HELP IS HERE!
A CONSTITUENT SERVICES TOOLKIT TO COVID-19 RELIEF

MAY 2021
INTRODUCTION

More than a year into the pandemic, millions of Americans are still struggling to keep their families safe while trying to make ends meet. Tens of millions of Americans have been infected, and we have lost more than half a million American lives to the virus. Meanwhile, the economic crisis has left millions of Americans relying on unemployment checks and food stamps, while up to 40 million cannot afford to pay rent and fear eviction. These twin crises are only exacerbating the severe inequities in our country: communities of color have contracted the disease at much higher rates, eight in ten minority-owned businesses are on the brink of closure and more than two million women have been forced out of the workforce. While Americans have met these challenges with extraordinary courage and resilience, many need a hand to get back on their feet.

Thanks to the leadership of President Biden and Democrats in Congress, Help Is Here! As promised, the $1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan is delivering much-needed relief to communities across the country, especially those hardest hit by the pandemic and economic crisis.

Right now, the historic American Rescue Plan is saving lives and livelihoods in our communities:

- **Vaccines in Arms**: by funding a national vaccination campaign in partnership with community vaccination sites, we have delivered more than 260 million doses of the COVID vaccine nationwide. Today, every American older than 16 years old is eligible for the vaccine, and more than a third of all Americans have been fully vaccinated. More than
80 percent of seniors, educators, school staff and child care workers have received at least one vaccine dose.

- **Money in People’s Pockets:** the American Rescue Plan is delivering working families larger paychecks, sending out more than 160 million $1,400 checks, providing direct housing assistance and nutrition assistance, expanding access to safe and reliable child care and affordable health care, extending unemployment insurance and supporting tens of millions of families children with an expanded Child Tax Credit and millions more low-wage workers through an improved Earned Income Tax Credit.

- **Children Safely Back in School:** with a nearly $130 billion investment in our schools, the American Rescue Plan has helped make up for lost learning by enabling more than half of K-8 schools reopen full-time and in-person – fulfilling a key promise by the Administration.

- **People Back In Jobs:** the American Rescue Plan created a lifeline for the hardest-hit small businesses, especially those owned by entrepreneurs from racial and ethnic backgrounds that have experienced systemic discrimination, and crucial resources to protect the jobs of first responders, frontline public health workers, teachers, transit workers and other essential workers that all Americans depend on.

As we work hard to urgently and equitably deliver these vital resources, it is imperative that the American people about the many benefits available to them and their communities. This updated Coronavirus Constituent Service Resource Toolkit will help you understand all the benefits from the American Rescue Plan — and how to access them.
**UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

- The American Rescue Plan extended unemployment benefits until September 6, 2021 with a weekly supplemental benefit of $300 on top of the regular $400 benefit. These benefits are available immediately.
- The first $10,200 of unemployment benefits will be tax-free for people with incomes less than $150,000.
- Click here for general information from the Department of Labor about how to file for Unemployment Insurance. Residents seeking more information about UI benefits should contact the state unemployment insurance program. For a list of unemployment offices by state please click here.

**ECONOMIC IMPACT PAYMENTS TO INDIVIDUALS & THEIR FAMILIES**

- Individuals making less than $75,000, heads of household making less than $112,500, and married couples filing jointly that make less than $150,000 qualify for $1,400 direct payments. Individuals making up to $80,000, heads of household making up to $120,000, and couples making up to $160,000 will receive partial payments. Those with dependents will also receive $1,400 per person, including college students and seniors claimed as dependents.
- These payments will be issued by the IRS via direct deposit or mailed as a check or debit card. This will be based on 2020 or 2019 tax returns or 2019 Social Security statement.
- If you were eligible and didn’t receive a first or second Economic Impact Payment or got less than the full amounts, you may be eligible for the 2020 Recovery Rebate Credit, but you'll need to file your 2020 tax return.
• Veterans who receive non-taxable VA benefits but did not file tax returns for 2019 or 2020 will automatically be issued payments.
  
  o For VA beneficiaries who filed a Form 1040 for 2019 or 2020, those payments will also be automatic. No further action is needed. They can track the status of their payments on the Get My Payment tool on IRS.gov. For non-tax filing VA beneficiaries, please note their information will be loaded on this tool within the next few weeks.

• Check your payment status, confirm your deposit information and your payment type here.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

IRS: Questions and Answers about the Third Economic Impact Payments

EARNEDINCOME TAX CREDITS AND CHILD TAX CREDITS

• For individuals without children, the American Rescue Plan raises the maximum Earned Income Tax Credit from roughly $530 to close to $1,500, raises the income limit for the credit from about $16,000 to about $21,000, and eliminates the age cap for older workers, for 2021. This step will benefit more than 17 million low-income workers like cashiers and delivery drivers.

• For individuals with children, the American Rescue Plan increased the Child Tax Credit for 2021 from $2,000 per child to $3,000 per child for children over the age of six and $3,600 for children under the age of six. It also raised the age limit from 16 to 17. The IRS will begin sending regular periodic payments to families beginning in July 2021.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

IRS: Advance Child Tax Credit Payments in 2021
The American Rescue Plan also makes several improvements to the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit for 2021, including increasing the amount of the tax credit from 35 percent to 50 percent of child and dependent care expenses and increasing the amount of expenses that are eligible for the credit to $8,000 for one qualifying individual and $16,000 for two or more qualifying individuals (such that the maximum credits would now be $4,000 and $8,000). This credit is also refundable.

HEALTH INSURANCE

The American Rescue Plan will lower or eliminate health insurance premiums for millions of lower- and middle-income families enrolled in health insurance marketplaces. This will help well over a million uninsured Americans gain coverage.

A family of four making $90,000 could see their monthly premium come down by as much as $200 per month.

If you or a member of your household have lost health insurance coverage, there are several ways to stay covered:

- If you had insurance through a job, your employer may continue it or you may be eligible to pay for it through a program called “COBRA.” Ask your employer about how to sign up and how much it will cost or call 866-487-2365. The American Rescue Plan provides a 100 percent federal COBRA subsidy through September 1, 2021 – ensuring that those who lose their jobs or their health coverage due to reduced hours don’t lose their health insurance.

- To learn about other options, go to HealthCare.gov and follow instructions to see if you or your children qualify for your state’s Medicaid program. For people who qualify, Medicaid programs are very low cost.

- Through HealthCare.gov (or call 800-318-2596), you can also find out about low-cost insurance through your state’s health care exchange.
FOOD ASSISTANCE

- The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), more commonly known as food stamps, ensures that Americans receive the food they need, especially if they are newly unemployed. The American Rescue Plan included funding to increase SNAP benefits 15 percent – up to $100 more per household – through September 2021.
  - In order to apply for SNAP, contact your [state SNAP office](#) or the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food & Nutrition Services [regional offices](#) near you.

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

USDA’s SNAP Eligibility FAQ

- The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women Infants and Children (WIC) provides access to nutritious foods to low-income pregnant women or mothers. The American Rescue Plan allocates $800 million for WIC and temporarily boosts the value of WIC Cash Value Vouchers for vulnerable mothers and their children. WIC recipients with special dietary needs have been added to the list of individuals eligible for the increase in Cash Value Vouchers as well.
  - To see if you are eligible for WIC benefits click [here](#). To learn more about how to apply for WIC click [here](#). To learn about WIC in your state, click [here](#).

- USDA’s Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) provides reimbursements for nutritious meals and snacks to eligible children and adults who are enrolled for care at participating child care centers, day care homes, and adult day care centers. The American Rescue Plan temporarily expands the age of eligibility for CACFP at emergency homeless shelters to ensure more young adults can access needed nutrition support.
  - To find a participating child care center or adult care center near you, please [contact the agency office in your state](#).
TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE FOR NEEDY FAMILIES

- The American Rescue Plan created a $1 Billion TANF Pandemic Emergency Assistance Fund. These funds will be distributed to the states to provide emergency cash assistance to low-income families with children. To find out more about eligibility for TANF in your state, please contact your state TANF program.

HOMEOWNER & RENTERS PROTECTIONS

- Mortgage Forbearance: Homeowners with FHA, USDA, VA, or Section 184 or 184A mortgages (for members of federally-recognized tribes) and those with mortgages backed by Fannie Mae or Freddie Mac have the right to request forbearance on their payments for up to 6 months, with a possible extension for another 6 months without fees, penalties, or extra interest. Homeowners should contact their mortgage servicing company directly. For FHA, USDA, VA or Section 184 or 184A mortgages, the deadline for requesting an initial forbearance is June 30, 2021. For Fannie Mae- and Freddie Mac-held loans, there is currently no deadline for requesting initial forbearance.

- Homeowner Assistance Fund: The American Rescue Plan provides $10 billion in direct aid to help homeowners who are struggling to stay current on their mortgages as a result of the pandemic. This assistance can be used to help with mortgage payments, property taxes, property insurance, utilities and other housing related costs.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

USDA – Help to Put Food on the Table: Facts on Nutrition Assistance in the American Rescue Plan

Treasury Department: Homeowner Assistance Fund Guidance
• **Housing assistance and supportive services programs for Native Americans**: The legislation provides $750 million for assistance for Native Americans and Native Hawaiians, helping reduce housing-related health risks during the pandemic. Specifically, the American Rescue Plan includes $450 million for the [Indian Housing Block Grant program](#), $280 million for the [Indian Community Development Block Grant program](#), $5 million for the [Native Hawaiian Housing Block Grant program](#) and $10 million for related technical assistance resources.

• **Housing Assistance for Rural Communities**: The legislation provides $100 million through September 2022 in rental assistance for low-income and elderly borrowers and $39 million through September 2023 to help refinance direct loans under the Single-Family Housing Loan Program and the Single-Family Housing Repair Loans and Grants. To see if you are eligible for rental assistance, please contact your [local Rural Development office](#). To learn more about the Single-Family loan programs – please check the following resources: [Single-Family Housing Guaranteed Loan Program](#); [Single-Family Housing Repair Loans and Grants](#)

• **Rental Assistance**: The American Rescue Plan provides $22.5 billion for [emergency rental assistance](#) to help ensure struggling families continue to have a safe place to live during this pandemic and to help rental property owners of all sizes continue to cover their costs. The CDC’s national eviction moratorium which was in place since September 2020 was recently struck down by a federal district court. While the Justice Department is appealing that court’s decision, the nationwide moratorium remains in place until May 12. The decision’s impact on state courts and state moratoria is unclear. The rental assistance included in the American Rescue Plan is another federal recourse available for families struggling to pay rent. Learn more about [Emergency Rental Assistance](#).

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

- [National Low Income Housing Coalition: State and Local Rental](#)
- [HUD: Learn More About Renting and HUD’s Rental Assistance Programs](#)
• **Helping People Experiencing or At Risk of Homelessness:**
  o The American Rescue Plan provides $5 billion for five years of funding for **Housing Choice Vouchers** to assist very low-income families, the elderly, and people with disabilities afford decent and safe housing in the private market. These vouchers allow individuals and families to find their own housing – including single-family homes, townhomes or apartments. **To see if you are eligible for Housing Choice Vouchers, or any other public housing program, please contact your local Public Housing Agency.**
  o The American Rescue Plan also includes $4.75 billion for state and local governments – through the HOME Investment Partnerships Program – to help create housing and services for people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness.

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCE:**

[HUD: Housing Choice Vouchers Fact Sheet](#)

**ENERGY ASSISTANCE FOR LOW INCOME FAMILIES**

• This legislative package includes $4.5 billion to help low income Americans and their families heat and cool their homes. **To learn more about the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) in your state, click here.**

**EMERGENCY BROADBAND ASSISTANCE**

• The American Rescue Plan included $3.2 billion to the Federal Communications Commission to establish an Emergency Broadband Benefit to provide a discount of up to $50 per month toward broadband service for eligible households and up to $75 per month for households on Tribal lands. Eligible families can also receive a one-time discount of up to $100 to purchase a laptop, desktop computer or tablet from
participating providers. **To learn more about the Emergency Broadband Benefit and to enroll** visit [GetEmergencyBroadband.org](http://GetEmergencyBroadband.org).

**FUNERAL ASSISTANCE**

- **Families who have lost a loved one to COVID-19 may be eligible to receive assistance for funeral expenses.** FEMA has begun processing applications for financial assistance for COVID-19-related funeral expenses incurred after Jan. 20, 2020 up to a maximum of $9,000 per funeral, provided under the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2021 and the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021.
- To be eligible for funeral assistance the death must have occurred in the United States; the applicant must be a U.S. citizen, non-citizen national, or qualified alien who incurred funeral expenses after January 20, 2020; and the death certificate must indicate the death was attributed to COVID-19. **There is no requirement that the deceased person to have been a U.S. citizen, non-citizen national or qualified alien.**
- To apply for FEMA funeral assistance, people should call 844-684-6333 (TTY: 800-462-7585). Multilingual services are available.

**EMERGENCY PAID LEAVE**

- Many workers in America currently have no paid leave and are being forced to choose between their paycheck and their health, as well as the health of the people around them.
- The American Rescue Plan extends, from March 31, 2021 to September 30, 2021, the payroll tax credit for employers created by the Families First Coronavirus Response Act for use to help employers defray the costs of the paid sick leave and paid family and
medical leave required for employees impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic under that Act.

- If you are an employer and want to learn more about these refundable tax credits, please visit this IRS fact sheet on emergency paid leave.

---

**SMALL BUSINESSES**

**SMALL BUSINESS FORGIVABLE LOANS AND GRANTS**

- The American Rescue Plan included an additional $7.25 billion for the SBA’s Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), and expanded eligibility of 501(c) nonprofits of all sizes and types, except for 501(c)4 lobbying organizations.
  - PPP loans can be forgiven when used for payroll costs (including paid leave, health care, and other costs) to retain workers, and for other expenses such as rent, mortgage interest, and utilities. Independent contractors, sole-proprietors, and other self-employed persons are eligible for these loans.
- Additionally, Congress extended the PPP program through May 31, from March 31, and gave SBA an additional 30 days to process loans.
- Small businesses, tribal business concerns, nonprofits, and veterans’ organizations in your district should contact their lender and the Small Business Administration office directly.
  - For a state-by-state list of PPP lenders please click here.
  - For a list of SBA offices by state with contact information please click here.
- The American Rescue Plan included an additional $1.25 billion for SBA’s Shuttered Venue Operators Grant program, bringing the total amount available to more than $16
billion, including a set aside for technical assistance to help eligible small businesses apply for these grants.

- Eligible applicants may qualify for grants based on the product of a formula applied to their 2019 earned revenue (minus any PPP loan amount received after Dec. 27, 2020) or $10 million, whichever is less. $2 billion is set aside for businesses with 50 or fewer employees.

- To learn more about the SVO Grant program and eligibility and application guidelines, please click here.

- The American Rescue Plan established the SBA’s Restaurant Revitalization Fund and provided $28.66 billion for restaurants and other food and drinking establishments hard hit by the pandemic with $5 billion set aside specifically for smaller establishments with less than $500,000 in 2019 annual revenue and $500 million set aside for very small establishments with 2019 annual revenue of not more than $50,000.

- During the first 21 days, applications from restaurants owned and operated by women, veterans, or socially and economically disadvantaged individuals will receive priority consideration.

- RRF grants may be used for a wide variety of expenses, including payroll, mortgage payments, rent, utilities, supplies, food and beverage expenses, paid sick leave and operational expenses.

- To learn more about the RRF Grant program and eligibility and application guidelines, please click here.

- The American Rescue Plan provides an additional $15 billion for Targeted Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) grants to help those who applied for EIDL relief in 2020 but did not receive the full $10,000 grant.

- To learn more about EIDL grants and eligibility, please click here.

- The American Rescue Plan established a $10 billion State Small Business Credit Initiative to support up to $100 billion in small business financing through state, territorial and Tribal government programs.
• Click here to see the Treasury Department’s preliminary allocations for the State Small Business Credit Initiative.

• To learn more about the SSBCI, please click here.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Committee on Small Business: SBA State and Regional Lenders
Lead Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs) by State or Region
Women’s Business Centers Master Contact List

FARMERS & RURAL COMMUNITIES

• The American Rescue Plan provides $3.6 billion for USDA to strengthen the food supply chain by:
  o Increasing food donations with commodity purchases from farmers for distribution to food banks, nonprofits, or restaurants, to help feed families and support farmers’ bottom lines;
  o Improving worker safety with resources for food and agriculture businesses to purchase personal protective equipment, test kits, and other measures that keep essential food workers safe; and
  o Investing in infrastructure that supports food processors, farmers markets, and producers to build resiliency in the food supply in the long term
The American Rescue Plan includes provisions for USDA to pay up to 120 percent of loan balances, as of January 1, 2021, for Farm Service Agency (FSA) Direct and Guaranteed Farm Loans and Farm Storage Facility Loans debt relief to any socially disadvantaged producer who has a qualifying loan with FSA. This includes producers who identify as one or more of the following: Black/African American, American Indian, Alaskan Native, Hispanic/Latino, Asian American, or Pacific Islander.

- If you’re uncertain of your demographic designation on file at FSA, you can contact your local service center to verify your classification on record. If an update or correction is needed, you may either fill out USDA Form AD-2047 or work with your local service center to update your record, including race and ethnicity.

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

*USDA: American Rescue Plan Debt Repayments FAQ*

- The American Rescue Plan also provides $500 million in USDA rural initiatives to help hospitals expand vaccine distribution, purchase needed medical supplies, bolsters telehealth capacity and helps hospitals facing lost revenue and high costs. The USDA will administer these funds through the Community Facilities Program.
SCHOOL MEALS

- **The American Rescue Plan maintains and expands the Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT) Program.**
  For the 2020-2021 school year, the USDA has approved $17.7 billion to provide P-EBT benefits to 20.6 million children in 35 states and territories. The American Rescue Plan invests an additional $5 billion in P-EBT so that low-income families have access to school meals and food assistance during both the school year and summer months.

- **P-EBT is available this summer to all children who were eligible to receive free or reduced-price meals during the 2020-21 school year.** This includes school children who received and used P-EBT benefits as well as those who were eligible for free or reduced-price school meals but did not receive P-EBT benefits because they attended school in person and had access to a meal service at school. It also includes children who are newly determined eligible for free or reduced price meals during the covered summer period as well as children under 6 years old who are enrolled in SNAP during the summer.

HELPING K-12 SCHOOLS RE-OPEN SAFELY

- **The American Rescue Plan’s Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) fund provides $122 billion in relief for Pre-K-12 schools to reopen safely and address the academic, social, emotional, and mental health needs of their students.** The Department of Education is encouraging states to develop and implement plans to immediately utilize that funding to get more schools opened safely this spring and work to close the gaps in education equity that the pandemic has exacerbated. The remainder...
of ESSER funds will become available after states submit the plans they are developing and implementing for using ESSER funds to safely reopen schools and meet the needs of students.

- More than $1.2 billion of the ESSER funds will be used by states, school districts, and schools to offer evidence-based summer learning and enrichment programs to help address the lost instructional and extracurricular time students may have experienced as a result of the pandemic – particularly for underserved communities.

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention awarded $10 billion to states and jurisdictions to support COVID-19 screening testing for teachers, staff, and students in K-12 schools. By ramping up testing for educators and school staff, the Administration is helping more schools to be able to safely and quickly reopen and more students.

- The Department of Education has already distributed $200 million of the $800 million in funding to help states identify students experiencing homelessness, provide wraparound services in light of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and provide assistance to enable students experiencing homelessness to attend school and participate fully in school activities. The remaining $600 million in funding will go out this summer. Click here to find your state’s chief state school officer.

- The American Rescue Plan includes nearly $40 billion for institutions of higher education to help make up for lost revenue due to the pandemic. Requires institutions to dedicate at least half of their funding for emergency financial aid grants to students to help prevent hunger, homelessness and other hardships facing students as a result of the pandemic.
TRIBAL GOVERNANCE

- The American Rescue Plan includes $900 million for American Indian and Alaska Native government programs administered under the oversight of the Department of the Interior’s Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs. The disbursement plan includes $20 million for Potable Water Delivery, $100 million for Housing Improvement, and $772.5 million for Tribal payments and direct service for Tribal Government, Social Services, Public Safety and Justice, and Indian Child Welfare. More information about the allocation of this funding can be found at the Department of the Interior Indian Affairs website.

SCHOOLS

- The American Rescue Plan provides $850 million for Bureau of Indian Education-funded K-12 schools and Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities. This funding will help alleviate the stress on students, teachers and administrators and support these schools crafting and implementing student learning recovery initiatives. The Bureau of Indian Education’s allocation plan for the $850 million is as follows:
  - $535.5 million for the 183 K-12 schools in its school system based on the Weighted Student Unit formula
  - $229.5 million for Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities based on student count
  - $85 million will be managed by the Bureau of Indian Education School Operations for investments, such as the buildout of a Learning Management System and facility ventilation improvement projects
• The Bureau of Indian Education is using the same set of allowable costs identified by the U.S. Department of Education for CARES Act funding, which are outlined on the Bureau of Indian Affairs [website](#).

**INDIAN HEALTH SERVICE**

• Congress secured $6 billion in critically needed resources to the Indian Health Service (IHS) for vaccinations, health centers, mental health services and other vital health needs in Indian Country. Of the $6 billion allocated for IHS, $600 million will support increased vaccination efforts, $1 billion will increase contact tracing, drive through testing sites, and other public health efforts, and $2 billion will replace lost revenues for tribal health systems. Additional information on the federal response in Indian Country can be found on the IHS [website](#).

**HOUSING**

• The American Rescue Plan included $1.2 billion for tribal housing programs within the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Office of Native American Programs. The Indian Housing Block Grant formula allocations can be found on the HUD [website](#). Additional ONAP-American Rescue Plan resources can be found [here](#).
HEALTH CARE

- The American Rescue Plan includes more than $14.5 billion for VA to provide health care services and other related supports – including suicide prevention, Women’s health services, telehealth expansion, medical facility improvements – to eligible veterans and allows up to $4 billion in spending for the Veterans Community Care Program.
- Veterans will not have any copays or cost-sharing for preventative treatment or services related to COVID-19 going back to April 2020. If you have already submitted payments for your coronavirus related care during this period, the VA is authorized to reimburse you.
- If you are a VA frontline worker or essential health worker, the American Rescue Plan includes emergency paid sick leave for you for coronavirus related leave.
- Click here for a comprehensive list of Frequently Asked Questions from the VA: What Veterans Need to Know

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

VA – Military to Civilian Transition during the Coronavirus Pandemic
List of all VA Medical Centers
Veterans Crisis Line 1-800-273-8255

SMALL BUSINESSES

- Veterans are prioritized for the $28.6 billion Restaurant Revitalization Grants in the Small Business Administration’s Restaurant Revitalization Fund. During the initial 21-day period in which the Small Business Administration (SBA) awards grants under this program, SBA
will prioritize awarding grants to eligible entities that are owned and controlled by Veterans. **Learn more about the SBA’s Restaurant Revitalization Grant.**

**JOB RETRAINING**

- The American Rescue Plan provides nearly $400 million for up to 12 months of retraining assistance for veterans who are unemployed as a result of the pandemic and do not have access to other veteran education benefits. This funding covers the cost of the rapid retraining program as well as a housing allowance for enrolled veterans. **Learn more about the Veteran Rapid Retraining Assistance Program.**