



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND HEALTH SERVICES
COMMUNITY SERVICES DIVISION
Economic Services Administration
Post Office Box 45440 Olympia WA 98504-5440

April 17, 2020

Dear Partners and Friends:

The uncertainty of these historic days has been challenging and difficult. One thing remains reassuring: the solidarity we share as partners in our collective mission to eliminate hunger and reduce poverty. We are so grateful to you, our partners and our friends, for continuing to serve Washington's communities so they may have the best possible support when they need it most.

In response to the ongoing outbreak of COVID-19 in Washington state, the Department of Social and Health Services' Community Services Division has been rapidly adjusting our standard practices to protect our staff and the public we serve. This current public health crisis has required a swift response, and we are asking for your help to ensure that our customers and communities fully understand these changes and the need for all Washington residents to practice social distancing to the greatest degree possible. We hope that you will join us in ensuring this information is shared widely and accurately.

At the time of my March 17, 2020, communication, DSHS had begun to limit in-person services. Governor Inslee's Stay Home, Stay Healthy directive on March 23 required us to restrict our in-person services almost completely and to continue expanding telework options to protect our workforce. Let me assure you, while the department has changed the way customers are served, services are **not** reduced. We continue to serve our customers and be available to the best of our abilities. Changes that have taken place since our last communication include:

- **Effective March 20**, Community Services Office doors remained open, but general lobby services were redirected to phones and online. Customer services in lobbies were restricted to issuance of initial and/or emergent EBT cards and WorkFirst Support Services. The phone services technology was expanded to the maximum degree possible for staff to work back-office in CSOs and telework to help support the increased call volumes.
- **Effective March 26**, CSOs statewide suspended lobby services through the duration of the Stay Home, Stay Healthy directive for the safety of our staff and our customers. A few exceptions remained in place for issuance of initial and/or emergent EBT cards and WorkFirst Support Services by appointment. The [DSHS news release of March 26](#) covers the full details of services offered online, by phone and by exception.
- **Currently**, CSO lobby services remain suspended for general services until further notice. **In-person appointments will be made when needed, as described above.** All changes related to COVID-19 will remain in place until there is new guidance from the Governor and public health officials.

We thank our contracted providers, who previously met with clients at CSOs, for continuing to use alternative ways to meet while reception services are not available in lobbies. Please work with the local CSO Administrator to coordinate about services or if you have questions. DSHS appreciates all the virtual services that many providers are using to support our customers during these unprecedented times. I

know many domestic violence programs are offering virtual services to survivors and we applaud them for their work.

Currently, our clients are experiencing longer wait times as they access phone services and sometimes new calls aren't going through once maximum capacity is reached. Our IT support and regional teams are working diligently to reinforce our phone system to allow us to add more staff to meet the capacity for the tremendous volume that has been redirected from CSOs and from an influx of new applications. Our phone capacity is improving, wait times are coming down and disconnect rates are dropping. And with recent plans to receive help from our partner agency, the Health Care Authority, and other offers within our department our commitment to support Washingtonians is reinforced through solidarity.

Although there have been impacts to our service delivery from the response to COVID-19, our Office of Programs and Policy staff have done an exceptional job to seek federal waivers and implement emergency WACs that allow us to deliver additional benefits, reduce barriers or extend services. An updated summary of our changes that are currently in effect is attached, and operational changes will be posted at [Online Community Services Office \(CSO\)](#). Please note on the attached document, our most recent change. Beginning on April 17, 2020, we will administer the Disaster Cash Assistance Program (DCAP) across the state of Washington. The Governor's declaration of a statewide emergency enables DSHS to offer the DCAP program to people who are not eligible for other cash programs. The assistance is available to all Washington families and people without children who meet the income and resource limits of the program.

Lastly, it is important for all of us to stay updated and informed on COVID-19 to avoid miscommunication or inaccurate information. Please continue to access and share information from reliable sources at:

- [Coronavirus.wa.gov](https://www.coronavirus.wa.gov)
- Department of Health has [COVID-19 Fact Sheet translated in multiple languages](#).

We will continue to monitor information coming from all DSHS levels and from DOH about COVID-19 to keep you updated as the situation continually changes. Updates about resuming CSO operations and/or any other developments will be posted at the DSHS [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and on the new [DSHS COVID-19 Information page](#).

Thank you for your ongoing work to help support people in our communities.

Sincerely,



Babs Roberts, Director
Community Services Division