

Questions & Answers:

Q1. Why has it taken so long for the Army's implementation guidance for Basic Needs Allowance?

A1. We wanted to ensure we get our policy guidance correct to prevent future issues for our Soldiers.

Q2: Who is eligible for BNA?

A2: Active-duty service members with dependents are eligible for BNA and may be certified if:

- They have completed initial entry training (IET).
- Their gross household income during the most recent calendar year (i.e., the calendar year immediately preceding the year they apply for BNA) did not exceed 130% of the federal poverty guidelines, as published by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) for their location and the number of individuals in their household.
- They have voluntarily applied for the BNA and provided the required information to determine eligibility.

Soldiers who meet these criteria and apply for BNA will be considered certified.

Q3. Are cadets at the United States Military Academy eligible?

A3. No.

Q4. How many Soldiers does the Army estimate will be eligible for BNA?

A4. Initial HR and pay systems reviews indicate a very limited number of Soldiers will qualify.

Q5. How and when will Soldiers be notified?

A5. Soldiers will be advised about their eligibility to apply for BNA based upon screening conducted by their chains of command.

Q6. When does the Army expect to complete its screening of soldiers for possible eligibility for the allowance?

A6. In accordance with DoD policy, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command has begun screening Soldiers attending Advanced Individual Training (AIT) for BNA eligibility. Soldiers already assigned to their permanent duty stations will be screened annually during their personnel readiness reviews and Soldier Readiness Processing upon Army guidance approval.

Q7. Why is there a screening process?

A7. The screening process provides commanders the opportunity to increase the financial literacy of their Soldiers, and inform them about BNA, and other resources available including local, state and federal assistance programs.

Q8. How much will Soldiers get?

A8. The amount of BNA eligible members receive will vary according to their individual circumstances. The amount will be calculated to increase their gross household income to 130% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines, which vary according to household size and location (CONUS, Alaska and Hawaii).

Q9: How is BNA calculated?

A9: When determining BNA eligibility, an applicant will be evaluated to determine whether their preceding calendar year's gross household income and current year's annualized gross household income is less than 130% of the preceding year's Federal Poverty Guidelines for their household size and geographic location. The monthly BNA payments are calculated as the difference between 130% of the current year's federal poverty guidelines and the preceding year's gross household income, divided by 12.

Q10. What is Gross Household Income?

A10. A Soldier's gross household income includes all income from all members of the household, all pay and allowances, including basic housing allowance paid to the Soldier. It also includes investment income and any other household income, government food assistance programs, but does not include military travel and transportation and related allowances and entitlements. Also, a dependent who is not required to file a tax return won't have income included in the GHI.

Q11: Is BNA considered taxable income?

A11: BNA is considered taxable income. As a result, a certain amount of the allowance will be withheld from each paycheck for taxes.

Q12: Will BNA affect my eligibility for Family Supplemental Subsistence Allowance or government assistance programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children?

A12: BNA may affect eligibility for those programs. Before applying, Soldiers should consider meeting with a personal financial manager or counselor to find out which benefits they may qualify for and to determine how BNA may impact eligibility for those programs.

Q13. Can Soldiers receive retroactive benefits if there are processing issues?

A13. Retroactive payments are not authorized. The monthly BNA is only payable from the date the application is certified. The Department of Defense Instruction directs the service secretaries to establish procedures to ensure all eligible service members will be paid the monthly BNA within 30 calendar days of certifying the application.

Q14. Is there a deadline to apply?

A14. Upon approval of Army guidance, any Soldier may apply. If a Soldier is screened and notified of possible eligibility, they must complete the application within 90 days of the notification counseling.

Q15: Must I recertify?

A15: Soldiers receiving BNA must reapply each year or when certain factors trigger a recertification, such as a change in household size, a PCS to or from Alaska or Hawaii, or an increase in gross household income.

Q16: Is this mandatory?

A16: BNA is optional, and you may choose not to apply. You may also decline the allowance if you are notified that you have been certified for approval.

Q17. Can an application be submitted after 180 days if a Soldiers' status has changed, making them eligible?

A17. Yes, upon a change in income, change in household size, promotion or PCS, Soldiers can apply for BNA.

Q18. How will the Army determine if the Soldier no longer qualifies for BNA, such as an increase to their household income, divorce, etc.?

A18. Commanders and human resources professionals review financial and personnel system reports to monitor changes that may impact eligibility for Soldiers receiving BNA.

Q19. If a recipient is found to no longer be eligible for BNA during a review, will they be forced to repay allowances received after the life event that increased their household income above 130% of FPG (e.g., promotion, spouse's income increased, divorce)? If so, what is the Army doing to educate Soldiers about their responsibility to report these events and the possibility for recoupment and/or disciplinary action?

A19. Soldiers who are found to be no longer eligible have 60 days to resubmit the application and supporting documents for recertification. We have also included counselling requirements throughout the BNA process. For example, upon approval commanders will inform Soldiers of the amount of monthly BNA they can receive, and during participation the Soldier must report increases or decreases in reoccurring monthly gross household income of \$150 or more.

Soldiers who do not recertify as required by policy are indebted to the U.S. Government for BNA payments received without the proper authority. If this occurs, they may apply for a remission or cancellation of indebtedness in accordance with AR 600-4.

Q20. How many have applied and how many have been approved?

A20. We are still in the initial phases of our screening process so that information isn't yet available.

Q21. What else is the Army doing to improve quality of life for junior Soldiers and families?

A21. The Army supports all Secretary of Defense approved initiatives to assist Soldiers and their families. Recently approved initiatives included Permanent Increase to Temporary Lodging Expense (TLE) coverage, Increase to Dislocation Allowance (DLA) for Soldiers in the rank of E1 to E6, and funding for five additional Child Development

Centers (CDCs) in FY21-22. Regardless of their eligibility, it's important that leaders leverage the opportunities to provide Soldiers information about financial programs, services and resources.

Q22. Why is it important for annual screenings for BNA?

A22. One of the Army's top priorities is taking care of our people, and securing affordable basic needs is a team effort. Our people and our readiness remain inextricably linked, and economic challenges can happen throughout the year. The Army's Financial Readiness Program is a trusted resource that can assist Soldiers and families in lessening financial stressors and improving mental health by providing Soldiers with opportunities to learn important financial management skills and behaviors. Leaders should inform and encourage Soldiers and families to take advantage of this resource even if they do not qualify for BNA. Credentialed counselors can assist in identifying alternate financial management programs for which Soldiers may qualify.

Q23. What questions should leaders be asking Soldiers who exhibit financial strain?

A23. Leaders should be having conversations with Soldiers regarding finances and should help eliminate the stigma that many feel when seeking assistance, particularly when it comes to accessing resources for affordable basic needs. Leaders should ask Soldiers who exhibit financial strain questions such as, "Are you having difficulty providing basic needs for you and your family?" or "Have you considered whether you are eligible for assistance programs like SNAP, WIC or the new BNA entitlementment?" Encouraging the use of available resources will go a long way in addressing economic security in the force.

Q24. How does the 2023 NDAA affect BNA?

A24. The 2023 NDAA requires implementation of an increase of the income cap from 130% to 150% of federal poverty guidelines by January 2024, and Congress has authorized DoD to increase the income cap to 200% of federal poverty guidelines under certain circumstances. The Army is prepared to implement this change once the Secretary of Defense approves.

Resources:

1. Defense Finance and Accounting Resources:
<https://www.dfas.mil/MilitaryMembers/payentitlements/bna/>
2. DoDI 1341.15, Basic Needs Allowance Nov. 15, 2022:
https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/dodi/134115p.PDF?ver=tqF1mBA_PSHwdqogpkQFaw%3D%3D
3. SECDEF People Memo PAG Sept. 22, 2022
4. SECDEF MEMO: Taking Care of Our Service Members and Families Sept. 22, 2022:
<https://media.defense.gov/2022/Sep/22/2003083398/-1/-1/0/TAKING-CARE-OF-OUR-SERVICE-MEMBERS-AND-FAMILIES.PDF>

5. Summary of NDAA 2023:
https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/fy23_ndaa_agreement_summary.pdf
6. Military OneSource Basic Needs Allowance Fact Sheet:
<https://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Factsheets/basic-needs-allowance-factsheet.pdf>
7. Financial Readiness BNA Resource Page:
<https://finred.usalearning.gov/Benefits/BNA>