



TO: **Child Care Eligibility and Authorization Workers
and Supervisors
Income Maintenance Supervisors
Income Maintenance Lead Workers
Income Maintenance Staff
Training Staff
Child Care Coordinators**

DECE/BCCSA OPERATIONS MEMO

No: 26-01

DATE: 01/26/2026

Child Care

FROM: David Timmerman, Director
Bureau of Child Care Subsidy Administration
Division of Early Care and Education
Department of Children and Families

SUBJECT: 2026 Federal Poverty Level (FPL) Changes for Wisconsin Shares

CROSS REFERENCE: [Wisconsin Shares Handbook](#), Sections 6.1.1 and 6.1.2
[DHHS Federal Poverty Guidelines](#)

EFFECTIVE DATE: February 1, 2026

PURPOSE: The purpose of this Operations Memo is to introduce the 2026 Federal Poverty Level (FPL) and State Median Income (SMI) used in determining financial eligibility for the Wisconsin Shares child care subsidy program.

BACKGROUND: Each year, the federal Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) updates the FPL guidelines based on the Consumer Price Index. Poverty guidelines are used to determine financial eligibility for Community Services Block Grant programs and several other publicly funded programs, including Wisconsin Shares.

SMI is based on the American Community Survey and published by the United States Census Bureau. The Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) – which partially funds Wisconsin Shares – instructs agencies to use the SMI to determine ongoing financial eligibility for child care.

POLICY: Beginning February 1, 2026, new applicant eligibility will be determined using the 2026 FPL limits. The 2026 SMI limits will be applied to March eligibility for ongoing cases.

The 2026 FPL and SMI table for financial eligibility in the Wisconsin Shares child care subsidy program is as follows:

Group Size	Monthly 200% FPL	Monthly 85% SMI
2	\$3,607	\$5,932
3	\$4,553	\$7,327
4	\$5,500	\$8,723
5	\$6,447	\$10,119
6	\$7,393	\$11,514
7	\$8,340	\$11,776
8	\$9,287	\$12,038
9	\$10,233	\$12,299
10	\$11,180	\$12,561
Each Additional Person Add	\$947	

Wisconsin Shares Financial Eligibility: The financial eligibility limit for new Wisconsin Shares applicants, including cases in which child care eligibility has been closed for more than a calendar month, is 200% FPL. Once financial eligibility has been met, financial eligibility may continue until income reaches 85% SMI.

Financial eligibility for foster parents, subsidized guardians, interim caretakers, and relatives with court-ordered placement who receive a Kinship Care payment (and relatives of children in tribal placement homes under a substantially similar Wisconsin tribal law) is based upon the child's biological or adoptive parents' income tested at 200% FPL at the time the child was removed from the home.

CARES: The CARES income limit table, TCCS (Childcare Need Standard), which is used to determine Wisconsin Shares eligibility, has been updated with an effective date of February 1, 2026. All new applications for Wisconsin Shares beginning on February 1 will use the updated information. A CARES mass change will run the weekend of February 1, 2026, that will select all ongoing Wisconsin Shares cases and apply the 2026 SMI amounts to March eligibility. Because the income thresholds are increasing, this process will not have a negative eligibility impact for Wisconsin Shares cases.

Wisconsin Shares Copayments: The Wisconsin Shares copayment schedule will also be updated to show the change in the FPL. The copayment per hour amounts will remain the same.

CONTACTS:

For Wisconsin Shares Child Care policy questions outside of Milwaukee County contact your Bureau of Regional Operations (BRO), Child Care Coordinators at BROCCPolicyHelpDesk@wisconsin.gov.

For Child Care CARES/CWW and CSAW Processing Questions statewide, and policy questions in Milwaukee County, contact the Child Care Subsidy and Technical Assistance line at: childcare@wisconsin.gov or (608) 422-7200.

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