

Establishing **Evidence** Elevating **Standards** Enriching **Policy**



# **TANF Recipients Living With a Disability: Policy Framework, Prevalence and Service Strategies**

**Presentation to the Disability Policy Research Forum**

**Addressing the Needs of TANF Recipients with Disabilities:  
Opportunities Within and Outside TANF**

**January 15, 2009**

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# TANF Overview

- Created through the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA)
- Block grant to states to assist families with children
- States have flexibility to decide on policy framework, *but*
- States must meet a 50 percent work participation rate for all families or face substantial financial penalties
  - Changes made through Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 heightened state focus on work participation rate

# Prevalence of Disabilities in TANF Recipients

- Estimates are inconsistent, but all suggest a substantial share of TANF recipients is living with a disability
- Disabilities reported most often
  - Mental health conditions
  - Learning disabilities and other cognitive disabilities
  - Physical health problems
- TANF staff report disabilities are often undiagnosed and untreated
- Multiple disabilities or a disability plus other personal or family challenges are the norm

# What TANF Recipients Must Do To Meet the Work Requirement (1)

- **Participate in work activities for specified number of hours**
  - **Single parents: 30 hours without a child under age 6; 20 hours with child under 6**
  - **Two parents: 35 hours if not receiving federal child care assistance; 55 hours if receiving assistance**
- **"Core" activities for first 20 hours**
- **"Non-core" or "core" activities for any hours over 20**
- **Eligible for 80 hours of excused absences per year**

# What TANF Recipients Must Do To Meet the Work Requirement (2)

- **Core activities for the first 20 hours**
  - **Job search and job readiness assistance: 6 weeks/year for up to 4 consecutive weeks; 12 weeks in some states**
  - **Paid employment: unsubsidized employment, subsidized employment (public or private), on-the-job training**
  - **Unpaid employment: work experience, community service, providing child care for an individual who is participating in a community service program**
  - **Vocational educational training: lifetime limit of 12 months; no more than 30 percent of people participating in work activities**

# What TANF Recipients Must Do To Meet the Work Requirement (3)

- **Non-core activities for required hours over 20**
  - Job skills training related directly to employment
  - Education related directly to employment (for those without a high school diploma or GED)
  - Satisfactory attendance at a secondary school (for those who have not completed high school)

# Special Considerations for TANF Recipients Living with a Disability

- Final regulations do not include special considerations for recipients living with a disability
- Advocates and some states argued for a "deeming" provision that would have made fewer hours acceptable for those with a disability
- States can exempt people from work requirements, but they still count in the calculation of the work participation rate
- Treatment (e.g., mental health counseling) can count as job readiness but is subject to job readiness time limit

# **State Approaches to Engaging TANF Recipients with a Disability in Work and Work-Related Activities**

- **In-depth and specialized assessments**
- **Intensive personal and work supports**
- **Specialized work programs (paid and unpaid)**
- **TANF and VR agency partnerships**
- **SSI advocacy initiatives**
- **Solely state-funded programs**

# Challenges

- **Diversity of needs in the TANF population**
- **TANF staff's limited knowledge of disabilities and disability resources**
- **Competing priorities for scarce financial resources (child care, child welfare services, etc.)**
- **Complexity of TANF recipients' lives – disability *plus* other barriers that come with being poor (substandard and unstable housing, limited transportation, etc.) and poorly educated**
- **Limited flexibility in work requirements**
- **High cost of programs and limited evidence of success**