

CRITICAL ACTIONS ON TANF:

Support families with the greatest needs by removing barriers to TANF

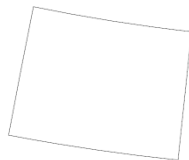
Many families in need with children do not receive any cash assistance, even though they do not have adequate income from work or other sources to pay for housing and other basic living expenses. Since welfare reform, the ratio of the number of families on TANF to the number of families with children in poverty (also known as the TANF-to-poverty ratio) has declined greatly.

How do TANF-to-poverty ratios differ by state?

Our research found a wide range of TANF-to-poverty ratios throughout the United States. For example, in 2011-2012:



California provided TANF cash assistance to roughly **60 of out every 100 families** living in poverty ...



... while Wyoming provided cash assistance to only about **4 of out every 100 families** living in poverty

NATIONAL AVERAGES

1996

68 families on TANF for every 100 families living in poverty



2012

25 families on TANF for every 100 families living in poverty

TANF participation is down. Why?

TANF participation rates among eligible families have also been far lower than that of previous 20 years. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 32 percent of families who were eligible for TANF assistance actually received benefits in an average month in 2009. This is substantially less than the 82% participation rate of eligible families in 2003.

Eligible families can be denied benefits because of time limits or sanctions, or they may be discouraged from applying because of policies or practices implemented by states and local government agencies. For example, in some states, vulnerable families face significant barriers to employment and so may not meet the requirements of welfare-to-work programs.

What can we do?

States have a lot of flexibility in the design and implementation of their TANF programs. To assist the most vulnerable families, we must make changes at the state level to address and remove these barriers to cash assistance.

For more information about TANF's declining role for families in need, visit:

◇ [TANF Weakening as a Safety Net for Poor Families](#)

For more information about the needs of families that are disconnected from both work and TANF assistance, and potential policy solutions, visit:

◇ [Disconnected Families and TANF](#)