc.cssny.org/pbm/covid-19-resources/food-programs/nys-pandemic-ebt>.

HEAP Cooling Assistance Open

The HEAP Cooling Assistance Component (CAC) program is open and will run until the allocated funding is exhausted. HEAP CAC assists with the purchase and installation of air conditioners (not to exceed \$800 with installation.)

In situations where an air conditioner cannot be safely installed, a fan will be provided. Household members must be U.S. citizens or qualified aliens, and have at least one member in the household with a documented medical condition* that is exacerbated by heat, as well as:

- Have income at or below current HEAP income guidelines (or is in receipt of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Cash Assistance or SSI living alone benefits), and
- Received a regular HEAP benefit greater than \$21 in the most recent heating season, and
- The household does not have a working air conditioner, or their current air conditioner is five or more years old, and
- The household did not receive a HEAP funded air conditioner within the past 10 years.

**Requirements for medical documentation for a CAC benefit may be waived for applicants who are unable to obtain such documentation due to COVID-19.*

NYS created a HEAP Cooling Assistance Component flyer [here](#). To apply, call (212) 331-3126 or download an application [here](#). Completed applications can be mailed to the address below:

Home Energy Assistance Program/HEAP
P.O. Box 1401
Church Street Station
New York, NY 10008

For more information call (212) 835-7216 or [click here](#).

Benefits Plus Online Subscribers can find additional information on the HEAP CAC program under *Cash Benefits, Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP), HEAP Cooling Assistance.*

HEALTH NEWS

Medicaid

Renewals

During the COVID-19 public health emergency, no Medicaid case will be closed for failure to renew or to provide documentation. Currently, the following provisions are in place:

- Cases with authorization **through September 30, 2021**, are being extended for 12 months. This applies to Managed Long-Term Care (MLTC), Medicaid Spenddown (surplus) renewals, nursing home eligibility, Medicare Savings Program (MSP), Medicaid Buy-In for Working People with Disabilities (MBI-WPD), among others.

For more information visit our free COVID-19 Resources in Benefits Plus at <https://bplc.cssny.org/pbm/covid-19-resources/health-benefits/medicaid#changes-in-medicaid-renewals>.

Application for Medicaid - Supplement A

Applicants for Medicaid who are 65+, blind or disabled, or applying for Medicaid for nursing home coverage, must submit Supplement A along with their application for Medicaid.

As of January 1, 2021, New York City is requiring a revised Supplement A, [DOH-5178A](#). Souses are required to sign Supplement A, even if not applying for Medicaid or if they are applying using Spousal Refusal.

Medicare - Extra Help

Medicare beneficiaries who have Medicaid or a Medicare Savings Program between July-December of a calendar year are automatically enrolled in full Extra Help for Part D prescription drug coverage for the remainder of the calendar year (if not already enrolled), as well as for the entire following year.

Full Extra Help allows individuals to have a Part D plan (either one that works with Original Medicare or a Medicare Advantage plan) for \$0 premium, \$0 deductible, and low copays. In addition, those with Extra Help can make a change once per quarter for the first 9 months of the calendar year (one time Jan-March; April-June; July-Sept). The new plan would be effective the first of the following month after one makes the change.

For more information, call our help line at 212-614-5552.

Transitioning from Medicaid to Medicare

Default Enrollment

Individuals with Medicaid through the NYS of Health Marketplace, who turn 65, must enroll in Medicare in order to avoid a delay in Medicare coverage and a possible late enrollment penalty. Certain insurers have received approval to “default enroll” their Medicaid Managed Care (MMC) and/or Health and Recovery Plan (HARP) members into their Medicare Advantage-Dual Special Needs Plan (D-SNP)* when they become Medicare eligible, unless the individual opts out.

The effective date of the D-SNP plan is the same as their Medicare effective date. Members in approved plans would receive notice regarding the D-SNP 60 days before the start date of the D-SNP coverage with information on how the new plan differs from their current plan, as well as how to opt-out of the D-SNP plan.

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) allowed some insurers to begin default enrollment on April 1; since then, additional insurers have been approved by CMS.

All Medicare beneficiaries, including dual eligibles (with both Medicare and Medicaid), have a choice in how they receive their Medicare benefits. If you have questions about these choices, please consult with Benefit Plus Online or send us an email to BPCC@cssny.org.

** Medicare Advantage-Dual Special Needs Plan (D-SNP) coordinates coverage for those who have Medicare and Medicaid benefits.*

Enrollment in Medicare

Typically, Medicaid beneficiaries must apply for Medicare as a condition of continued Medicaid eligibility. However, due to COVID easements, Medicaid beneficiaries are not required to apply for Medicare at this time.

It is important to know, however, that having Medicaid **does not** extend one’s Initial Enrollment Period (IEP) to enroll in Medicare Part B, and, unless one qualifies for a Special Enrollment Period (SEP), one may need to wait until the General Enrollment Period (Jan – March) to enroll in Part B. Using the GEP may result in delayed enrollment, as well as a late enrollment penalty.,

HOUSING NEWS

NYC HRA: One Shot Deals for Rental Arrears

Applications for emergency assistance, known as one shot deals, are not being processed at this time for rental assistance. Instead, applicants who need assistance with rent arrears will be required to file an application for the *Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP)*, see below.

Applications for other types of emergencies (other than rent), such as moving costs, storage, furniture, etc. should be processed as usual.

NYS COVID-19 Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP)

The New York State Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) provides payment for rental arrears, temporary rental assistance and utility arrears assistance to eligible households. Landlords who accept the ERAP payments agree to [certain tenant protections](#), which include eviction protection for a year from receipt of the ERAP payment.

Eligible households may receive:

- Up to 12 months of rental arrears payments for rents accrued on or after March 13, 2020, and
- Up to 12 months of electric or gas utility arrears payments for arrears that have accrued on or after March 13, 2020, and
- If the household is expected to spend 30% or more of their gross monthly income to pay for rent, an additional 3 months of rental assistance.

While there are no immigration criteria to qualify for ERAP, applicants must be a renter in New York State and meet all of the following criteria:

- Have primary residence in NYS; and
- Have a household gross income at or below 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI); and
- Have an obligation to pay rent and have rental arrears for March 13, 2020, or after; and
- Are at risk of experiencing homelessness or housing instability; and
- Have a member in the household who, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and beginning on or after March 13, 2020, meets one or more of the following criteria:
 - Received unemployment benefits; or
 - Experienced a reduction in income; or
 - Incurred significant costs; or
 - Experienced some [other financial hardship](#).

Applications for ERAP are accepted online only at <https://nysrenthelp.otda.ny.gov/en/> and will remain available until ERAP funds are exhausted. In NYC, the NYC Human Resources Administration has partnered with community-based organizations that can help households apply for ERAP. [Click here](#) for a listing of organizations across the five boroughs. For community-based organizations outside of NYC, [click here](#).

For more information, please visit our free COVID-19 Resources in Benefits Plus at <https://bplc.cssny.org/pbm/covid-19-resources/housing-programs-services/rent>.

Right to Counsel Expands to all NYC Zip Codes

As of June 1, 2021, all income-eligible tenants across New York City will have access to free full legal representation in eviction cases in NYC housing courts regardless of zip code.

In May 2021, NYC modified the Universal Access to Legal Services Law (more commonly referred to as Right to Counsel) that was signed into law in August 2017. The 2017 version of the law outlined a phased expansion by zip code that would have been completed by 2022; however, the May 2021 modification pushed up the expansion by a year.

Generally, households with incomes [below 200% FPL](#) are eligible for full legal representation, while households above 200% FPL are eligible for brief legal advice, but not full representation. In response to the pandemic, NYC has waived the income criteria so all households, regardless of income, who are at risk of eviction can access full legal representation. Additionally, Right to Counsel is also available to tenants who may have been previously declined or been found ineligible for legal representation.

There are no immigration criteria to access an attorney under NYC's Right to Counsel.

While NYC's Human Resources Administration (HRA) Office of Civil Justice (OCJ) oversees Right to Counsel, households have many ways to connect with an attorney for legal representation. NYC tenants can:

- Call Housing Court Answers at 718-557-1379 or 212-962-4795, Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm.
- Call 311 and ask for the "Tenant Helpline."
- Email OCJ at civiljustice@hra.nyc.gov. In the email, provide a name, telephone number, and, if known, the housing court case index number for the eviction case.
- Contact a nonprofit law office near you. [Click here](#) for a list of nonprofit legal service providers that have partnered with OCJ to provide free legal help for tenants.

Extension of the NYS Eviction Moratorium

The NYS eviction moratorium was extended to August 31, 2021. If tenants submit a [hardship declaration form](#) to their landlord or their county's housing court, tenants will remain protected from eviction and their court case will be suspended from the court's calendar through August 31, 2021.

By signing and submitting the declaration, the tenant is certifying that the household is eligible for protection from eviction because they have suffered a financial hardship because of COVID or that moving would pose a health threat to any member of the household.

In NYC, tenants can submit the completed hardship forms via email to their county's housing court. E-mail addresses of five NYC housing courts can be found [here](#).

Alternatively, tenants can use an online tool created by [Right to Counsel NYC Coalition](#), [Housing Justice for All](#), and [JustFix.nyc](#) to fill out the hardship declaration form, have it emailed to the courts and their landlords, and mailed to their landlords by USPS Certified Mail for free. Tenants can access the tool by visiting <https://www.evictionfreeny.org/en/>.

For more information, visit our free COVID-19 Resources in Benefits Plus at <https://bplc.cssny.org/pbm/covid-19-resources/housing-programs-services/eviction-moratoriums#protections-against-residential-evictions>.

NYCHA Extends Autorenewals of Applications on the Waitlist

NYCHA has extended automatic renewals of NYCHA applications through September 30, 2021. That is, any NYCHA applications set to expire between March 2020 and September 2021 will be auto-renewed and remain on NYCHA's preliminary waitlist without need for any action by the applicant. For more information, [click here](#).

TRAINING

In July, the Benefits Plus Learning Center will offer 3 free webinars on changes to public benefits and housing programs due to COVID-19.

- Please Save the Dates: July 20, July 21, and July 22.

If you have received this e-newsletter directly from BPLC, you will get notified when registration is open. If you would like to confirm or create an account, visit <http://bit.ly/accountBPLC>.

Dates will also be announced on our social media accounts, follow us!



@BPLCNYC



@BPLCNYC



Group: Benefits Plus Learning Center

Benefits Plus Online

Benefits Plus Updates

Housing Court

- Update on NYC's Right to Counsel in NYC Housing Courts. <https://bplc.cssny.org/pbm/housing-programs-services/housing-court/advocacy-and-appeals#representation-in-housing-court>

Free COVID-19 Resources

Benefits Plus Online has FREE COVID-19 Resources which are available to anyone seeking relevant and up-to-date information on COVID-19. This service is offered by the Community Service Society of New York to support social service professionals who are working with vulnerable population groups during this emergency.

COVID-19 Updates

[COVID-19 Resources, COVID-19: Additional Resources, Burial Assistance](#)

- Added FEMA COVID-19 Funeral Reimbursement

[COVID-19 Resources, Housing Programs & Services, Rent Relief: Under COVID-19, NYS Emergency Rental Assistance Program \(ERAP\)](#)

- Added information on NYS Emergency Rental Assistance Program.

[COVID-19 Resources, Housing Programs & Services, CITYFHEPS: Changes under COVID-19](#)

- Updated to include state's elimination of the "lawsuit requirement" when applying for CITYFHEPS

[COVID-19 Resources, Housing Programs & Services, NYCHA: Changes under COVID-19](#)

- Updated NYCHA's automatic renewals of waitlist applications

[COVID-19 Resources, Utility Assistance](#) – New Section

- Added NYS Utility Moratorium, Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP), Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) and Lifeline

Not a *Benefits Plus* Subscriber? Request a free demo [here](#).

Community Resources/Events

Free Presentation: What to Do Before Student Loan Payments Resume

Join the Education Debt Consumer Assistance Program (EDCAP) on **July 15, 2021, at 6:30 p.m.** for a free presentation on what to do before federal student loan payments resume. They will be time for Q &A. You can register [here](#).

As a reminder, if you need help developing a strategy to tackle your student loan debt, EDCAP can help you. You can contact EDCAP at 888-614-5004 or via email at edcap@cssny.org. All services are free. One hour of your time can give you peace of mind and potentially help you eliminate your student loan debt faster.

Emergency Connectivity Fund

[The Emergency Connectivity Fund](#) helps schools and libraries provide the tools and services their communities need for remote learning during the COVID-19 emergency period.

From June 29, 2021, to August 13, 2021, eligible schools and libraries can apply for financial support to purchase connected devices like laptops and tablets, Wi-Fi hotspots, modems, routers, and broadband connectivity to meet unmet needs for off-campus use by students, school staff, and library patrons during the COVID-19 emergency period.

During this application filing window, eligible schools and libraries, in addition to consortia of schools and libraries, can submit requests for funding to purchase eligible equipment and services between July 1, 2021, and June 30, 2022. You can view an FCC Fact Sheet on the program by visiting:

https://www.fcc.gov/sites/default/files/ecf_factsheet.pdf

Job Opportunities

Volunteer Manager

CSS's Financial Advocacy Program is currently accepting applications for a Volunteer Manager position. The Volunteer Manager will be responsible for the implementation and expansion of the Financial Coaching Corps (FCC), a program designed to build the financial capabilities of low-wage individuals and families in NYC. The FCC is comprised of trained older adult volunteers who serve as financial coaches working one-on-one with individuals guiding them in self-selected areas of personal finance.

[Click here](#) for the job vacancy notice or email Rebecca Haase at rhaase@cssny.org for more information.

Income Support Services Specialist

The CSS Income Support Services Unit seeks a highly organized, detail-oriented individual with the ability to multi-task in a fast-paced, changing environment while meeting deadlines. This individual will work with the Income Support Services Director and assist with gathering and processing rental arrears and workforce development applications; collect unit data on Teams, and other duties as assigned.

[Click here](#) for the job vacancy notice or email Sami Akleh at sakleh@cssny.org for more information.

Hotline To Help People with Disabilities Access COVID-19 Vaccines

U.S. Health and Human Services (HHS) announced the launch of a national hotline to connect people with disabilities to information and services to improve access to COVID-19 vaccines. The newly established *Disability Information and Access Line (DIAL)* is available to help people with disabilities find vaccination locations in their communities, assist callers with making vaccination appointments, and connect callers to local services, such as accessible transportation, to overcome barriers to vaccination.

Learn more at <https://acl.gov/DIAL> or call 888-677-1199 from 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. ET.