

# **CHISAGO COUNTY** **POLICY & PROCEDURES MANUAL**

Health & Human Services Policy # 506

## **TOPIC: Emergency Assistance**

Effective Date: January 1, 2011

**Purpose:** The purpose of this policy is to specify how Chisago County Health & Human Services will use money available through the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) Consolidated Fund to assist people in emergency situations.

**Authority: MFIP Consolidated Fund, MN Statutes 256J.626**

**Policy:** Chisago County Health & Human Services may grant Emergency Assistance for qualifying short-term, non-recurring, shelter, utility and work-related transportation needs through the Chisago County Health & Human Services designated portion of the MFIP Consolidated Fund. The total funds available for Emergency Assistance is limited to the amount authorized by the Chisago County Board of Commissioners for the Emergency Assistance program in the specified or current calendar year.

### **Procedure:**

#### **1. Accessibility of Funds:**

A. Emergency Assistance may be available to a family unit, which is defined as a pregnant woman or family unit legally responsible for caring for a child, as defined herein.

B. The eligible family unit must have gross income under 200% of the Federal Poverty Guideline. These policies are updated annually by the Department of Human Services (DHS EDOCS 3461).

C. Emergency Assistance benefits may be issued for eligible households to 1) resolve an existing emergent situation related to basic needs, 2) avert a crisis related to basic

needs which is assessed as likely to happen, and to 3) stabilize the family's situation in order to ensure that the family can continue to meet their basic needs.

(1) An emergency is defined as the loss of shelter or utilities posing an immediate threat to the physical health or safety of a child. Other related expenses may be considered if necessary to alleviate an immediate health or safety threat. Emergency Assistance may also be used for employment related expenses needed for a family member who needs to obtain or retain employment.

(2) Emergency Assistance must resolve the emergency, not postpone it. Funds will be approved on behalf of a client for the most cost effective solution. Individuals requesting Emergency Assistance must show a good faith effort to have resolved the emergency prior to application. Liquid assets available to the applicant will be expected to be utilized as well as any anticipated income prior to Emergency Assistance authorization.

(3) Applicants who have been in receipt of Emergency Assistance more than once in the previous 36 months will show evidence of a financial management course completion before being authorized to receive further funds. The County reserves the right to require additional budget management services, including possible Vendor payments, as conditions of repeat authorizations of Emergency Assistance.

(4) Chisago County Health & Human Services will grant Emergency Assistance only when and to the extent that funding is available through the County designated portion of the MFIP Consolidated Fund.

(5) Emergency Assistance payments made on behalf of a family unit cannot exceed an amount equal to four times the monthly MFIP cash assistance standard.

(6) All payments made on behalf of a family unit will be vendor paid.

(7) Exceptions to these payment limitations may be made at the discretion of the Social Services Director or designee if it is determined that doing so is cost effective for the County.

2. **Eligibility:**

A. To be eligible, a family unit must:

(1) Have gross income under 200% of the federal poverty guideline;

(2) Be residing in Chisago County;

(3) Any household member must not have used any one of the following in the past 18 months:

- a. Emergency Assistance
- b. Emergency General Assistance
- c. Emergency Minnesota Supplemental Aid

(4) The emergency must not be from the result of fraud or misrepresentation on the part of any member of the family unit.

(5) The emergency must not be caused by any member of the family unit being in a disqualification or sanction status from either DWP or MFIP.

(6) The family unit with the emergency must be in compliance with all Health & Human Service requirements and case plans including, but not limited to, mandatory activities related to employment and training, child support, as well as other social service requirements.

(7) A family unit member's refusal of employment or quitting a job must not have caused the emergency.

(8) The emergency must not have arisen as a result of a conviction of criminal activity or incarceration of a family unit member.

(9) The family unit must be unable to resolve its emergency by combining liquid assets and assets they can liquidate in time to assist in resolving the crisis. Clients must apply for any other agency or funding (i.e. LIHEAP, RRHAO, etc.) for which they may be eligible.

**3. Application Processing:**

- A. To apply for Emergency Assistance, a family unit must complete a DHS Combined Application and/or other forms designated by Chisago County Health & Human Services and complete a face to face interview with a Financial Worker. In certain circumstances a phone interview may be conducted at the approval of the HHS supervisor.
- B. Verification of all factors needed to determine eligibility and emergency circumstances is required, prior to issuance of Emergency Assistance.

- C. Within 15 days after Chisago County Health & Human Services receives a completed application with the necessary verifications, the family unit will be notified in writing whether the application was approved, denied, or pending.
- D. Coordination with other local resources that may meet the emergency need, either fully or in part is required prior to approval. Exhausting eligibility from such local resources may be required prior to issuance of Emergency Assistance.

**4. Uses of the Emergency Assistance:**

Allowable expenditures under the Emergency Assistance Policy include the following types of expenditures:

Evictions

Rent and Deposits for a new residence if being evicted from current residence or otherwise homeless

Moving expenses

Foreclosures

Utilities and deposits and hook-ups if needed:

- Gas

- Electricity

- Municipal Water

- Municipal Sewer

- Fuel Oil

- Trash removal

- Wood

## **The Chisago County Health and Human Services Emergency Assistance Program Guidelines**

### **1. Short term, nonrecurring shelter/housing:**

- A. Foreclosures: Client needs to be referred by Foreclosure Counseling agency.
- B. Evictions: A copy of a lease or confirmation by property management entity will be required. Client must be referred by Housing Advocate from Lakes and Pines CAC.
- C. First month's rent and or damage deposit if client is being evicted from current residence or otherwise homeless.
- D. At least 30% of the family unit's last 12 months gross income must have been paid toward the unit's shelter costs in order to be eligible for Emergency Assistance.
- E. Housing support is limited to dwellings with a current rental certificate as required by local jurisdiction, or if a dwelling is not required by local ordinance to have such a certificate, verification of a landlord-tenant relationship in the form of a lease agreement must be provided. (Emergency Assistance will not be paid to a relative unless a copy of a lease has been provided or an unlawful detainer has been filed)
- F. Housing support may be provided if current situation is jeopardizing other household members housing.
- G. Per Diem payments to New Pathways may be paid on behalf of a homeless family using the shelter facilities and program. This is excluded from the 18 month rule.

- H. The maximum dollar amount to resolve shelter crisis is \$1,800 or 4 times the MFIP cash grant standard, whichever is less.

**2. Utilities:**

- A. Payment of utilities is available only if verification of a pending disconnection notice is received and all other forms of energy assistance have been exhausted.
- B. The maximum dollar amount to prevent utility shutoff(s) or to restore services is \$1,800 or 4 times the MFIP cash grant standard, whichever is less.
- C. 8% of the family unit's last 12 months gross income must have been paid toward the unit's utility bills in order to be eligible for Emergency Assistance. The 8% may be waived for family units with a child under the age of one year old or if a medical reason is verified. Payments by other agencies are excluded from the 8%.

**3. Transportation:**

- A. Transportation expenses to maintain employment. Allowable transportation expenses will be car repairs non-maintenance type, registration, car payments to bring client current, 2 months car insurance, costs associated with obtaining a driver's license excluding fines or penalties, taxi or bus expenses. (Employment related expenses are also excluded from the 18 month rule.)
- B. Must have a valid driver's license and own the vehicle to be insured.
- C. Repair requests must provide an estimate by a licensed Mechanic.
- D. Must be cost effective.

**Definitions:**

Child: A person who is 18 years of age or younger **OR** lives with PARENTS or other CAREGIVER, is not the parent of a child in the home, or a child Under the age of 19 and a FULL-TIME STUDENT in a SECONDARY

SCHOOL or equivalent level of vocational or technical training, designed to fit students for gainful employment (See CM 0002.41)

Eighteen-Month Rule: Individuals found eligible for emergency assistance are to receive payment ones in an 18 month period.

Emergency: The loss of shelter or utilities posing an immediate threat to the physical health or safety of a child. Or an immediate health or safety threat is created if emergency assistance funds are not made available.

Family Unit: A pregnant woman or another adult who is [legally] responsible for providing care to one or more children, as defined herein.

Vendor Paid: Resolved crisis payments made directly to a landlord, utility, mortgage or transportation related business.