

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



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

**Presentation to the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities**

**Serving Parents and Children with Disabilities in the TANF Program**

**July 16, 2009**

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# Brief Overview of TANF

- Created through the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA)
- Block grant to states to provide assistance to low-income families with children
- States have considerable flexibility to decide policy framework, *but*
- States must:
  - Meet a 50 percent work participation rate for all families or face substantial financial penalties
  - Limit receipt of benefits to 60 months in a lifetime (with some allowance for extensions)
  - Impose a pro rata reduction in benefits for noncompliance with work requirements

# Prevalence and Consequences of Disabilities Among TANF Recipients

- Estimates across studies are inconsistent, but all suggest substantial portion of TANF recipients are living with a disability
- Disabilities reported most often
  - Mental Health Conditions (21 to 41 percent)
  - Learning Disabilities (8 to 18 percent)
  - Physical Health Problems (16 to 26 percent)
- Staff report disabilities are often undiagnosed and untreated
- Multiple disabilities or a disability combined with other personal or family challenges are the norm
- Studies show that families who are sanctioned have higher rates of disability and face greater personal and family challenges; in some states, many families reaching time limits face serious disabilities

# 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 10 excused absences per year**

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

- **Must participate in "core" activities for first 20 hours**
  - Job search and job readiness assistance (6 weeks per year, no more than 4 consecutive weeks; 12 weeks in some states)
  - Paid employment: unsubsidized, subsidized private or public sector, on-the-job training, child care assistance to an individual in a community service program
  - Unpaid employment: work experience, community service
  - Vocational educational training (up to 12 months for no more than 20 percent of those participating in work activities)

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

- **Option to participate in "non-core" activities for any required hours over 20**
  - Job skills training directly related to employment
  - Education directly related to employment (in the case of someone who does not have a high school diploma or GED)
  - Satisfactory school 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 any special consideration for individuals living with a disability
- Advocates argued for adding a "deeming" provision that would have permitted individuals living with a disability to participate for fewer hours
- States can exempt individuals from work requirements, but they still count in the denominator of the work participation rate
- Treatment activities such as mental health counseling can count as job readiness but are subject to the job readiness time limitations

# State Approaches

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

# Challenges

- **Diversity of needs within the TANF population**
- **Limited knowledge about disabilities and disability resources among TANF staff**
- **Competing priorities for limited financial resources (e.g., child care for working families, child welfare services)**
- **Complexity of TANF recipients' lives – disability plus multiple other barriers that come with being poor (e.g., substandard and unstable housing, limited transportation, etc.)**
- **Limited flexibility with work requirements**
- **High cost and limited evidence of success**