



MEDIA STATEMENT

May 13, 2024

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Priority: HIGH

Public Assistance Grant Criteria

Port of Spain - The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services seeks to clarify information regarding the Public Assistance Grant (PAG) in response to recent utterances regarding the standardized qualifying criteria used to access the suite of grants.

Public Assistance or the Public Assistance Grant is a relief grant to an individual who is in need, by reason of his/her being prevented by some physical or mental disability from earning a living. It is provided to meet the needs of persons where the household income is deemed inadequate.

Eligible individuals may include:

- an individual 18 years and over, who is certified by a government Medical Officer as unable to earn a living due to physical or mental disability;
- a person receiving Senior Citizens' Pension, whose spouse is 55 years and over and unemployed, or, whose spouse is under 55 years but unable to work due to physical or mental disability;
- an individual whose deceased spouse received Senior Citizens' Pension and Public Assistance;
- a single parent who is unable to earn a living due to caring for a child with a physical or mental disability;
- a parent, guardian or custodian on behalf of a child with a physical or mental disability, on behalf of a child whose parent is hospitalized, deceased, imprisoned, or has abandoned the family and does not provide support despite there being an application/order for maintenance;
- is the spouse of a person serving a term of imprisonment;
- was cohabitating with a person of the opposite sex for a period of at least three years before the latter began serving a term of imprisonment;
- a child who may be deemed necessitous in accordance with guidelines issued at the board.

As at May 2024, there are Fifteen Thousand, Nine Hundred and Two (15,902) individuals in receipt of the Public Assistance Grant amounting to an expenditure of Twenty-Four Million, Three Hundred and Forty-One Thousand, Three Hundred and Ninety-Five Dollars and Sixty-Four Cents (\$24,341,395.64). From October 2023 to present, the Ministry has disbursed funds in the amount

of One Hundred and Ninety-Eight Million, Five Hundred and Sixty-Six Thousand, Seven Hundred and Twenty-Nine Dollars and Ninety-Two Cents (\$198,566,729.92) under the Public Assistance Grants.

To become eligible for this Grant, individuals must undergo a Standard Means Test (SMT). The purpose of the SMT is to improve the efficiency of targeting mechanisms for accessing social safety net programmes/grants and to enhance the effectiveness of social service delivery. Contrary to misinformation, the SMT does not determine the qualifying income of the applicant but determines the poverty line of the household.

The SMT calculates the household's poverty line by assessing the household income and deducting two allowable expenses namely housing (rent, land rent/lease, mortgage) and health expenses not covered by CDAP or the Public Health Dispensary. Once an applicant's net household income is equal to or less than the household poverty line, the household is deemed below the household poverty line and can be considered for programmes/services.

The Ministry further wishes to state that the SMT is continuously being reviewed, monitored and evaluated to gauge its efficacy as the Ministry's main targeting mechanism for identifying the poor and vulnerable. The SMT was last reviewed in 2021 and a preliminary estimate of an updated poverty line was also calculated in 2023. Further, the Ministry anticipates that a new household poverty line will be determined upon the finalisation of the Report of the 2023 Survey of Living Conditions, which remains the country's most reliable assessment of poverty levels and is currently being conducted by the Central Statistical Office (CSO).

The Ministry further assures that every step is being taken to ensure that public assistance reaches those households who are truly in need, aligning with our commitment to helping, empowering and transforming the lives of the most vulnerable. The Ministry reiterates its commitment to ensuring that vulnerable individuals and those in need receive the assistance they require, leaving no one behind.

For further information about the Ministry's grants and services, persons are encouraged to visit the Ministry's website at <https://social.gov.tt/grants/> or call the MSDFS' Toll-Free hotline at 800-1MSD (1673).

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For more information, contact

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