

Deadline looms to claim missing pandemic relief benefits

Tax advocates encourage Ohioans to speak with an IRS certified tax preparer

While the COVID-19 pandemic may seem like a distant memory, tax advocates stress that it's not too late to claim missing pandemic relief funds. However, the deadline to claim those benefits is fast approaching.

Individuals have until May 17, 2024 to recover 2020 economic impact payments, commonly referred to as stimulus payments. In order to claim missing funds, they must file a 2020 tax return and request the recovery rebate credit.

"Individuals who haven't received these stimulus payments are typically the very ones who can least afford to miss out," shared Dana Goldstein, tax attorney at Community Legal Aid.

The IRS issued stimulus payments by using the information on the 2018 or 2019 taxpayer records to determine how to distribute the funds.

"Individuals with little or no earned income aren't required to file taxes, so the IRS had no way to identify them and issue payment," she explained. Those without a recent tax record were required to take additional steps to claim the funds. For some, that process proved too difficult, or they assumed they weren't really eligible for the payment.

Goldstein stressed that while it's not too late to claim missing benefits, time is running out.

"Anyone who did not receive stimulus payments should speak with a tax professional immediately," she shared.

There is still time to claim 2021 pandemic relief funds as well, including the expanded Child Tax Credit, which can provide as much as \$3600 per qualifying child. The deadline to claim 2021 benefits is April 15, 2025 but there is no reason to wait.

In 2021, there were no income requirements to claim the expanded CTC, meaning more households were eligible to receive these funds.

"Removing the income requirements meant households living on a fixed income, such as a grandparent who is also a kinship caregiver, could claim the credit and gain much-needed financial support to care for the children in their care," Goldstein elaborated.

Whether individuals seek to recover missing stimulus payments or the expanded CTC, the solution is to file a tax return, even if there is no earned income to report.

Households making roughly \$60,000 a year or less can find tax help at a local Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) site. VITA programs provide free tax preparation services offered by IRS certified preparers. VITA services can be found by calling (800) 906-9877 or by visiting irs.treasury.gov/freetaxprep.

Legal Aid may be able to provide additional assistance for those who filed tax returns but are still having difficulty recovering stimulus payments or tax credits. Call (800) 998-9454 to apply for assistance or visit www.communitylegalaid.org/apply.

About Community Legal Aid:

Community Legal Aid is a 501(c)3 non-profit law firm serving the legal needs of low-income individuals in central and northeast Ohio. Community Legal Aid is not a tax preparation service but can help eligible individuals resolve the burden of tax debt, access tax credits and refunds, address tax fraud and identity theft, or represent them in IRS exams, appeals and Tax Court.

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