

Adoption Assistance: Changes in Adoptive Family Circumstance (FAQs)



Adoption Assistance (AA)

Adoption assistance (AA) is a supportive resource for children who have been adopted and their families. AA provides Foster Care Medicaid and the chance to apply for a one-time reimbursement of up to \$2,000 in adoption-related expenses. For some children, AA also includes a monthly subsidy.

AA is established by an agreement between the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families and the adoptive parent(s). An AA agreement must be entered into before adoption finalization. AA is typically available until the child's 18th birthday or high school graduation, unless other circumstances exist.

For more information about AA, see [Adoption Assistance: General Information \(DCF-P-PSF0105\)](#).

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs): What happens to adoption assistance?

This document answers common questions about what happens to adoption assistance when there is a change of circumstance for the adoptive family, including the death of an adoptive parent(s), the divorce or remarriage of the adoptive parent(s), the child entering out-of-home care, or other major changes.

Death of an Adoptive Parent

Will adoption assistance end if an adoptive parent dies?

AA is established by an agreement between DCF and the adoptive parent(s). If both signatory adoptive parents (i.e., adoptive parents who signed the AA agreement) die, then the agreement will be terminated and adoption assistance will end. If one signatory adoptive parent dies and the other signatory adoptive parent does not, then adoption assistance will remain in effect. If the living parent is not signatory to the AA agreement, then the agreement will be terminated and adoption assistance will end.

To add a second parent as a signatory to an active AA agreement, that parent must be married to a signatory adoptive parent on the AA agreement **and** must legally adopt the child via a stepparent adoption. For more information about stepparent adoptions, contact the Wisconsin Family Connections Center at info@wifamilyconnectionscenter.org or (800) 762-8063 (toll free). Note that Wisconsin law does not permit a child to have more than two legal parents. If a child was originally adopted by two parents, stepparent adoption can only occur if there is a death or termination of parental rights of one of the legal parents. Once the stepparent adoption has occurred, contact the Adoption Assistance Program to have the stepparent added as a signatory to the agreement.

Can adoption assistance be transferred to the child's guardian?

No. The agreement is between DCF and the adoptive parent(s). If both adoptive parents listed on an AA agreement die, the agreement will be terminated and adoption assistance will end. The agreement does not transfer from the adoptive parent(s) to the child's guardian. Medical assistance and the monthly subsidy, if applicable will end.

How can the guardian receive adoption assistance for the child?

Adoption assistance can only be received if the guardian adopts the child, meets all eligibility requirements, and enters into an active adoption assistance agreement. If the guardian wishes to adopt the child, the guardian must apply and be approved for adoption. The guardian will not automatically be approved for adoption or adoption assistance. To learn more about the adoption process and requirements, contact the Wisconsin Family Connections Center at info@wifamilyconnectionscenter.org or 1 (800) 762-8063 (toll free).

Does the guardian have to adopt the child?

No. The guardian is not required to adopt the child. AA will only be provided if the child is adopted. Other permanency options and resources may be available. To explore these resources, contact the Wisconsin Family Connections Center at (800) 762-8063 (toll free) or visit WIFamilyConnectionsCenter.org.

If the guardian adopts the child, will the adoption assistance subsidy, if applicable, be the same?

If determined eligible for adoption assistance, the subsidy will be redetermined. AA eligibility and the monthly subsidy rate, if applicable, will be based on the needs of the child at the time of the new adoption.

How will costs be covered before the guardian adopts the child or the guardian does not adopt the child?

Costs will not automatically be covered. The guardian may explore receiving assistance from social security benefits, life insurance, or inheritance. To learn more about these and other resources, contact your local human services department. Financial assistance may be available if the guardian is a kinship caregiver, foster parent, or adoptive parent.

If an adoptive parent has a terminal illness, can they do anything to prepare?

Yes. The adoptive parent can designate a guardian. If the guardian is interested in adopting the child, the guardian may begin the foster and adoptive home licensing process before the death of the adoptive parent.

Divorce or Re-Marriage of the Adoptive Parent(s)

What happens to adoption assistance after the adoptive parent(s) get divorced?

This depends on the adoptive parent(s) divorce decree or marital settlement agreement. Adoptive parent(s) should address the stipulations of the adoption assistance with their legal counsel.

If one adoptive parent gets remarried, can the new stepparent receive adoption assistance?

A stepparent may become a signatory to an AA Agreement only if they legally adopt the child via a stepparent adoption. For more information about stepparent adoptions, contact the Wisconsin Family Connections Center at info@wifamilyconnectionscenter.org or 1 (800) 762-8063 (toll free).

Child Entering into Out-of-Home Care

Does adoption assistance end if the child enters out-of-home care (e.g., foster care or a residential facility)?

Not necessarily. Adoption assistance will end if the adoptive parent(s) is/are no longer supporting the child or when parental rights of the adoptive parent(s) have been terminated or suspended. If the adoptive parent(s)' rights have not been terminated and they are still providing support to the child, the adoption assistance agreement may remain active.

Can adoption assistance monthly payments be re-routed, if applicable?

All or part of the monthly adoption assistance subsidy may be rerouted to a child placing agency (e.g., the county Department of Human Services) by means of a child support order, other court order, or at the direction of the adoptive parent(s). AA will not be rerouted to a third party, other than a child placing agency.

Other Major Changes

Other major changes may occur for the adoptive family while there is an active adoption assistance agreement. Adoptive parent(s) are responsible for notifying DCF of major changes, as required in the AA agreement. Major changes include:

- Adoptive parent(s) address change
- Child acquires new Social Security Number (SSN)
- Child is no longer living with the adoptive parent(s)
- Adoptive parent(s) parental rights to the child have been terminated
- Adoptive parent(s) no longer supporting child
- Child enlists in the military
- Child gets married
- Child attains 18 years of age
- Child completes high school after attaining 18 years of age
- Child was determined eligible for AA under [Wis. Admin. Code § DCF 50.15\(3\)\(a\)3](#) and no longer has an individual educational program (IEP)
- Death of child

Who do I contact if...?

I would like to learn more about adoption, including stepparent adoption.	Wisconsin Family Connections Center Website: WIFamilyConnectionsCenter.org Email: info@wifamilyconnectionscenter.org Phone: (800) 762-8063 (toll free)
I would like more information about post-permanency supports.	
I need to report any of the major changes listed above.	Adoption Assistance Program Email: DCFAdoptionAssistance@wi.gov Phone: (866) 666-5532, option 1 (toll free)
I need to discuss conditions of my child's adoption assistance.	

The Department of Children and Families is an equal opportunity employer and service provider. If you have a disability and need to access services, receive information in an alternate format, or need information translated to another language, please call the Division of Safety and Permanence at (608) 266-8787. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind or speech disabled can use the free Wisconsin Relay Service (WRS) – 711 to contact the department.