

Department of Social and Health Services
Olympia, Washington
EAZ Manual

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Category AREN
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Summary

Removing RCA from AREN program eligibility

Emergency Assistance Programs - Additional Requirements for Emergent Needs (AREN)

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Revised ~~December 18, 2023~~ [March 25, 2025](#)

Purpose:

This section describes an additional cash benefit available only to families, individuals, and pregnant women receiving Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), [or](#) State Family Assistance (SFA), ~~or Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA)~~ programs.

[WAC 388-436-0002](#) If my family has an emergency, can I get help from DSHS to get or keep our housing or utilities?

- [Clarifying Information and Worker Responsibilities](#)

Clarifying Information - [WAC 388-436-0002](#)

The intent of the AREN program is to keep clients in their housing, prevent utility disconnection, or get clients into housing that they can afford on an ongoing basis and get utilities connected. Paying for a hotel or motel stay should be a last resort and a short-term solution.

1. Families may be eligible when they:

- Have an emergent need to get or keep housing or utilities (See AREN Emergency Needs Table);
- Are eligible for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), [or](#) State Family Assistance ~~or~~ (SFA), ~~or Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA)~~;
- Have good reason that they don't have enough money to pay the housing or utility costs; and
- Haven't received the maximum AREN payment (\$750), as an adult, in the last 12-month period.

2. Clients must complete a cash assistance application as required in [WAC 388-406-0010](#) if they don't get assistance at the time of the AREN request. Clients who don't want on-going TANF, [or](#) SFA ~~or RCA~~ can't receive AREN; however if they have on-going means of support they may be eligible for [Diversion Cash Assistance](#).

3. AREN for "child only" households:

Households that receive a "child only" grant (e.g., non-needy relative, SSI parent, or someone acting in loco parentis) may receive AREN for emergent needs because the emergent need has an impact on children receiving TANF, [or](#) SFA, ~~or RCA~~. When we determine the household's needs, we must consider the income of the entire household, including income that we exclude when determining the household's ongoing assistance.

4. We consider a client who applies for TANF in Washington but isn't eligible until the month after the application because they received TANF in another state to be receiving TANF for the purposes of this rule. The client can get AREN if they meet all other eligibility factors.

NOTES:

1. See **VERIFICATION** for information on how to get verification. Use ACES letter, 0075-02 AREN Status, if you need to request verification of the amount of the client's emergency need.
2. A statement from the client or their landlord that they are simply behind on their rent doesn't necessarily meet the emergency requirement. At that point, the landlord may be willing to make arrangements for a payment plan with the client.
3. We may consider WorkFirst Support Services to meet client's needs if the client gets TANF/SFA and doesn't meet AREN eligibility.
4. We may consider AREN funds for an emergency housing or utility need when the bill isn't in the client's name. We must obtain verification that the client is responsible for payment.

AREN Emergency Needs Table

This table includes acceptable needs for AREN payments but doesn't cover reasons a client may not have money to cover their expenses. If you aren't sure if a client has good reason for how they spent their funds, you may want to talk to your lead worker or supervisor about the situation.

Emergency Need	AREN payment?	Comments
Back Rent	Yes	
Car Repair	No	
Clothing	No	
Credit Card Bills	No	
Deposits for rent or utilities	Yes	
Food	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If client doesn't get food assistance, ask if they want to apply. • We may replace food bought with food assistance benefits and lost in household disaster. See WAC 388-412-0040.
Furniture	No	
Home repairs	Yes	<p>When:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The damage puts the client's health or safety at risk; and

Emergency Need	AREN payment?	Comments
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The client owns the home; or The landlord won't fix the damage, and it is less expensive to fix the damage than to move.
Licensing, auto fees, automobile insurance	No	
Relocation	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To flee domestic violence. To leave unsafe housing. As a lower cost option to paying back rent to prevent eviction.
Short-term lodging such as motels	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only when there is no other option. Decide how long of a stay to approve based on when you expect the client to get more permanent housing. Not allowed on an ongoing basis.
Utility Bills	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The least amount to prevent a utility shut off. For phone service, only the amount to keep local phone service when the client needs the service for their health and safety.
Basic Local Telephone Service	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only allow AREN to get phone service or prevent a shut-off of basic service when the client can show a need for the service to meet the client's health and safety needs. Refer clients who need help with their phone service to local community resources.

EXAMPLES:

- Susan, her minor daughter Cindy, and Cindy's child get TANF. Susan ~~They~~ received AREN for an emergency housing need on August 5, ~~2006~~2024. Cindy later moved out of the TANF AU with ~~the~~ her child. Cindy requested AREN on October 5, ~~2006~~2024. The worker decided Cindy had a good reason for not having money to meet their needs. ~~As~~ Cindy is a minor

child and lived with an adult when their AU received AREN. Approve AREN as long as Cindy meets all other eligibility criteria, as she was not the head of household for previous issuance.

2. A TANF AU of Mom, Dad, and two children received AREN in August. Mom and one of the children moved out of the AU at the end of August. Mom was an adult member of an AU that received AREN. Deduct the amount Mom received from the \$750 twelve-month limit if she requests AREN.
3. Doug, Sally and their child receive AREN of \$750 in March of 2010 to prevent eviction from their apartment. Doug and Sally divorce, and he marries Tiffany in 2012. He and Tiffany apply for AREN to prevent utility shut off. Tiffany never received AREN. The assistance unit is eligible for AREN because neither Doug nor Tiffany received AREN funds within the past twelve months.
4. A four-person AU applied for TANF and requested AREN to pay for new housing and furniture. The AU currently lives in a domestic violence shelter. The AU has no income but will get \$833 in TANF monthly. The rent for the new apartment is \$450 a month. We can use AREN to get the new apartment but not for furniture. Refer the client to resources in the community to see if someone can help with the client's furniture needs.
5. A two-person AU asked for AREN to help pay for their overdue utility bill and current long-distance telephone bill. The family provided proof that their usual monthly income covers these expenses but due to an injury, the client missed six weeks of work. The client had a claim for L&I, but after a delay the client ended up receiving benefits for two weeks instead of the six weeks of benefits the client expected. We can use AREN for the utility costs. We don't pay the long distance bill, because the service isn't a health or safety factor.
6. A three-person AU requests AREN to pay for rent that is two months behind. The AU's only income is their TANF grant of \$706. The AU lives in subsidized housing and has a rent cost of \$300 a month. Look at how the AU spent their grant for the last two months to decide if the AU is eligible for AREN. The AU must show that their TANF grant was used to pay other necessary expenses as listed in [WAC 388-436-0002](#). Make your decision based on information that is readily available to the AU.
7. A family of four applied for assistance and asked for AREN to pay for a utility bill and rent that is three months past due. The mom left her job a week ago when she was diagnosed with cancer. Her overdue utility bill is \$400 and her overdue rent is \$1800. Her monthly rent is \$600. Although the family has an emergency housing need, we must look at how the AU has spent their money for the last three months. Some questions to ask are:
 - Were the AU's earnings used to pay for necessary expenses, such as medical care?
 - Will the AU be able to pay for the ongoing rent of \$600 in addition to their other bills?
 - Will the AU's only source of income be the TANF grant of \$833, or will they have other forms of income (such as SSI or child support in addition to TANF) to meet their future needs?

Decide if it is more appropriate to look at AREN to help the family get housing they can afford based on the AU's change in income

8. A three-person AU requested AREN to avoid eviction and pay \$1600 for rent that is two months overdue. The ongoing rent is still \$800 a month, and the AU's only income is the TANF grant of \$706 a month. Even if the AU has good reason for their lack of funds to meet the emergency need the AU is living beyond their means and can't show how they will be able to afford this expense in the near future. Consider looking at using AREN to help the family avoid homelessness by getting housing that they can afford based on their income.

9. On October 5th a two-person AU requests AREN for an eviction notice on the 1st of October and a utility shut off notice on the 25th of November. We can use AREN to pay the landlord and the utility company as long as they meet the AREN requirements, and the total amount doesn't exceed \$750.

10. Mom and Dad get TANF for their two children. The AU received \$400 in AREN for their emergency housing needs on August 10. Mom and dad split up at the end of August. Dad moved out with one child and is now in a new AU. Mom stayed in the home with the other child and is in the original AU. On October 1st, Dad requested AREN for a utility shut-off. Dad was an adult member of an AU that received AREN. He is eligible for up to \$350 in AREN.

11. Shelley receives a monthly TANF grant of \$450 because she is acting in place of a parent for John, an unrelated child. Despite her best efforts to keep up on the bills, John's hospitalization and unplanned medical expense prevented Shelley from being able to pay the utility bills. She received a notice to pay the \$380 balance, or the heat will be cut off in February. Because Shelley receives a TANF grant for John's needs, Shelley may be eligible for AREN to pay the emergency utility cost. We do consider Shelly's income and available cash resources for AREN, even though we didn't use this to determine eligibility for the child-only TANF grant.

12. In March, a TANF eligible family moves from California to Washington. The family applies for assistance in Washington on 3/15/~~07~~2025. The family is eligible for TANF beginning 04/01/~~07~~25 because they received March TANF benefits from California. They can get AREN in March if they meet all other program requirements

Worker Responsibilities - [WAC 388-436-0002](#)

Application Process

1. Clients may request AREN as follows:
 - a. A client who **currently gets** TANF, or SFA, ~~or~~ RCA, may request AREN by:
 - i. Completing the Emergency Assistance Request, DSHS 14-337(X), **or**
 - ii. Requesting the assistance over the phone, and we will complete form DSHS 14-337(X).
 - b. A client who **doesn't get** TANF, or SFA, ~~or~~ RCA must complete all of the following:

- i. Cash assistance application as required in [WAC 388-406-0010](#), and
 - ii. Emergency Assistance Request, DSHS 14-337(X).
2. Determine if AU is eligible for AREN per Clarifying Information #1 or WAC 388-436-0002 (1).
 - a. Obtain proof of the client's need and the cost it would take to end the emergency.
 - b. Determine if the assistance unit still has AREN funds available to resolve the emergent need. If not, the AU isn't eligible for AREN unless they meet ETR criteria.
 - c. Decide if AREN will meet the client's emergency housing or utility need. We can only use AREN to help a client get or keep housing and utility services. Use the AREN Emergency Needs Table to determine what needs are allowable through AREN. If not, the AU isn't eligible for AREN.
 - d. Decide if the client has good reason for why the AU doesn't have enough money to pay for the expense. If the client has good reason, continue to the next step. If not, the AU isn't eligible for AREN. Some questions to look at when you decide if a client has good reason include:
 - Did the client spend their money in a reasonable manner under the circumstances?
 - Was the client's choice of how they spent their funds reasonable at that time?
 - Did the client spend their money on necessary expenses?
 - Do the client's circumstances, such as mental or physical disability, explain why they used their money in a way that would not typically be looked at as a reasonable? If so, discuss Equal Access (EA) services available to the client.
 - Will paying the request meet the client's short-term emergency need, or will the client continue to need additional assistance? Will the action just delay what will happen anyway? If the request will just delay the emergency need, you may want to discuss other options with the client.
 - Is the client in non-compliance WorkFirst sanction with a reduced grant? If so they are not eligible for AREN.
 - e. Determine if an adult in the AU received AREN within the past twelve months.
 - i. If so, they may receive the unused amount from the \$750 as applicable (this includes adults who left an AU that received AREN and reapplies for AREN in a new AU), or submit Exception to Rule (ETR) request for payments that exceed the \$750 twelve-month limit using the ETR process. Headquarters will only approve AREN ETRs relating to health and safety. Some examples of ETR situations are:

- A. Elderly or disabled clients.
 - B. Clients who need access to emergency services. (e.g., a parent of a child who is on a ventilator would need a phone to contact an ambulance in an emergency).
 - C. Domestic violence victims or others who are likely to need police protection.
 - ii. If not, they may receive up to \$750.
- f. Determine the lowest amount that will end the client's emergency housing or utility need up to the twelve-month maximum of \$750, and issue the lowest amount needed to resolve the emergency completely, not just for a few months. Use the following steps to decide on the lowest amount:
- i. Contact the organization/person the client owes the payment to (e.g., landlord, utility company, etc.) and determine:
 - A. How to prevent eviction or utility shut-off.
 - B. Whether the organization/person will set up a reasonable payment plan or partial for the debt. **Don't provide legal advice or attempt to settle a client's legal claims.**
 - C. The landlord can be the owner, lessor, or sublessor of the home, unit or the property. Landlord can also mean any person designated as representative of the owner including, an agent, a resident manager, or a designated property manager.
 - ii. Determine client's **available** resources to meet the need (e.g. cash, checking, savings) and reach an agreement with the client on how much of the need they can cover. Clients don't have to use all of their resources to meet the emergency need. Look at what other expenses the client may need to pay. The following are examples of possible resources:
 - A. Money on hand in the form of cash, checking or savings.
 - B. Income the AU has that isn't excluded for cash assistance. (income of an SSI child, earnings of an ineligible AU member, etc.)
 - C. Money voluntarily provided by other individuals such as family or friends.
 - D. Money from a non-needy relative caretaker living in the home.
 - iii. Check other resources that may be able to meet the client's needs.

- iv. Look at what community resources are available to the client to meet the emergency need and refer as applicable (e.g. Catholic Charities, LIHEAP, Millionaire's Club, Multi-Service Center, Salvation Army, St. Luke's, St. Vincent DePaul, etc.).

~~g.~~ Refer all AREN requests for assistance beyond five hundred dollars and up to the seven hundred fifty dollar program limit to a supervisor or designee for approval of payment.

~~h.g.~~ Issue AREN for the approved needs by vendor payment after you determine the least amount necessary to meet a client's emergency housing or utility need. **You must issue AREN payments directly to a registered vendor to meet IRS guidelines.**

~~h.~~ Give or send the ACES letter 0075-02 AREN Status to the client.

~~j.i.~~ Review the circumstances that led to the client requesting AREN and decide if the client should have a protective payee under WAC 388-460-0020 and WAC 388-460-0035. Refer the client to social services to get a payee if necessary.

~~k.j.~~ Document the following in the remarks of the AREN screen for the AU:

- i. Date and amount of request,
- ii. Eligibility for TANF/SFA ~~or RCA~~,
- iii. The type of housing/utility emergency the client has,
- iv. The good reason for not having funds to meet their expenses,
- v. The lowest amount needed to end the emergency need and how this amount (include the name, title, and phone number of the person you spoke with if you used a collateral contact),
- vi. Whether or not you approved AREN,
- vii. The vendor/landlord name and vendor ID number, and
- viii. Amount approved (if any).

NOTES:

1. Complete all AREN denials in writing. Use ACES letter 0075-02 AREN Status
2. Find out if the utility company will separate the expenses if they provide services not related to the client's health or safety (e.g., one company provides electric, phone, cable, and garbage). **Don't** pay for services that are unrelated to health and safety if the company will separate the expenses.

EXAMPLES

1. A three-person AU applies for AREN. Mom's gross earned income is \$1500 a month. The AU isn't eligible for AREN because the AU exceeds the gross earned income limit of \$1,412 for the AU size. Ask the client if they want to apply for medical and food assistance.
2. A two-person AU applies for TANF and AREN. Mom earns \$800.00 monthly. The AU has no other income. Both the mother and the 17-year old child are fleeing felons. The AU isn't eligible for AREN. The AU isn't eligible for food assistance.
3. A four-person AU applies for AREN. The father gets \$1,200 a month in unemployment compensation. The AU isn't eligible for AREN because the AU's unearned income is greater than the TANF/SFA ~~and RCA~~ payment standard of \$833 for the AU size. Ask the client if they want to apply for food assistance.
4. A three-person AU applies for AREN. Mom earns \$900.00 monthly. The AU has no other income. They meet all the requirements for TANF eligibility. Approve AREN if the AU meets all other eligibility criteria.
5. In December, a TANF-eligible family of three requests AREN for \$500 to repair the heater in their home. The family doesn't have any other safe and reliable way to keep their home heated. The family isn't on assistance and doesn't want ongoing assistance. The family's gross income is normally \$900 a month, but the father had to take a leave of absence for two months due to a medical emergency. Even though AREN would cover this expense, the AU is ineligible since the client doesn't want ongoing benefits. Review eligibility for Diversion Cash Assistance for the emergency housing need under [WAC 388-432-0005](#) with the client.
6. A TANF AU requested AREN to help pay for a leak in the roof. The AU lives in an apartment and the lease agreement states that the landlord is responsible for maintenance and repairs of the apartment. The AU would have to contact the landlord and have them fix the roof. The client can reference the [Residential Landlord-Tenant Act](#) to persuade the landlord to make the needed repairs. If the family's health or safety is endangered and the landlord refuses to make the needed repairs, use AREN for the least expensive option of making the repair or relocating the client.
7. A three-person TANF AU requested AREN to help prevent eviction. The AU provided court papers showing the amount they owed. In order to avoid eviction, the AU needed to pay \$600.00 in back rent and \$80.00 in court and legal fees. We can use AREN to pay for the legal and court fees only if it will prevent the AU from eviction or foreclosure.