

Adoption assistance helps parents to meet their adopted children's varied — and often costly — special needs.

What does assistance include?

It could include:

- **Monthly payments to help you meet the child's ongoing needs:**
The amount you get can't be more than what the State would pay if the child was in foster care. It would be based on:
 - ⇒ The child's age and special needs
 - ⇒ Your family's financial situation
- **Reimbursement for one-time adoption expenses:**
You (or a third party) may get a payment of up to \$2,000 for one-time expenses related to adopting the child. In most cases, this will be a direct payment to the organization working to finalize your adoption (i.e., Project Family in Vermont).

This helps cover costs such as:
 - ⇒ Homestudy fees
 - ⇒ Court costs
 - ⇒ Other expenses incurred before the adoption is legally finalized

➤ **Medical benefits:**

If you live in Vermont, the child will be eligible for Medicaid, which helps cover the cost of doctor's visits, prescriptions, hospital care, mental health services, dental care, eye care and more.

If you don't live in Vermont, medical benefits may be provided by the state where you live.

➤ **Special services:**

You may get payment for special services for the child. *Only services that would be provided for a child in foster care may be approved.*

Before your request for a special service can be approved, you must get written approval from the DCF Commissioner or designee. You must also demonstrate:

- ⇒ Financial need
- ⇒ That neither Medicaid nor your family's private insurance (if the child is enrolled in it) will cover the service
- ⇒ That the service or funding for it is not available through another government program or existing local interagency process

Who is eligible?

Children must meet *all* of the following criteria to be eligible for adoption assistance. They:

1. Are either in:
 - a. DCF custody or
 - b. The legal custody of someone other than a parent as the result of a CHINS or delinquency proceeding in Family Court
2. Are legally freed for adoption
3. Could not be placed without assistance (or it's not in their best interest to do so)
4. Are under 18 with *at least one* of the following special needs:
 - a. Over the age of 3
 - b. To be adopted with a sibling(s)
 - c. Diagnosed with a medical, physical, mental or emotional disability
 - d. Diagnosed at high risk for a serious disability based on known risk factors in the child/ family's background (e.g., prenatal exposure to drugs/alcohol, severe abuse or neglect or a parent's serious mental illness)

You must apply and be approved for adoption assistance before the adoption is legally finalized.

How do I apply?

1. You complete an application with the Project Family worker finalizing the adoption.
2. The worker completes a *Determination of Special Needs Form* and helps you gather the required supporting documents (e.g., income tax return and medical documents).
3. The worker submits your application to the Adoption Assistance Committee.
4. The Committee determines whether your child is eligible for assistance.
5. If your child is eligible, the Committee:
 - a. Prepares an agreement that details the amount and type of assistance as well as the terms and conditions. *Your worker may present any concerns you have to the Committee.*
 - b. Submits the proposed agreement to the division's Deputy Commissioner for approval.
6. You sign the offered agreement and the worker returns it to our central office for processing.

Can we appeal a decision?

Yes. You may appeal a decision about adoption assistance to the Human Services Board — a citizen's panel created by the legislature to hear appeals of decisions made by departments in the Agency of Human Services.

To get a copy of the fair hearing rules and ask questions about the process:

- Call (802) 828-2536
- Email contact.hsb@vermont.gov

You must submit your request for an appeal in writing—within 30 days—to:

Human Services Board Clerk
14-16 Baldwin Street, 2nd floor
Montpelier, VT 05633

When does assistance end?

It usually ends when the child turns 18. However, if your child:

- Is in high school past age 18, it may be extended until graduation.
- Has a medical, physical, mental or emotional disability that warrants continued assistance *as determined by DCF*, it may be extended until age 21.

Any benefits provided beyond age 18 may be provided at a different rate.

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Adoption Assistance

For Children Involved With DCF

