



Washington State Coalition
for the
Homeless

2009 Legislative
Funding Priority

Avoid Costly Emergency Medical and Law Enforcement Interventions.

Preserve General Assistance Unemployable (GAU)

What is GAU?

GAU is a state-funded program that provides cash and medical benefits for persons at least 18 years of age who are physically and/or mentally incapacitated and unemployable for 90 days from the date of application, or 65 years of age or older.

GAU assists disabled and elderly Washington residents in meeting their basic needs for shelter, food and medical care. GAU recipients who also receive food stamps use GAU to help pay for things uncovered by food stamps from soap to toilet paper. GAU assists single adults and couples without children who are not eligible for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), State Family Assistance (SFA), and Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

Persons incapacitated solely by alcoholism or drug addiction are not eligible for GAU. These individuals are referred to other forms of assistance, such as Alcoholism and Drug Addition Treatment Support Act (ADATSA) living stipends, which the Governor has also eliminated.

What are current funding and service levels?

GAU provides \$339/month to about 21,000 people statewide. This costs the State \$156,195,000 and 56.8 FTE per biennium to operate.

The average length of stay on GA-U is 10.9 months; for GA-X is 24 months.

Why is it important to preserve GAU?

People receiving GAU are either currently homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless. Without this small amount of assistance, GAU recipients will have no means to support themselves. When they get sick, they will be treated in emergency rooms and when they cannot secure scarce shelter beds and are arrested for “illegal camping,” they will be incarcerated—all at the expense of tax-payers.

While it may seem a prudent action in an attempt to balance the budget, tax-payers will still be supporting this population via public services, and at a much greater cost.

How will preserving GAU help us achieve our goal of ending homelessness?

If GAU is eliminated, GAU recipients who are not already homeless will become homeless. The State has mandated that homelessness be reduced by 50% by the year 2015. Eliminating GAU would increase homelessness and Washington State would fail to meet that goal. It would then be several more years—decades even—before we actually end homelessness.