



Documents That Matter: Understanding the Importance of Gathering and Keeping Vital Documents

Did you know that important documents like birth certificates, immunization records, photo IDs, etc. could impact where you can live, if you can fly on a plane, or even if you can get a job?

Having access to important documents will help you to access the world around you, but as a young person who has experienced homelessness, you may have lost these documents over time. This resource is designed to help you identify which documents you need and how to access them.

Documents can refer to any official written, printed, or electronic records that provide some sort of information or evidence. This can include information or evidence as to your identity or personal information. Examples of important documents includes:

- Birth Certificate
- Photo ID
- Social Security Card
- Vaccination Records
- Medical Records
- Health Insurance Card
- Car Insurance Card
- Scholarship Letters
- Letters of Recommendation

Birth Certificates

A birth certificate is generally one of the first documents you'll need to gain access to other documents. In most instances a copy can be requested online. The information you'll need to request a copy can vary by state. Begin by searching your state and "vital records birth

certificate” online. This should provide you with a starting point for your state’s processes. Your school may also have a copy of your birth certificate. You can ask a school counselor or secretary for help seeing if you can receive a copy. Keep in mind that there is a difference between a paper copy and an official birth certificate. If you’re able to receive a paper copy from your school, it is still a good idea to get an official copy.

Photo ID & Social Security Card

Two other important documents that can grant you access to things like employment and travel are a Photo ID and a Social Security card. Starting in May 2023, every air traveler age 18 and up will be required to have a REAL ID. A REAL ID is a federally-accepted form of identification. This ID is needed to be able to travel on domestic flights. The way you can tell if your ID is a REAL ID is a star that will be on the front of it.



To begin the process to receive a photo ID, search your state and “obtain a photo ID” online. This should provide you with a link to the DMV website where you can see the processes that are specific to your state.

Social Security Cards are important because they are required for most places of employment and to access some governmental services. While this little piece of paper is small, it is extremely important and one that you do not want to carry on you. If you lose it, you can request a replacement online by visiting this [link](#). Be sure to keep it in a safe place to avoid identity theft.

Health Insurance & Car Insurance Cards

Two documents that you will want to keep with you are your health insurance card, and car insurance card (if you have a car). If your parents have your health insurance card, it may be possible to get a copy without having to ask them for it. You can request a copy from your health insurance provider by calling them and letting them know that you are a dependent on your parents’ plan, and that you would like to request a replacement card via email.

Immunization Records

Immunization records are records of the shots that you have received throughout your life. They can be tricky to track down if you are someone who has moved a lot, especially during early childhood. The best way to get a copy of these records is to ask your school. They should have copies in your student record. These are important in case you plan to live on campus in college as most colleges require certain vaccinations to live in the residence halls. Some jobs also require certain immunizations- most especially those in the medical field. Keep these records somewhere safe, but easy to locate if needed.

Locating important documents can be tricky but you're not alone! If there is a trusted adult in your life like a school counselor, we suggest reaching out for assistance. If not, utilize the websites and resources provided by your state. Keep in mind how important these documents are – and that once you have them, you're good to go! Taking time to gather them and to create a safe place to store them will pay off in the long run by removing countless barriers that you may face.