

What is public charge? Should I worry about it?

“Public charge” is a test used by US Citizenship and Immigration Services to decide who they will let into the United States, who can renew certain temporary visas, and who can get a green card. Only people who cannot support themselves are considered “public charges.”

There is no public charge test when you apply for citizenship.

Will getting healthcare hurt my immigration status?

Most immigrants can get healthcare without hurting their immigration status or being stopped from returning to the United States. US Citizenship and Immigration Services says it is okay to get:

- Medi-Cal (For more information, request a Medi-Cal Fact Sheet.)
- Covered California
- Other government healthcare

THERE IS ONE EXCEPTION: You can have an immigration problem if the government has paid for your long-term care in a nursing home or mental hospital.

What if I get other types of government help?

It is okay to get other government help that is NOT cash. Services that you can get include:

- CalFresh (food stamps)
- WIC
- School breakfast and lunch

What if I get cash benefits?

Cash welfare includes:

- SSI
- CalWORKS
- General Assistance (GA)

Getting these cash benefits can keep you from getting your green card, depending on your situation. It is not automatic, though, and some immigrants who use cash benefits can get green cards. **It is most important to answer questions honestly.** If you do not answer questions honestly, you may end up having an immigration problem.

There are some EXCEPTIONS where getting cash aid is OK and will NOT affect your immigration status or ability to get green cards. These exceptions are for: refugees, asylees, and certain victims of crime, domestic violence, or trafficking. A full list of exceptions can be found at: www.uscis.gov/green-card/green-card-processes-and-procedures/public-charge

Contact a lawyer if you need cash aid, nursing home care or mental hospital care.

More questions? Contact your health consumer center for free and confidential information about public charge. For the HCA program in your area, call HCA's statewide toll-free number: **1-888-805-3536**.