

Supporting the child care and workforce development needs of TANF families ^[1]

Author: Hahn, Heather; Adams, Gina; Spaulding, Shane & Heller, Caroline

Source: Urban Institute

Format: Report

Publication Date: 6 Apr 2016

AVAILABILITY

Full report PDF ^[2]

Background

Low-income families receiving cash assistance through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) also need assistance with workforce development and child care. Workforce development and child care subsidy systems exist to support low-income families and individuals, but are TANF families well served by these systems? This report outlines the opportunities offered by workforce development and child care subsidy systems but also highlights the challenges of meeting the complex needs of these highly disadvantaged families and identifies implications for federal and state policy improvements.

TANF is a flexible federal block grant to states for the broad purposes of providing assistance to needy families and reducing dependency on the government. While one of its main functions is to provide time-limited cash assistance to families—about 1.6 million very low-income US families with children receive small cash assistance payments averaging \$378 per month—resources are also used to promote job preparation, work, and marriage, as well as other statutorily defined purposes. TANF adults are required to engage in work or work activities, with some exceptions and exemptions, making child care subsidies critical for supporting TANF parents' employment as well as their children's healthy development. Access to child care subsidies and workforce development services is also important in supporting parents and children as they transition off TANF.

TANF time limits and work requirements, and the related demands for employment preparation and child care, situate TANF at the intersection of the workforce development and child care systems; however, the characteristics of TANF families accentuate the weaknesses in each system, making these families the most challenging for each system to serve. Program rules and realities, in combination with family characteristics, make it hard for TANF families to access intensive, high-quality services. TANF is positioned to meet the needs of both parents and children in mutually reinforcing ways, but both generations can succeed only if the supports are high-quality and intensive enough to meet those needs.

Recent reauthorizations and other developments in both the workforce and child care systems have implications for how those systems intersect with TANF, introducing new opportunities and new challenges. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) reauthorized the workforce system in July 2014 (final regulations will be issued in 2016) with increased emphasis on serving disadvantaged adults and promoting career pathways. The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), reauthorized in November 2014 with draft regulations issued in December 2015, emphasizes quality and continuity of care. All three systems have extensive state and local flexibility, which creates great variation across locations but also heightens the potential for states to seize new opportunities and creatively address challenges if doing so is a priority. TANF is also scheduled for reauthorization, creating an opportunity to align federal TANF rules with the realities of workforce development and child care subsidy systems in ways that enhance connections between systems and better meet the complex needs of TANF adults and children.

Region: United States ^[3]

Tags: childcare workforce ^[4]

Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/16/04/supporting-child-care-and-workforce-development-needs-tanf>

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/16/04/supporting-child-care-and-workforce-development-needs-tanf> ^[2]

<https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/79046/2000692-Supporting-the-Child-Care-and-Workforce-Development-Needs-of-TANF-Families.pdf> ^[3]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7865> ^[4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/childcare-workforce>