

INCREASED ELIGIBILITY OF COFA MIGRANTS FOR CERTAIN PUBLIC BENEFITS PROGRAMS IN THE STATE OF HAWAII

Citizens of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands and Palau have the right to live and work in the United States under the Compact of Free Association (COFA). On March 9, 2024 federal legislation restored full public benefits for COFA migrants living in the United States.

HEALTH INSURANCE

- COFA Migrants who are in the United States can qualify for Medicaid Insurance if they are low-income. To apply they must obtain a social security number which they can do by visiting an office of the Social Security Administration and presenting their passport and I-94 entry document. I-94 entry documents can be obtained at <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov>
- COFA Migrants who have incomes over the income threshold for Medicaid and do not have insurance provided by their employer may be able to obtain low-cost insurance under the Affordable Care Act at healthcare.gov

UNEMPLOYMENT

- COFA Migrants who become unemployed may qualify for unemployment. Claimants can apply online at <https://huiclaims.hawaii.gov/#/login>. Those who would like language assistance with applications can call (833) 901-2272, (808) 762-5751, (833) 901-2275 or (808) 762-5752 <https://labor.hawaii.gov/ui/mah> (for Marshallese interpretation) and <https://labor.hawaii.gov/ui/chk> (for Chuukese Interpretation).

FEMA DISASTER RELIEF

- COFA Migrants affected by the 2023 Maui wildfires now may qualify for FEMA disaster relief including assistance for both displaced renters and homeowners. There is a 60-day application period that began **Monday, April 1**, and ends **Friday, May 31**. To apply, eligible COFA citizens must show that their primary residence on Maui was affected by the wildfires.
- To apply, COFA citizens may call **808-784-1952** or visit the Lahaina Disaster Recovery Center in the Civic Center Gymnasium at 1840 Honoapiʻilani Highway. Phone lines and recovery center hours are **8 a.m. to 4 p.m. HST Monday to Friday; 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. HST Saturday; closed Sundays**.

SUBSIDIZED HOUSING INCLUDING SECTION 8 RENTAL ASSISTANCE

- COFA Migrants who have limited income may qualify for subsidized housing programs including public housing and rental assistance. COFA Migrants have a “qualifying immigration status” for the purposes of these programs. COFA Migrants facing homelessness also qualify for emergency shelter programs. There are no immigration restrictions related to emergency shelter.

SNAP (FOOD STAMPS)

COFA Migrants who are food insecure and have financial need now qualify for SNAP if they are income eligible. Individuals and families can apply for food stamps at <https://pais-benefits.dhs.hawaii.gov/>. Applications can also be made at the State of Hawaii’s Department of Human Services Processing Centers.

WIC (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children)

- COFA Migrants do qualify for WIC. WIC is a food assistance program for pregnant women, mothers with infants, and young children under the age of five who meet income guidelines and have a medical or nutritional risk.

SOCIAL SECURITY DISABILITY AND RETIREMENT

- COFA Migrants who have worked for a sufficient amount of time in the U.S. (usually at least 10 years but may be less depending on age) and become disabled may qualify for Social Security Disability benefits. COFA Migrants who reach retirement age and have 40 work credits (at least 10 years of work history), may qualify for Social Security Retirement benefits.

COFA Migrants are now eligible for Supplemental Security Income. COFA migrants who are determined by the Social Security Administration to be disabled and unable to work and have very limited incomes and assets may qualify for Supplemental Security Income (SSI). COFA migrants who are 65 years or older and have very limited income and assets may qualify for SSI.

STATE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

- COFA Migrants who are low-income and have minor children living in their household may qualify for financial benefits from the state through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. COFA Migrants who do not have minor children and are blind, disabled or over the age of 65 may qualify for financial assistance through the State of Hawaii’s General Assistance program or Aid to the Aged, Blind, and Disabled.