

A Quick Guide to Using CommonHelp

CommonHelp
helping those in need

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VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF
SOCIAL SERVICES

Introduction

CommonHelp is the Commonwealth of Virginia’s fast and easy way to apply online for many Virginia social services assistance programs. Through a single online site, you can find out what assistance you might be eligible for and submit one application saving you time and effort. You can also use CommonHelp to Check Your Benefits, Report Household Changes, or Renew Your Benefits.

This guide is designed to help you use CommonHelp. When you go online and start working in CommonHelp, you will find a quick video that introduces CommonHelp. We have also included a video about using CommonHelp after you have submitted your application. Use these tools to find answers to your questions.

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Still Have Questions?
Call 1-855-635-4370

About CommonHelp

CommonHelp is a self-service portal where Virginia citizens can go to apply for assistance.

Using CommonHelp, you will be able to submit a single application to apply for assistance from multiple Department of Social Services (DSS) programs such as:

- TANF – Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
- SNAP – Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
- HCC – Health Care Coverage
- EA – Energy Assistance
- Child Care – Assistance for Child Care services

This makes applying easier and more convenient.

After You Have Submitted Your Application

With CommonHelp you and your authorized representative can check your benefits, report changes and renew your benefits.

Please note: You cannot use CommonHelp to check your benefits, report changes, or renew benefits with Child Care or Energy assistance.

Your Information Is Kept Private

CommonHelp is private and confidential. Information you enter online into CommonHelp is protected. Access to your information is secured by use of a User ID and password.



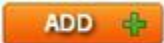




Each application also receives a unique tracking number which you should keep. Use this number if you ever need to call or stop by an office to discuss your application.

Navigation Tips

Here are the basics for getting around in the system.

Buttons

Buttons are at the bottom of each CommonHelp page.

	Saves information entered on the page and takes you to the next page or tab
	Takes you back to the previous page or tab
	Enables you to include another item to the information you're entering, such as an additional person, another employer, a source of income, an additional expense, or an additional insurance policy
	Saves your unsubmitted application and allows you to leave it to come back at a later time or date
	Allows you to change information you entered earlier in CommonHelp
	Lets you remove information you entered earlier in the CommonHelp application, renewal or change. For example, you can remove a person or an employer
	Lets you tell CommonHelp that something has ended, for example a job or pregnancy

Radio Buttons

Radio buttons allow you to choose only one option as shown below. Click on the circle to select it. In this example, the option "Yes" is selected.

Yes No

Checkboxes

Checkboxes allow you to select and deselect by clicking in the box. In this example, the option "No one" is selected.

No one



Gus

Drop-down Menus

Drop-down menus allow you to select an option from a list. Drop-down menus are identified by a down arrow to the right of the box.

Name:

Date Fields

Date fields allow you to enter a date. To type a date in, follow the pattern MM/DD/YYYY as shown in the example below:

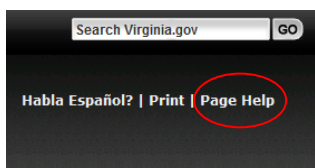
 Ex: mm/dd/yyyy

Links

Links take you directly to another page within CommonHelp. Most links are identified by underlined text. Click on the underlined text to go to that page.

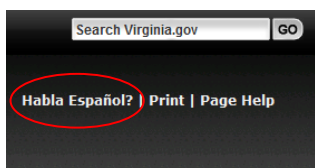
Page Help

On every page in CommonHelp, there is a link to helpful information you can use if you feel you need more information about the question you're answering. Click on the Page Help link found in the top right area of the page.



Spanish

The entire CommonHelp system is also available in Spanish. Use the Spanish version of the system by clicking the Habla Espanol? link found in the top right area of the page.



How to Use CommonHelp

Am I Eligible?

Click the "Am I Eligible?" button on the CommonHelp home page to answer short questions and be told if you and the members of your household may or may not be eligible for assistance. It takes about 15 minutes to complete. The information you enter here is not saved.

The "Am I Eligible?" tool is not required. It's an optional step, but it can help give you an idea of what to expect if you decide to complete and submit an application.

The "Am I Eligible?" tool is divided into two sections, Health Care Only and All Benefit Programs. It will allow you to see if you and members of your household may be eligible for health care coverage only or health care coverage along with other benefit programs.

Apply for Benefits

If you only want to apply for Health Care Coverage for you and your family and if you do not want to request any other benefits, click the Get Started button for the Health Care Only window.

If you want to apply for food, child care, cash assistance, heating or cooling benefits, aged/blind/disabled health care, or Long Term Care – or you want to apply for Health Care Coverage in addition to any of these programs – click the Get Started button of the All Benefit Programs window.

It typically takes about 20-60 minutes to complete. If you need to stop, you can save and exit your application at any time and return to complete it later.

The online application includes the following:

1. **Get Started** – Guides you through setting up an account to create a User ID and Password and allows you to begin entering information about yourself.
2. **People** – Allows you to enter details about yourself and the members of your household.



Be sure to write down your User ID and Password. You will need them to start your application. You will also need them to re-enter the system should you decide to save and stop the application and need to return to it later.

Next, this section collects basic information about you and your household. Prepare for this section by having the following information ready:

- Names of household members, address and telephone number
- Household income from jobs, child support and other income sources

- Social Security Numbers and birth dates of household members
 - Current or recent health insurance information
 - Housing and utility expense information
 - Dependent care or disability expense information, including day care and medical expenses
 - Resource information, such as bank accounts, vehicles, homes, property, life insurance, etc. Please note: Some social services do not need resource information. Resource questions will only be asked if this information is needed to determine eligibility
 - If you are a U.S. citizen, you must declare citizenship and provide proof of identity
 - Non-U.S. citizens must provide documentation indicating lawful residence in the U.S.
 - For Food Assistance (SNAP), you must include children under age 22 and also include anyone else who eats with you
3. **Resources** – Collects information about resources held by you and other household members such as bank accounts, vehicles, homes, property and life insurance.
 4. **Financial Information** – Asks for information about employment income and other types received by you and other members in your household.
 5. **Bills** – Includes questions about the housing bills, other bills such as medical bills, dependent care bills and deductions for all household members.
 6. **Additional Information** – Allows you to enter information about health insurance, foster care and tax credits for members of your household,
 7. **Summary**– Asks you to review all the information you’ve entered in CommonHelp up to this point; provides you a chance to make additions or corrections.
 8. **Finish Summary** – Allows you upload documents to submit with your application, appoint an authorized representative, authorize a Certified Application Counselor or Navigator or Broker.
 9. **Comments** – Allows you to enter additional information on your application.
 10. **Next Steps** - Explains which programs you applied for and allows you to apply for additional Benefit programs or other Medicaid programs.
 11. **Signing Your Application** – Gives you the opportunity to read the rights and responsibilities, consent to VDSS to exchange information with other agencies, authorize use of your income data to renew coverage and electronically sign your application
 12. **Submit** – If you are ready to submit your application, click the Next button. You will then be asked to sign back into your account. Once you have signed back into your account, click the Submit button at the bottom of the screen to complete your submission.

After Submitting Your Application

The Virginia Department of Social Services will see if you qualify for assistance. You will receive a Notice of Action with a case number.

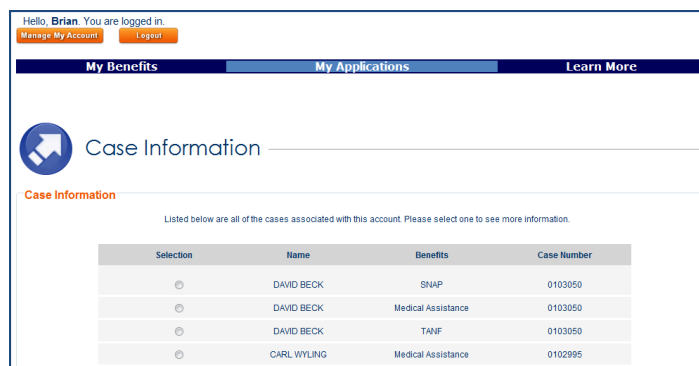
You will have the opportunity to link your case to your CommonHelp account using your User ID and Password. When the case has been linked, you can Check Your Benefits, Report Household Changes, and Renew Your Benefits through CommonHelp.

How to Link Your Case and Account

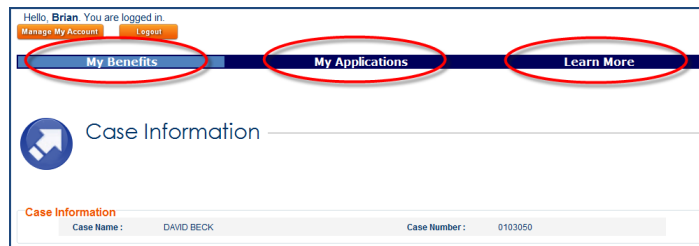
Go to the CommonHelp home page and click the “Check My Benefits” button. Sign into CommonHelp. Click the Manage My Account button. In the Case Association section, click the check box and click the ‘Link Case’ button. Enter your Case number and Client ID and click “Continue.” Your case will be successfully linked.

Check Your Benefits Online

To check your benefits online with CommonHelp, go to the CommonHelp home page and click the Check My Benefits button. Just like before, type your User ID and password..



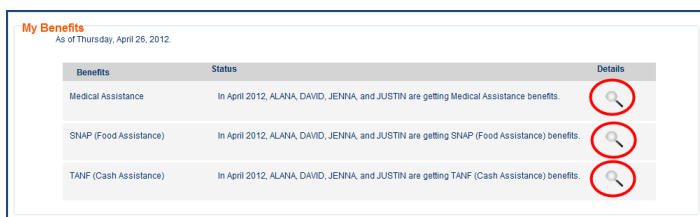
View the Case Information page (above). It shows the cases linked with your account. Select the radio button for the case that you want to review.






This will bring you to the Case Information page which has 3 tabs– My Benefits, My Applications and Learn More. If you have only one case you will be navigated directly to the Case Information page.

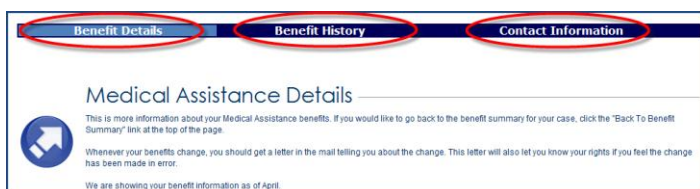
You will start on a tab called “My Benefits.” The My Benefits tab shows you:

- The name of the benefits being received under this case
- The status
- The names of all the people in the household who are receiving the benefits
- Any documentation you need to give to your case worker
- Your upcoming renewals



Benefits	Status	Details
Medical Assistance	In April 2012, ALANA, DAVID, JENNA, and JUSTIN are getting Medical Assistance benefits.	
SNAP (Food Assistance)	In April 2012, ALANA, DAVID, JENNA, and JUSTIN are getting SNAP (Food Assistance) benefits.	
TANF (Cash Assistance)	In April 2012, ALANA, DAVID, JENNA, and JUSTIN are getting TANF (Cash Assistance) benefits.	

Clicking on the Magnifying Glass icon next to one of the benefit programs will take you to a detail page about that benefit.



For example, the image above is for a detailed MA (Medical Assistance) benefit. There are 3 tabs at the top: Benefit Details, Benefit History, and Contact Information. When you click on them, you will see more details.

- **Benefits Details** – This shows you what the benefit payment details are for this month.
- **Benefit History** – This shows payment details for the past 12 months.
- **Contact Information** – This shows you the name, location, address, and phone number of your assigned case worker, and your contact information.

Report Your Changes

When you are approved for benefits, you will need to report certain changes to your case worker. To report changes, click “Report My Changes” on the CommonHelp home page and enter your User ID and password. Click the “Report My Changes” link at the top of the screen. If you have more than one case, click the radio button next to the case you want to update. Next click the boxes next to the changes you want to report.

CommonHelp will take you step-by-step through questions that let you report your changes. At the end, you will be prompted to submit the changes.

Renew Your Benefits

CommonHelp shows when you need to renew your benefits. To see if it’s time to renew, go to the CommonHelp home page. Click “Renew My Benefits.” Sign in to CommonHelp with your User ID and password. Go to the My Renewals section to see if it is time to renew any of your benefits. Click the link next to the benefit you want to renew.

CommonHelp will take you step-by-step through questions that let you renew your benefits. At the end, you will be asked to submit the renewal application.

Stopping Your Application to Come Back at a Later Time

With CommonHelp, you can stop your application and then come back to it at a later time or date.

To do this, click the **Save + Exit** button before closing your internet browser.



If you close your internet browser without first clicking **Save + Exit**, you will lose information you entered. Always click **Save + Exit** before leaving CommonHelp.

Returning to Your Application

To come back to the application at a later time, go to the CommonHelp home page. Click “Get Started” and select the radio button next to “Login to keep working on an application you have already started.” Enter the User ID and password you created during the setup of your account.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: How long will it take to apply for assistance using CommonHelp?

A: It takes most applicants between 20 to 60 minutes.

Q: How long will my application be saved?

A: CommonHelp gives you 90 days from the last update to complete an application.

Q: Do I have to sign my application electronically?

A: No. If you do not want to sign and submit your application electronically, you can go to the About Benefits section on the CommonHelp home page and click the necessary program link to locate and download the VDSS

application you want to complete for Benefits. You can print the application, complete it, sign it, and then submit it either via mail, fax, or personal drop-off to the local Department of Social Services in your area. If you submit your application electronically, then you will sign it electronically.

Q: After I submit my application and receive the confirmation, do I need to do anything else?

A: The local agency will contact you with further information on conducting an interview or returning verifications.

Q: Does information I enter in “Am I Eligible?” show up automatically for me in “Apply for Benefits”?

A: No. Information you enter in the “Am I Eligible?” tool does not carry over to “Apply for Benefits.” The questions in “Am I Eligible?” are designed to quickly give you an idea of the type of assistance you might be able to receive. To apply for assistance, CommonHelp needs more details.

Q: How do I add another benefit (SNAP, TANF, Energy, Health Care Coverage, Child Care) to a CommonHelp application I’ve already started?

A: If you applied for Health Care Coverage only you will be allowed to add another benefit during the Next Steps while completing the “Finish & Submit” section of the application. Click the Add Other Benefit and Medicaid Programs to My Application button. If you need to log back into CommonHelp to access your application:

- Go to the CommonHelp home page
- On the Health Care Only window, click Get Started
- Click the radio button next to “Login to keep working on an application you have already started”
- Enter your User ID and password
- Click the radio button next to “Go back to where you stopped filling out the application”
- Finish completing the application and when you get to the “Finish & Submit” section of the application, click the “Add Other Benefit and Medicaid Programs to My Application” button
- All of the previously entered data will be pre-filled
- CommonHelp will show the screens that need to be filled out
- Complete and submit the application

A: If you applied for All Benefit Programs and are in the process of completing the application, click the “Get Started” tab and then continue to click the “Previous” button until you reach the “Assistance For Which You Would Like to Apply” screen. Select the additional benefit programs you wish to apply for and finish completing the application. If you need to log back into CommonHelp to access your application:

- Go to the CommonHelp home page
- On the All Benefit Programs window, click Get Started

- Click the radio button next to “Login to keep working on an application you have already started”
- Enter your User ID and password
- Click the radio button next to “Go back to where you stopped filling out the application”
- Click the “Get Started” tab
- Continue to click the Previous button until you reach the “Assistance For Which You Would Like to Apply” screen
- Select any additional programs (Child Care, TANF, SNAP Health Care Coverage, Energy) you want to add to this application
- All of the previously entered data will be pre-filled
- CommonHelp will show the screens that need to be filled out
- Complete and submit the application