

TOGETHER, FOR YOU.

GET THE FACTS

Keeping you informed about changes
to public charge

PUBLIC CHARGE GUIDE
What It Means for You and Your Family

SEPTEMBER 2026



Important: This guide gives general information, not legal advice. Public charge rules may apply in different ways based on your immigration case. For advice about your case, talk with a licensed immigration attorney.

KNOW WHAT MATTERS

Federal public charge rules have changed?

Public charge can feel confusing or stressful. This guide explains the basics in plain language. It tells you **what has changed, what has not changed, who may be affected, and where to get trusted help.**

What is public charge?

Public charge is an assessment used in some immigration cases. It asks whether a person is likely to depend on means-tested public benefits to meet their needs. It can apply when some immigrants seek entry to the United States or apply for a green card. It doesn't apply to all immigrants.

What has changed?

A new federal public charge rule took effect on **September 18, 2026**.

The new rule lets federal immigration officers consider public benefits that were not considered under the old rule.

Immigration officers must look at each person's full situation. They must consider at least:

- Age.
- Health.
- Family situation.
- Income, money, and other resources.
- Education and job skills.
- Ability to work.
- Use of means-tested public benefits.

They can also look at other facts about the person and the case.





BASED ON THE FACTS

Public charge applies only in some cases

Public charge may apply when a person seeks admission to the United States or applies for a family- or employment-based green card. For people already in the United States, it is considered during an adjustment of status application.

It does not apply to green card applications based on:

- Asylum or refugee status, U visa or T visa, a Violence Against Women Act self-petition, or Special Immigrant Juvenile Status.
- Applications for U.S. citizenship, DACA, Temporary Protected Status, or work authorization.

Talk with a licensed immigration attorney about your case.

KEEP WHAT MATTERS

Public charge and public benefits are not the same thing

The public charge rule does not decide who can get Medi-Cal, CalFresh, or other public benefits. It is an immigration rule, not a benefits eligibility rule.

If you qualify for benefits, you may still apply for and use them. But public charge may affect your immigration case. Using a public benefit doesn't automatically decide what happens in an immigration case. Federal immigration officers review benefit use with other facts about the immigration case.

Ask a licensed immigration attorney before changing benefits.



Which benefits will be considered?

If public charge applies, immigration officers will review means-tested public benefits received on or after September 18, 2026. These benefits are limited to people who meet income or resource limits. Examples include, **but are not limited to:**

Medi-Cal: California's Medicaid health coverage program.

CalFresh: California's SNAP food assistance program.

Covered California: Receiving financial assistance, also known as "Advance Premium Tax Credits".

Other benefits based on income or need may also be considered.

Immigration officers review benefit use with other facts. The effect depends on each case. **Talk with a licensed immigration attorney before making a change.**

What about benefits my family uses?

Benefits used by your children or family members aren't treated as benefits you received. But officials can consider them when reviewing your family's money and support.

Ask a licensed immigration attorney before changing a family member's benefits.

Remember

Changes to Medi-Cal, CalFresh, or other benefit rules are separate from public charge. Public charge is about the immigration process, it is not about who can get public benefits.

Before you stop a benefit, turn down help, or make a change that affects your family, get the facts about your case.

BEFORE YOU MAKE A DECISION

Get the facts from the right source

If you are worried about public charge, **do not make choices based on rumors or general information alone.**

Before you stop health care, food aid, or other support your family needs, find out if public charge applies to you.

For immigration questions	Talk with a licensed immigration attorney or find a qualified immigration legal services provider through the California Department of Social Services: https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/immigration/contractor-contact-information .
For Medi-Cal, CalFresh, or other benefit eligibility or renewal questions	Contact: • Your county social services agency at: https://www.cdss.ca.gov/county-offices. • BenefitsCal at: https://benefitscal.com/. • A trusted community organization. This may be legal aid, a community health center, your WIC local agency, an immigrant-serving organization, or a food bank. • For questions about Covered California coverage or financial assistance, contact Covered California or a certified enrollment partner.
For federal public charge information	Get current federal information about public charge from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services: https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-8-part-g .

TOGETHER FOR YOU

Before giving up something that matters, get the facts

Your health matters. Food on your family's table matters. Your family matters.

Federal officials must look at each person's full situation to determine public charge.

Get the facts about your case before you act.