

Welfare Rules Databook: State TANF Policies as of July 2021

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ABOUT THE WELFARE RULES DATABASE

The Welfare Rules Database is maintained by the Urban Institute under funding from the Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation. This project produces a comprehensive, up-to-date database of TANF policies for the 50 states and the District of Columbia. The database contains hundreds of variables and is designed to capture TANF policies across time. The data are made available for public use; for more information visit <https://wrd.urban.org>.

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Introduction and Background

The purpose of this publication—the Welfare Rules Database’s annual Databook—is to provide researchers and policymakers with easy access to detailed information on how states provide cash assistance under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program.¹ The dozens of tables in this report collectively describe how states determine eligibility for TANF benefits, how they compute program benefits for eligible families, and the work requirements and time limits that they impose. In Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2021, 804,000 families received cash aid from TANF in the average month.²

TANF cash assistance policies vary widely across states due to the nature of the TANF program and funding. TANF is a block grant, providing federal money that states combine with their own funding (there is a “maintenance of effort” or MOE requirement) to meet the goals of the program.³ The four purposes of the program are: to “(1) provide assistance to needy families so that children can be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives; (2) end the dependence of needy parents by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage; (3) prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies; and (4) encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.”⁴ Some requirements are established at the federal level. However, states are allowed to determine how much of their block grant funds to spend on cash assistance compared with other services, and to establish most of the specific policies used in providing those benefits. State policies—ranging from initial eligibility determination to benefit computation to ongoing eligibility requirements—can vary greatly. For

¹ Throughout the Databook, the term “states” refers to the 50 states and the District of Columbia. As of this publication, the Welfare Rules Database does not track information on the TANF programs within Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands or federally recognized tribes administering their own TANF programs within a state. As of 2022, the Welfare Rules Database captures information on the TANF programs within Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. Policy information for these territories will be included in next year’s Databook report.

² The policies shown in this Databook are primarily for July 1, 2021, and fall within FFY 2021, which covers the period of October 2020 through September 2021. For information about the number of families receiving TANF in FFY 2021, as well as other caseload data, see the Office of Family Assistance website (accessed July 28, 2022): <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ofa/data/tanf-caseload-data-2021>. The figure of 804,000 families cited here does not include those who receive benefits paid through separate state programs funded with maintenance-of-effort dollars (SSP-MOE) or solely-state-funded (SSF) programs.

³ States are required to maintain specified levels of funding, based in part on historical spending levels in each state. The requirement for state expenditures is referred to as the maintenance of effort (MOE) requirement; additional detail about MOE requirements can be found on the Office of Family Assistance website: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/resource/policy/pi-ofa/1996/pi9602>.

⁴ Additional detail about the TANF program can be found on the Office of Family Assistance website: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/programs/tanf/about>.

example, a family eligible for several hundred dollars of cash aid each month in one state may be eligible for much less in another state and completely ineligible in a third state. Thus, while TANF is a single program from the perspective of federal law, in practice the program operates differently in every state.

This publication presents the key policies that each state used to determine cash aid under the TANF program as of July 1, 2021. The Databook also provides longitudinal tables describing various state policies for selected years between 1996 (the year the program was created) and 2021, as well as a list of state policy changes since the 2020 Databook tables. In addition to updating information on all of the TANF policies covered in prior Databooks, this year's Databook also provides information on select ongoing policies that were instituted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. All the tables in this publication are based on the information in the Welfare Rules Database (WRD), a publicly available, online database funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and developed and maintained by the Urban Institute. The Databook summarizes the more detailed information in the WRD. Users interested in more information than is provided in this Databook are encouraged to use the full database, available at <https://wrd.urban.org>. This site includes a point-and-click interface and extensive documentation.

The focus of this publication, and the underlying database, is on the cash aid that is funded wholly or partly by federal TANF dollars. During FFY 2020 (the most recent year for which financial data are available), 22.3 percent of combined federal TANF funds and state maintenance-of-effort (MOE) funds were used on "basic assistance" (cash aid). Other TANF/MOE funds were spent on work, education, and training activities; child care; refundable tax credits; child welfare services; pre-kindergarten/Head Start; out-of-wedlock pregnancy prevention; program management; and other activities.⁵ The WRD covers only the policies for TANF cash aid and related policies such as work requirements for aid recipients; it does not cover policies for other programs that may be provided through TANF/MOE funds.

The tables in this Databook are presented in five groups:

1. Initial eligibility in 2021
2. Benefits in 2021
3. Activity Requirements in 2021
4. Ongoing eligibility and transitional benefits in 2021

⁵ See table A.1 "Federal TANF and State MOE Expenditures Summary by ACF-196 Spending Category, FY 2020" on the ACF website (accessed July 28, 2022), <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ofa/data/tanf-financial-data-fy-2020>.

5. Policies across time, 1996–2021

Each chapter begins with an overview of the policies, followed by information relating to specific tables.

The following sections first discuss the background and structure of the WRD, and then describe the contents and structure of the tables in this report.

The Welfare Rules Database

The Welfare Rules Database is a comprehensive resource for comparing cash assistance programs across all 50 states and the District of Columbia, researching changes across time in cash assistance rules within a single state, or determining the rules governing cash assistance in one state at a point in time. The WRD is longitudinal and currently provides information on state Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and TANF policies from 1996 through 2021. The WRD was initially developed in the mid-1990s to meet the needs of researchers under the Urban Institute’s Assessing the New Federalism project and was made publicly available in August 1999. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (HHS/ACF), Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) currently funds the maintenance and development of the WRD.

The Development of the WRD

The WRD was developed in response to the increasing difficulty since the early 1990s of tracking how states operate their cash assistance programs for needy families. Under AFDC, the structure of eligibility and benefit computation was mostly determined at the federal level. States were allowed to set certain policies—such as the standards used to establish eligibility and benefits, and the rules for two-parent families—but those choices were detailed in the State Plans submitted to HHS/ACF and in annual reports issued by HHS/ACF summarizing the State Plans. In the early to mid-1990s, as more states received waivers to experiment with welfare rules, it became increasingly difficult to research states’ policies. The waiver terms and conditions agreed to by the states and the federal government often did not provide full implementation details, and the implementation schedules often changed after the agreement was reached. The August 1996 passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), replacing AFDC with the TANF block grant, further increased both the degree of variation across state programs and the difficulty of tracking program rules. (The

Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, which reauthorized the TANF program in 2006, modified work participation requirements and further altered state TANF policies.)

Currently, each state is required to submit a TANF State Plan to the federal government every two to three years. TANF State Plans provide an overview of states' choices under the block grant; however, the plans' level of detail varies considerably across states, and alone, the plans generally offer insufficient information to completely understand the details of eligibility, benefit computation, and client requirements. Furthermore, states are required to notify the federal government if any of their choices change after the plan is submitted.

The WRD provides detailed information about the extensive variation in states' policies, going beyond the level of detail in most states' official State Plans and capturing changes in policies that occur between the submissions of those plans. The WRD focuses on cash assistance policies and some closely tied transitional benefits; it does not attempt to capture other uses of TANF/MOE funds (such as state earned income tax credits and child care programs).

Although in general the Welfare Rules Database and Databook can be thought of as tracking TANF policies, the state cash assistance programs tracked by the WRD are not always exclusively funded with TANF dollars. Some states' cash assistance policies incorporate a separate state program (SSP), and other states use a solely state funded (SSF) program.⁶ States may choose to use different types of funding for families in different situations, although the materials used by caseworkers—which are generally the source materials for this project—do not typically indicate what funding is used in what circumstance. Thus, if a state funds benefits to two-parent units under an SSF program, or funds benefits to certain immigrant families under SSP funding, those benefits policies are included in the WRD to the extent they are described in the TANF caseworker materials, but the WRD does not separately identify which policies use SSP or SSF funds. This is particularly relevant for readers examining both the eligibility and benefit policies in the Databook and information on TANF spending or caseloads. The federal government's administrative data sources *do* capture information on SSP programs (it is usually shown separately from information on TANF programs); but information on SSF programs is not collected or disseminated by the federal government.

⁶ See Falk, Gene. "The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Block Grant: A Primer on TANF Financing and Federal Requirements." Congressional Research Service. December 14, 2017. <https://www.fas.org/spp/crs/misc/RL32748.pdf> (PDF).

Sources of Information for the WRD, and Verification of the Data

The primary sources of information for the WRD (and thus for the tables in the Databook) are the caseworker manuals and regulations used in each state.⁷ The Urban Institute obtains the manuals or regulations for each state, as well as the ongoing updates to those manuals or regulations. These documents provide a consistent source of detailed information on policy changes and implementation dates across states and time.

After reviewing and coding the documents describing 2021 procedures, project staff conducted a verification process with the states. The draft 2021 tables were submitted to program administrators who were asked to identify incorrect information and to indicate where project staff could locate missing information not initially identified in the policy materials used for coding.⁸ The verification process occurred between April and July 2022.

Table 1 shows the extent to which each state’s data were reviewed. In most states (49 out of 51), a state contact reviewed the materials and all issues that were raised were fully resolved (shown as “fully verified” in the table below). In two states, we were able to verify some of the information in the tables but had outstanding questions after the verification period (shown as “partially verified”).

A similar verification process has been performed in each year since the first WRD Databook, which described policy variations in 1999. Portions of the 1996–98 data in the WRD have been verified against selected secondary sources but have not been fully reviewed by state TANF staff.

Table 1. Verification Status of the Information in the Welfare Rules Database Project’s Databook for July 1, 2021

State	Status of Verification ¹
Alabama	Fully verified
Alaska	Partially verified
Arizona	Fully verified
Arkansas	Fully verified
California	Fully verified
Colorado	Fully verified

⁷ Owing to the difficulty of obtaining caseworker manuals during the transition from AFDC to TANF, the 1996 data in the WRD are coded using several different sources, including (a) caseworker manuals, when available; (b) AFDC State Plans submitted by states to the federal government; (c) waiver terms and conditions; and (d) telephone calls to states to clarify the implementation dates of waivers.

⁸ In most cases, adjustments to initial coding were made after documentation was obtained in the form of an updated policy or supplemental policy document. In the few cases where a particular policy was not documented in any written form, initial coding was adjusted based on discussion with the state contact.

State	Status of Verification ¹
Connecticut	Fully verified
Delaware	Partially verified
DC	Fully verified
Florida	Fully verified
Georgia	Fully verified
Hawaii	Fully verified
Idaho	Fully verified
Illinois	Fully verified
Indiana	Fully verified
Iowa	Fully verified
Kansas	Fully verified
Kentucky	Fully verified
Louisiana	Fully verified
Maine	Fully verified
Maryland	Fully verified
Massachusetts	Fully verified
Michigan	Fully verified
Minnesota	Fully verified
Mississippi	Fully verified
Missouri	Fully verified
Montana	Fully verified
Nebraska	Fully verified
Nevada	Fully verified
New Hampshire	Fully verified
New Jersey	Fully verified
New Mexico	Fully verified
New York	Fully verified
North Carolina	Fully verified
North Dakota	Fully verified
Ohio	Fully verified
Oklahoma	Fully verified
Oregon	Fully verified
Pennsylvania	Fully verified
Rhode Island	Fully verified
South Carolina	Fully verified
South Dakota	Fully verified
Tennessee	Fully verified
Texas	Fully verified
Utah	Fully verified
Vermont	Fully verified
Virginia	Fully verified
Washington	Fully verified
West Virginia	Fully verified

State	Status of Verification ¹
Wisconsin	Fully verified
Wyoming	Fully verified

¹ “Fully verified” (49 states) means the state reviewed the draft tables, and all issues that were raised were fully resolved. “Partially verified” (two states) means we were able to verify some of the information in the tables but had outstanding questions left after the verification period.

Contents of the WRD

The WRD provides in-depth information on a wide range of policy topics. These topics are currently organized into 32 categories that together describe the most significant dimensions of state policies regarding cash assistance to needy families. It is useful to consider the rules in the sequence in which individuals seeking and receiving assistance will likely encounter them. The 32 categories are listed below, organized into five sections, beginning with initial eligibility. (The organization of the tables in this report is similar to the organization of the database, but with slightly different categorizations.)

- I. Initial Eligibility
 - A. Does the state try to divert some families from becoming recipients?
 - i. Diversion
 - B. How does family composition or individual status affect eligibility?
 - i. Eligibility by Number/Type of Parents
 - ii. Eligibility of Units Headed by a Minor Parent
 - iii. Eligibility of Pregnant Women
 - iv. Employment-Related Eligibility of Two-Parent Families
 - v. Eligibility of Individual Family Members
 - vi. Inclusion of Noncitizens in the Unit
 - vii. Treatment of Additional Adults in the Household⁹
 - viii. Other Nonparent Caretaker Policies
 - C. What level of assets can a family have and still be eligible?
 - i. Asset Test
 - D. How is income counted in determining eligibility?
 - i. Countable Income¹⁰

⁹ Treatment of Additional Adults in the Household includes policies related to both financial and nonfinancial eligibility, as well as benefit computation. Therefore, the category could be included under sections I.A, I.D, and II.A.

¹⁰ The treatment of unemployment income is included in appendix 2.

- ii. Income and Assets of Children
 - iii. In-Kind Income
 - iv. Deemed Income
 - v. Child Support
 - vi. Earned Income Disregards
 - E. How much income can a family have and still be eligible?
 - i. Income Eligibility Tests
 - ii. Dollar Amounts¹¹
- II. Benefits
 - A. If a family passes all eligibility tests, what is received?
 - i. Benefit Computation¹²
 - ii. Benefit Issuance
- III. Activity Requirements
 - A. Once determined eligible, what must a recipient family do to maintain benefits?
 - i. Contracts and Agreements
 - ii. School Policies for Dependent Children
 - iii. Immunization and Health Screening Requirements
 - iv. Child Support Sanctions¹³
 - B. What work activities are required?
 - i. Activities Exemptions
 - ii. Activities Requirements
 - iii. Activities Sanctions
 - iv. Minor Parent Activities Requirements and Bonuses
 - v. Components
- IV. Ongoing Eligibility and Transitional Benefits¹⁴
 - A. What eligibility tests must recipient families pass for continuing eligibility?
 - B. Are children eligible if born while the family receives benefits?

¹¹ Information in the Dollar Amounts category is also relevant to other categories, including Deemed Income, Income Eligibility Tests, and Benefit Computation.

¹² Most states base benefits on the net income of the recipient. Net income is calculated by determining the gross income of a recipient and subtracting any earned income disregards the state may allow. Therefore, the Earned Income Disregard category is also relevant for section II.A. Information on special benefit computation policies during the COVID-19 pandemic is included in appendix 3.

¹³ The child support requirements for which a recipient may be sanctioned are included in the Child Support category listed under section I.D.

¹⁴ The categories under sections I.B–I.E and II.A may also be relevant to ongoing eligibility. In most states, recipients are also required to pass nonfinancial and financial tests to continue receiving benefits. These tests may differ for initial and ongoing eligibility.

- i. Family Cap
- C. How long can a family receive benefits?
 - i. Time Limits
- D. What happens after cash assistance ends?
 - i. Transitional Benefits

General Points about the WRD

In using the Databook and full database, it is helpful to keep in mind the following aspects of the WRD.

- The WRD contains information on the cash assistance rules in effect in each state across time. It does not include information on proposed legislation or on policies that have been agreed-upon but not yet implemented.
- The WRD focuses on the rules applied in determining families' eligibility, benefits, and requirements. The database does not contain information regarding caseloads, budgets, outcomes, or administrative practices.
- The database contains at least one "record" (a set of coded variables) for each state, time period, and category of rules.
- The database contains additional records when the state changes a policy or when the state's policy varies by geographic regions of the state, demographic characteristics of the assistance units, or "component" groups across the state. (The term "component" is used when the state's caseload is divided into mutually exclusive groups based on multiple characteristics. Appendix 1 provides additional information about components.)
- The WRD indicates when states vary policies either by sub-state regions or by county. When eligibility or benefit levels vary by sub-state regions, those amounts are generally captured for all regions. However, when policies vary at the county level, data are recorded only for the largest county in the state.¹⁵

¹⁵ The states that allow counties to vary policies (that are included in this report) are California and Colorado. The largest counties in each state are Los Angeles County in California and Denver County in Colorado. The WRD provides additional information on states that allow counties to vary other policies (that are not included in this report).

- The database contains for every time period, state, and category of rules one record designated the “majority rule” record. This record represents the policy that affected the majority of the caseload during the time period.

It is important to note that neither the WRD nor the Databook addresses the issue of how rules may be implemented in practice. As noted above, the WRD is based on caseworker manuals and regulations, which typically do not include information on the likelihood of various outcomes. For instance, if a particular type of recipient may be assigned to one of several work activities, the manuals do not typically address which activity is most likely to be assigned. Thus, for certain policies, two states may look similar in the database and yet in practice be different, and other states’ policies may look different and yet be similar in practice.

Policies in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

In 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic continued to impact many low-income families, and also created challenges for the operation of benefit programs. While there were no changes to federal TANF rules during 2020 or 2021, some states continued to use the program’s existing flexibility to modify their policies to better support families in 2021.¹⁶ The Databook captures policies that may have significantly impacted participants’ eligibility and benefits during the pandemic, including changes to job search and activity requirements, asset limits, time limits, and the treatment of certain income for eligibility and benefit computation.¹⁷

The tables in this report focus on the standard policies in each state as of July 1, 2021. If a state had temporary policies in place at some point during the year in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we note these changes throughout the tables and report. In cases where a significant number of states made policy changes, we added additional columns to the tables to describe the COVID-19 policies.¹⁸ This report also includes a table (appendix 2) that describes how states treated unemployment benefits. This year, the report also captures states’ special benefit computation policies developed in response to the pandemic (appendix 3). However,

¹⁶ For more information on federal TANF policy during the COVID-19 pandemic, see “Questions and answers about TANF and the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic,” March 24, 2020, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ofa/policy-guidance/tanf-acf-pi-2020-01-questions-and-answers-about-tanf-and-coronavirus-disease>.

¹⁷ For more information about states’ policies in response to the pandemic, see Shantz, Katie, Sarah Knowles, Ilham Dehry, and Linda Giannarelli (2023). State TANF Policies During the COVID-19 Pandemic. OPRE Report 2023-003, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services., and the full underlying database available at <https://wrd.urban.org>.

¹⁸ See tables III.B.1, III.B.2, III.B.3, III.B.4, IV.C.1, appendix 2, and appendix 3.

the policies described in this report are not an exhaustive list of states' COVID-19 changes. The Welfare Rules Database provides additional information on pandemic policies not captured in the Databook.

The Databook

The descriptions of the policies in this Databook are focused on what is relevant to the individuals and families to whom the policies apply. The report describes the rules that affect individuals and families in each state, but it generally does not specify whether those policies are imposed as a result of federal or state requirements. Thus, this report does not exhaustively describe federal requirements or prohibitions. Federal TANF policies are fully described in resources available from the Administration for Children and Families.¹⁹

The tables included in the Databook are designed to provide readers with easy access to key TANF policies across states as of July 1, 2021. The first four chapters of the Databook provide information across four broad policy areas: initial eligibility, benefits, requirements, and ongoing eligibility and transitional benefits. The Databook describes the standard policies as of July 1, 2021 and, when a state's policies varied in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the policy is included if it occurred at any point during 2021. The last chapter provides longitudinal tables for selected policies with data from 1996 through 2021. In addition, appendix 2 provides information on the treatment of unemployment income provided through federal pandemic programs. Appendix 3 captures information on states' special benefit computation policies during the pandemic, and appendix 4 lists the changes in state policies between the 2020 and 2021 tables.

The data for the tables are extracted from the WRD and represent only a portion of the information in the database. Even for the policy areas addressed in this report, further details are available online in the WRD. In general, the Databook tables focus on the "majority rule" for an aspect of policy, while the full online database allows exploration of policy variations across months of the year and different subsets of the caseload.²⁰

Each table follows the same general structure. Typically, the body of each table includes one row per state, which represents the policies in place as of July 1, 2021. If different policies were

¹⁹ For an index of TANF-related laws and regulations compiled by the Administration for Children and Families, Office of Financial Assistance, see the Office of Family Assistance website: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/programs/tanf/laws-regulations>.

²⁰ In the tables regarding eligibility and benefits, states with sub-state variation in the dollar amounts used for eligibility or benefit standards are denoted.

used for different types of families, the tables show the policies for the predominant type of family receiving TANF in the state—generally, single-parent units with children. If a state’s policies in a category vary by geographic area, the policies for the largest area in the state are shown. In some cases, tables include additional columns to describe the COVID-19 policies at any point during 2021.

Some tables include more information than just the rules for the majority of the caseload. In some cases, additional information is included in an additional row for the state; in other cases, additional information is included in footnotes.

- Additional data as a second row: A second row is added to the body of the table if a state divides its entire caseload into mutually exclusive groups that are treated differently across more than one policy. These groups—called “components” in the WRD—are usually defined by more than one characteristic, such as units either meeting any one of a number of work-exemption criteria or not meeting any of those criteria. Descriptions of states’ components are located in appendix 1.
- Additional data as a footnote: Several types of variations may appear as footnotes in the tables. These include variation by type of assistance unit (two-parent units versus one-parent units, or applicants versus recipients) or geographic areas. These types of policies are footnoted in some, but not all, tables. The tables do not capture all the variation in policies across regions and types of units, but the full database contains this information. In addition, states with county variations in policy are footnoted. The footnote indicates the name of the county (the largest in population in the state) to which the policy applies.

Each 2021 table is numbered by chapter and section. For example, table III.A.1 refers to the first table in chapter III, section A. The longitudinal tables are numbered L1 through L10. With the exception of the additions to capture COVID-19 policy changes, the tables in this report and their numbering are the same as in the Databook describing the July 2020 policies.

Initial Eligibility

The tables in this chapter of the Databook describe key aspects of the rules imposed on families and individuals to determine initial eligibility for TANF cash assistance as of July 1, 2021. Rules for *initial* eligibility apply to individuals who are applying for the first time or who are reapplying for assistance after a period of not receiving assistance. To be eligible, an applicant family must pass both nonfinancial tests, based on the characteristics of the family and its members, and financial tests, based on the income and asset holdings available to the family. This chapter is divided into five sections covering initial eligibility rules related to diversion, family composition, assets, income definitions, and income tests.

A. Does the state try to divert some families from becoming recipients?

Many states have policies that attempt to divert from assistance applicants who may be able to achieve economic stability with some type of government assistance other than regular monthly cash aid. These types of policies were developed during the 1990s, first under state waivers and then after the passage of PRWORA. Some states use a formal diversion program (described below), while others require job search at application, and some states use both approaches.

Formal Diversion Payments (Table I.A.1)

Under formal diversion programs, families may choose to receive a lump-sum cash payment to address immediate needs instead of receiving a monthly TANF benefit. Generally, states provide benefits to families to alleviate short-term problems that interfere with either keeping or finding employment. Many states require recipients of diversion assistance to be currently employed or seeking employment. Families that accept diversion payments typically are barred from applying for monthly TANF benefits for some period, but the period of ineligibility may be reduced by approaches such as deducting a portion of the diversion payment from future TANF benefits. Most diversion programs are voluntary; however, states may require certain families to enroll in a diversion program and participate in job search or job-related activities before applying for monthly TANF benefits.

For the purposes of the WRD, a formal diversion program is defined as diverting eligible applicants or recipients from ongoing TANF receipt by providing a lump-sum cash payment

directly to the family or to a vendor for expenses incurred by the family. Other strategies states may use to divert applicants from ongoing receipt of cash benefits (such as requiring an applicant to participate in job search or resource and referral services) are not identified as formal diversion programs in the WRD.

The maximum diversion payment is either a flat payment, regardless of the family's size and the state's maximum benefit (represented in table I.A.1 by a dollar amount), or a multiple of the maximum benefit the family would have received in monthly TANF benefits (represented in the table by a number of months of benefits). If the state provides diversion payments based on a multiple of the maximum monthly benefit, the amount will vary by the family size and the level of the state's maximum benefits.

Table I.A.1 describes whether a state provides a diversion payment, the maximum payment, the form of the payment, how often a recipient may receive the maximum payment, the period of TANF ineligibility after receiving a diversion payment, and whether the months that a family is diverted count toward the state's time limit. Highlights for 2021 include:

- Thirty-three states have formal diversion programs.
- Of the states with formal diversion programs, nine states provide families the same diversion payment regardless of the family's size. These payments range from \$1,000 in Florida, Kansas, and Texas to \$2,500 in Colorado. An additional two states provide families a fixed amount that depends on the family's size. For a family of three, these payments range from \$750 in New Jersey to \$1,500 in New Mexico.
- Seventeen states pay diverted families an amount equal to a multiple of the maximum monthly benefit for the family's size; the multiple ranges from 1 to 12, but is most commonly 3 times the maximum benefit. Additionally, California pays the greater of \$2,000 or three times the maximum aid payment for the family size, and Virginia pays the lesser of \$1,500 or four times the maximum benefit for the family size.
- Among the states with diversion programs, six count the payments toward the TANF time limit in some or all cases.

Families applying for a diversion payment must still be eligible for assistance using the state's eligibility rules (see sections I.B–I.E). The rules generally are the same for families that apply for diversion and those that apply for monthly assistance.

Related tables: For information on diversion programs for selected years between 1996 and 2021, see table L1.

Mandatory Job Search at Application (Table I.A.2)

In states requiring job search at application, applicants must look for jobs either before or while their applications are processed. To be eligible for aid, applicants must prove they have searched for jobs at a set number of businesses or participated in the state's job-related programs. The goal of these requirements is for applicants to find jobs and no longer need assistance, or at least be employed by the time they begin receiving assistance. States may exempt some applicants from searching for a job at the time of application. Exempt groups often include applicants who are ill or incapacitated, caring for someone who is ill or incapacitated, over a certain age, or pregnant.

Table I.A.2 indicates which states require applicants to search for a job at application as a condition of eligibility, what kinds of activities are required, who is exempt from the activities, and what happens to individuals who do not comply with the requirement. An additional column captures suspensions of job search requirements implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic that were in place at some point in 2021.²¹ Findings for 2021 include:

- Seventeen states require the applicant to seek employment either before or while the application is processed.
- Of the states that require job search, 15 may deny the application if the individual fails to meet the job search requirements.

B. How does family composition or individual status affect eligibility?

To be eligible for either a diversion payment or monthly benefits, a family must pass several nonfinancial tests based on the demographic characteristics of the overall family or individuals within the family. Families generally include at least one eligible child, but states may also allow TANF eligibility for pregnant women with no other children. States vary in whether they allow TANF for children living with caretakers who are not relatives; further, some states do not offer TANF to families that include two parents who do not have disabilities.

²¹ For more information about states' policies in response to the pandemic, see Shantz, Katie, Sarah Knowles, Ilham Dehry, and Linda Giannarelli (2023). *State TANF Policies During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. OPRE Report 2023-003, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services., and the full underlying database.

When a family passes a state’s initial tests, the next step in the eligibility process is to determine what many states refer to as the “assistance unit”—the group of people whose needs are considered in establishing the benefit. The definition of the assistance unit can have substantial implications for a unit’s eligibility. In states that increase eligibility limits with unit size, a larger assistance unit might increase the family’s chance of eligibility. In some cases, however, including additional individuals in the unit and including their income in the unit’s countable income might lower the chance of eligibility. In most states, the size of the assistance unit also determines the maximum benefit that will be paid.

In general terms, the assistance unit consists of the dependent children and their parents—including any parents in the household, even if those parents are not married. However, states vary in the treatment of stepparents, noncitizen parents, a parent’s nonparent partner, and parents and children who receive benefits from the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program. When the only adults in the family are prohibited from being in the assistance unit (due to immigrant status, receipt of SSI, certain time limits or sanctions, or nonparent caretaker status in some states and circumstances), or when they choose not to be in the unit (nonparent caretakers in other states and circumstances), a “child-only” assistance unit is formed.²²

Eligibility of Pregnant Women with No Other Children (Table I.B.1)

At the most basic level, to be eligible for TANF, the family must include a child or, in some states, a pregnant woman. Table I.B.1 indicates whether units with pregnant women who have no other children are eligible to receive TANF cash assistance. The table also indicates whether the father and unborn child are also eligible for benefits—usually meaning they are included in the assistance unit. For states that provide TANF benefits to pregnant recipients with no other children, the table also provides the month of pregnancy in which benefits may begin. Key findings for 2021 include:

- In cases when an applicant is pregnant but has no other children, 32 states consider the applicant potentially eligible for benefits for at least a portion of the pregnancy.
- Among the states that allow eligibility for a pregnant person with no other children, 10 states also consider the father eligible, and one state counts the unborn child in the size of the assistance unit.

²² In some states, reaching a time limit results in removing the needs of the adult from the assistance unit.

Eligibility Rules for Two-Parent Applicant Units In Which Neither Parent Has a Disability (Table I.B.2)

Some states have different eligibility rules for families that include two parents—either married or unmarried—compared with families with one parent or no parents. If the family includes two parents, and neither parent has a disability, the family is ineligible for TANF in some states. In other states, a family with two parents who do not have disabilities must pass additional eligibility tests (not imposed on other families) based on the parents’ current or prior labor force status.²³

The additional requirements imposed on two-parent families may include an “hours test,” a work history test, or a waiting period. Under an hours test, the unit is ineligible if the parent who is the principal wage earner is working more than a specified number of hours per month.²⁴ States may apply this rule when determining the initial or continuing eligibility of two-parent families. Under a work history test, the eligibility of two-parent units is restricted to those in which the principal wage earner worked during a certain number of calendar quarters over a specified number of years, or in which the principal wage earner satisfies other criteria related to labor force attachment.²⁵ Waiting periods restrict the eligibility of two-parent families until a certain number of days or weeks after the family would otherwise have been eligible.²⁶ For example, under a 30-day waiting period, if the principal wage earner becomes unemployed and the family would not have been eligible when the parent was working, the family would not become eligible to apply for assistance until one month after the parent loses employment.

²³ In some states, benefits are provided to two-parent units under solely state-funded or separate state programs (SSFs or SSPs) funded by state monies rather than the TANF block grant. Table I.B.2 includes those states as providing benefits to two-parent families regardless of the funding source as long as these provisions are specified in each state’s TANF policy manual.

²⁴ Under AFDC, the principal earner could be working no more than 100 hours per month in order for the family to be potentially eligible for aid.

²⁵ Under AFDC, the principal earner was required to have worked during at least six calendar quarters within a 13-calendar-quarter period that ended within one year of applying for assistance. Generally, work history could also be established if one of the following applied: (1) the applicant received unemployment compensation (UC) benefits within 12 months of the date of application, or (2) the applicant would have been eligible for UC benefits within the previous 12 months but did not apply or the applicant’s employment was not covered by UC laws.

²⁶ Under AFDC, waiting periods were imposed only on two-parent units. However, under TANF, some states have begun to apply waiting periods to all types of units. The WRD does not currently capture waiting periods that apply to all units.

Table I.B.2 presents the eligibility rules for families with two parents without disabilities at application. Highlights for 2021 include:

- Three states (Louisiana, New Hampshire, and North Dakota) do not allow two-parent families in which neither parent has a disability to receive TANF.
- In six states, two-parent families are potentially eligible, but face additional tests not imposed on single-parent families (i.e., a work hours test, work history test, or application waiting period).

Related tables: For information about the hours test for two-parent families in which neither parent has a disability and the families are already receiving benefits (as compared to those who are applying for benefits), see table IV.A.1. Table L2 provides information on the rules for two-parent units in selected years from 1996 through 2021.

Special Rules Imposed on Minor Parent Eligibility (Table I.B.3)

Parents who are teenagers may or may not be eligible to receive a benefit on their own, and in most cases, they are eligible only if they are living with their parents or in another state-approved setting.²⁷ Table I.B.3 describes special eligibility rules for families in which the parent is a minor (usually defined as under age 18 and never married). The first column indicates whether minor parents can ever head a TANF unit and receive the benefit in their own name. The second column indicates whether the state requires the minor parent to live with a parent or in another state-approved setting (referred to in the table as a living arrangement restriction). Findings from the 2021 data include:

- Forty-one states allow minor parents to apply for TANF as the head of a unit.
- Two states (Hawaii and Nebraska) do not require the minor parent to live with a guardian or in an approved setting.²⁸

Related table: Table I.D.1 provides information on the treatment of the grandparents' income in cases when minor parents are living with one or both of their parents and also heading their own assistance units.

²⁷ In general, states may not provide federally-funded assistance to minor parents who are not living in an adult-supervised setting. However, there are some exceptions to this requirement.

²⁸ Benefits for assistance units that do not qualify for federal funding are provided with state funding.

Inclusion of Stepparents in the Assistance Unit (Table I.B.4)

State rules vary for whether a stepparent (i.e., a person who has married the child's biological/adoptive parent, but who has not legally adopted the child) is included in the assistance unit. Stepparents may be required to be part of the unit, may be prohibited from being part of the unit, or may be included in the unit at the option of the family. Table I.B.4 focuses on rules for stepparents who have no child in common with their spouses, have no biological children of their own in the assistance unit, are living in the home, and are not incapacitated. (State rules for stepparents not meeting these criteria may vary and are addressed in further detail in the WRD.) Policy highlights from 2021 include:

- Twenty-two states require that stepparents be included in the assistance unit.
- Eleven states allow the unit head to choose whether to include the stepparent.
- Eighteen states prohibit the stepparent from being included in the assistance unit.

Related table: Information about the treatment of income from a stepparent who is *not* included in the assistance unit can be found in table I.D.2.

Eligibility of Noncitizens (Tables I.B.5, I.B.6, and I.B.7)

If a family is potentially eligible for aid, but one or more members of the family are not citizens, complex rules govern whether the noncitizens can be included in an assistance unit. The eligibility of noncitizens depends on several factors, including when they arrived in the United States, how long they have resided here, the specific status that allows them to be in the United States (e.g., lawful permanent resident, refugee, etc.), and the extent to which they have worked since arriving. The federal rules require that some groups of noncitizens be considered potentially eligible for TANF in all states, but states retain wide discretion regarding the eligibility of most noncitizens.

Under the AFDC program, the only noncitizens categorically ineligible for aid were unauthorized immigrants and noncitizens in the country temporarily (under student visas or temporary work visas). Further, the income of a legal immigrant's sponsor could be treated as available to the immigrant (a process known as "deeming") for a limited time; however, most legal immigrants were potentially eligible for benefits.

After the passage of PRWORA, noncitizens' access to federal TANF benefits was significantly restricted. PRWORA created the "qualified alien" distinction, which more narrowly defined the

group of noncitizens potentially eligible for most federally-funded TANF assistance.²⁹ The federal law also extended sponsor deeming and further limited qualified noncitizens' access to assistance based on their date of entry into the country. Qualified noncitizens who entered the United States before August 22, 1996 (the date PRWORA was passed), are potentially eligible for federally-funded assistance without any waiting period, whereas most qualified noncitizens who arrived in the country on or after August 22, 1996 are subject to a five-year bar on federal TANF assistance.³⁰ After the five-year bar, qualified noncitizens are again potentially eligible for federally-funded TANF assistance.

Some immigrants are exempt from the various restrictions and must be potentially eligible for TANF. Refugees and asylees must be considered potentially eligible in all states for their first five years in the country. Also, military personnel and veterans and their families can never be denied eligibility due to their immigrant status (regardless of how long they have been in the country).³¹ Finally, noncitizens who arrived in the United States prior to the passage of

²⁹ Qualified aliens include lawful permanent residents, asylees, refugees, noncitizens paroled into the United States for at least one year, noncitizens whose deportations are being withheld, noncitizens granted conditional entry before April 1, 1980, certain battered noncitizen spouses and their children, battered noncitizen children and their parents, and Cuban/Haitian entrants. We use the term “qualified noncitizen” in this report when we are referring to people meeting the federally-established definition. When referring generally to people living in the United States who are not citizens, we use the word “noncitizens.”

³⁰ The five-year bar applies only to those qualified aliens who entered the United States—whether legally or illegally—on or after August 22, 1996. Therefore, a person may have entered illegally in 1994 and become a lawful permanent resident in 2000. As long as that person has been continuously present in the United States, the bar would not apply to them. See the Department of Justice’s Interim Guidance on Verification of Citizenship, Qualified Alien Status and Eligibility under Title IV of PRWORA at 62 Federal Regulation 61415 (November 17, 1997). Further, if noncitizens enter the United States on or after August 22, 1996, but are not qualified when they enter, the five-year clock begins on the date their immigrant status becomes qualified. In this report, we use the term “qualified noncitizen” to refer to this group.

³¹ States must permit the following qualified noncitizens who meet the state’s eligibility criteria to receive TANF benefits for five years after the date of entry into the United States or the date asylum or withholding of deportation was granted: refugees (and victims of severe forms of trafficking and certain family members), asylees, noncitizens whose deportation has been withheld, Amerasians, and Cuban/Haitian entrants. Also, states may never deny eligibility to veterans or individuals on active duty along with their spouses and unmarried dependent children. Under the 2008 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 110-161, § 101(a)(27)) and the 2008 National Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 110-181, § 8120(b)), Iraqi and Afghani immigrants gained special status and became eligible to receive benefits available to refugees, including resettlement assistance and access to other public benefit programs. The Afghani and Iraqi special immigrants, while eligible for a time-limited exemption, are still otherwise subject to the federal five-year bar on benefit assistance. Afghani special immigrants became eligible for a six-month time-limited exemption from the federal five-year bar, while Iraqi special immigrants became eligible for an eight-month time-limited exemption from the federal five-year bar. The time-limited exemption from the federal five-year bar begins on the date the noncitizen enters the United States.

PRWORA who have accumulated 40 quarters of work history cannot be denied TANF eligibility due to their immigrant status in any state.³²

Although federal law determines which noncitizens are *potentially* eligible for federally-funded benefits and the periods in which they may be eligible, states have substantial flexibility. States can choose to provide or deny assistance to certain groups of noncitizens the federal government has indicated are potentially eligible for federally-funded benefits. States can also provide state-funded assistance to certain noncitizens ineligible for federally-funded assistance, such as qualified noncitizens during the five-year bar or certain noncitizens who do not meet the “qualified noncitizens” definition.³³

States have made three types of decisions about the eligibility of noncitizens:

1. Will some or all qualified noncitizens who arrived before PRWORA (pre-PRWORA) be eligible for benefits?
2. Will some or all noncitizens who arrived on or after the date of the PRWORA legislation (post-PRWORA) be eligible for benefits during the five-year bar?
3. Will some or all post-PRWORA noncitizens be eligible for benefits after the five-year bar?

Tables I.B.5, I.B.6, and I.B.7 describe the variation in state policies concerning pre-PRWORA and post-PRWORA noncitizens.³⁴

Table I.B.5 describes selected state policies regarding pre-PRWORA qualified noncitizens who are potentially eligible for federally-funded assistance, but who do not fall into groups required to be covered (in other words, they are “nonexempt”). Since PRWORA was passed more than 20 years prior to the policies covered by this Databook, the policies regarding pre-PRWORA entrants do not affect a large number of applicants; however, there are still some families applying for TANF in which the adults entered the country prior to August 1996 and

³² Forty quarters is approximately 10 years for one person; however, a noncitizen may be credited with quarters of coverage worked by a parent or a spouse under certain circumstances.

³³ Two groups of nonqualified noncitizens—those who are in the country on a temporary basis (student visas, work visas, and so on) and those who are in the country without authorization—are not eligible for benefits in any state. However, there are other groups of nonqualified noncitizens, such as persons residing under color of law (PRUCOL), who are eligible in some states.

³⁴ These state rules must be viewed in the context of the federal prohibitions and requirements affecting the eligibility of noncitizens for federally funded assistance. The eligibility rules for noncitizens are very complex. This discussion is a summary intended for researchers and should not be used for assessing the policy options available to a state under federal law or whether a state’s policies fully comport with federal law.

have not obtained citizenship. The table provides eligibility rules for two groups of pre-PRWORA noncitizens—lawful permanent residents and asylees.³⁵ As mentioned above, even if a state does not provide assistance to *all* pre-PRWORA qualified noncitizens, those qualifying for special exceptions based on work history (having accumulated 40 quarters) or veteran or military status are still potentially eligible for federally-funded benefits in all states.

Highlights from the 2021 data include:

- Forty-nine states consider all pre-PRWORA qualified noncitizens who are lawful permanent residents eligible for assistance.
- Forty-nine states consider all pre-PRWORA qualified noncitizens who are asylees eligible for assistance.
- One state (Mississippi) does not consider any pre-PRWORA lawful permanent residents or asylees eligible for assistance (with the exception of those who must be considered potentially eligible based on federal rules).

Table I.B.6 shows whether states use their own funding to provide assistance to post-PRWORA noncitizens who are ineligible for federal TANF assistance. The first three columns of the table focus on three groups of qualified noncitizens during their first five years, when they are ineligible for federally-funded TANF due to the five-year bar (unless they qualify for a military or veteran exemption). The three groups of qualified noncitizens shown in the table are lawful permanent residents, parolees, and people who meet the specific definition of “battered non-citizen.” (Several other groups of qualified noncitizens—including refugees, asylees, and people with deportation withheld—are not shown in this table because they must be considered potentially eligible for federally-funded TANF in every state during their first five years.) The last column of the table describes whether any nonqualified noncitizens, other than those who are temporary or unauthorized, are potentially eligible for benefits using state funds. Key policies for 2021 include:

- Thirteen states fund benefits for all qualified noncitizens in each of the three categories shown in Table I.B.6 (lawful permanent residents, parolees, and battered noncitizens) during their first five years.

³⁵ Versions of this table for 2014 and earlier years showed policies for additional categories of noncitizens. However, due to the diminishing numbers of pre-PRWORA entrants in the population applying for TANF, many states’ caseworker manuals do not provide explicit policies for this group. Thus, this table focuses on the two statuses that are likely the most prevalent among noncitizens who entered prior to PRWORA.

- Nine states fund benefits for at least some nonqualified noncitizens.

Table I.B.7 shows whether post-PRWORA noncitizens are eligible for assistance after they have resided in the United States with qualified noncitizen status for at least five years. After the five-year bar, qualified noncitizens may be provided with TANF using federal funds, but the state is not required to provide aid. The table provides eligibility rules for several categories of qualified noncitizens: lawful permanent residents, asylees/refugees, noncitizens with deportation withheld, noncitizens paroled in the country for at least one year, and battered noncitizens. Even if a state does not provide assistance to all qualified noncitizens following the five-year bar, those qualifying for special exceptions based on veteran or military status are still eligible for federally-funded benefits in all states. Further, some states provide aid only to some subgroups, for example only those who have attained 40 quarters of work history. Policies from 2021 include:

- Forty-five states consider all post-PRWORA qualified noncitizens who are lawful permanent residents and who are beyond the five-year bar to be potentially eligible for assistance.
- Five states only consider a lawful permanent resident past the five-year bar to be potentially eligible for assistance if that person can be credited with 40 quarters of work (or if federal rules require eligibility based on military or veteran status).
- Forty-two states consider all post-PRWORA qualified noncitizens who are past the five-year bar and fall into any of the other four groups shown in Table I.B.7— asylees/refugees, deportees, parolees, or battered non-citizens—to be potentially eligible for assistance.
- For post-PRWORA qualified noncitizens who are past the five-year bar and fall into any of the other four groups shown in the table— asylees/refugees, deportees, parolees, or battered non-citizens—four states do not provide any eligibility (unless federal rules require eligibility based on military or veteran status).

Two points are important to note for all three tables concerning the treatment of noncitizens. First, even if a state will potentially fund cash aid to an immigrant in a particular circumstance, that immigrant might still be ineligible if the immigrant has a sponsor whose income is deemed available for the immigrant's support. Policies related to sponsor deeming are not shown in the tables but are included in the WRD. Second, all noncitizen rules discussed here apply to individuals, not to entire families. Within a family, some individuals may be ineligible based on immigrant status, while others may remain eligible.

Related table: Information about the treatment of income from immigrant parents who are not eligible to be in the assistance unit can be found in table I.D.4.

Treatment of Non-Caretaker Adults in Household (Table I.B.8)

When a child's household includes adults who are neither the child's parents nor caretakers, state rules vary on whether those non-caretaker adults may be considered to be members of the assistance unit. For the purposes of the WRD, a non-caretaker adult is defined as an adult living in the household who is neither the primary caretaker of the children nor a stepparent or parent of any children in the household. A non-caretaker adult could be an adult who is related to the parent or children (for instance, the children's aunt), the unmarried partner of the parent, or a friend of the parent who is not a relative or in a relationship with the parent. Table I.B.8 describes whether these individuals are eligible to be included in the TANF unit. Additionally, the table provides information about how states count income and calculate benefits when these individuals are not included in the assistance unit. The table also details whether shared living costs affect eligibility or benefits. Key policies from 2021 include:

- Thirty-three states always exclude all non-caretaker adults in the household from the assistance unit.
- Five states (Hawaii, New York, Oregon, Vermont, and Virginia) potentially allow any adult in the household to be included in the unit.

Eligibility Requirements for Children (Table I.B.9)

States define the maximum age of a child for purposes of TANF and may require that a child lives with either a parent or another relative to be potentially eligible for TANF. Table I.B.9 addresses these basic criteria for determining the potential eligibility of a family (as opposed to individuals within the family). The first two columns of the table show the maximum age at which a child can be TANF-eligible; the first column provides the maximum age for children who are not in school, and the second column gives the maximum that applies for children who are still enrolled in school. The last column of table I.B.9 addresses a second issue related to overall family eligibility—whether a child whose caretaker is a nonrelative is potentially eligible for TANF.³⁶ Policies from 2021 include:

- A teenager who is *not* attending school is still considered a child for purposes of TANF through age 17 (until reaching their 18th birthday) in 47 states, through age 18 in Nebraska, and through age 15 in D.C. In addition, Michigan and Virginia require all

³⁶ AFDC did not cover children with nonrelative caretakers.

school-age children to be in school full-time as a condition of eligibility for either the child (in Virginia) or the entire family (in Michigan).

- In 47 states, the maximum age to be considered a child for purposes of TANF is slightly higher (generally through age 18) for those who are attending school.
- Twenty-one states consider children living with nonrelative caretakers potentially eligible for TANF.

Inclusion of SSI Recipients in the Assistance Unit (Table I.B.10)

States also vary in the treatment of parents and children who receive benefits from the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program. SSI provides cash aid to low-income individuals who are age 65 or over and low-income individuals under age 65—including children—who are determined by the program to have a disability. Table I.B.10 shows whether SSI recipients are included in the TANF assistance unit and when counted in the unit, how their income is treated. SSI benefits are typically higher than TANF benefits, so including SSI recipients in the unit and counting their SSI income might reduce a family's likelihood of eligibility. Highlights for 2021 include:

- Five states (Alaska, Idaho, New Hampshire, West Virginia, and Wisconsin) include SSI recipients in the TANF assistance unit. New Hampshire and Wisconsin include both child and adult SSI recipients, whereas Idaho includes adult SSI recipients, and Alaska and West Virginia include SSI recipients who are children.

Related table: For additional detail about SSI recipients, table II.A.5 gives the maximum benefit paid to a child-only TANF case with one child when the parents are excluded from the assistance unit due to SSI receipt.

Inclusion of Nonparent Caretakers in the Assistance Unit (Table I.B.11)

Many children live with caretakers who are not their parents—often a grandparent or another relative. Nonparent caretakers may or may not be considered part of the TANF assistance unit, depending on their characteristics and, in some cases, their own choice. Being included in the unit could increase the TANF benefit (depending on the caretaker's income), but it could also lead to additional requirements that would not be placed on a child-only unit (a unit with no adults counted in the assistance unit) related to time limits and work requirements.

Table I.B.11 shows the state policies regarding nonparent caretakers. The first four columns of the table address whether nonparent caretakers are included in the unit, and under what

circumstances caretakers are included when inclusion is optional. The final column of the table provides information as to whether a caretaker's spouse is included in the unit when the caretaker is included. This column is relevant in the situation when a child's caretakers are a married couple—for example, the child's grandmother and grandfather. Key policies from 2021 include:

- Four states (Alabama, North Carolina, South Dakota, and Wisconsin) never allow nonparent caretakers to be included in the assistance unit.
- Twenty-four states allow nonparent caretakers to choose whether to be included in the assistance unit.
- Twenty-one states allow for the inclusion of some nonparent caretakers (e.g., those with lower incomes, or those who are relatives), but do not allow others to be included in the unit.
- Of the remaining two states, New Jersey requires the inclusion of some nonparent caretakers, and does not allow others to be included in the unit and North Dakota requires the inclusion of some nonparent caretakers, allows for the inclusion of other nonparent caretakers, and does not allow others to be included in the unit.

Related tables: For additional information about cases with nonparent caretakers, see table I.B.9 for whether the state ever provides TANF to a child living with a caretaker who is not a relative. Additionally, table I.D.3 describes the treatment of the income and assets of nonparent caretakers, table II.A.5 gives the maximum benefits paid to child-only units with a single child living with a nonparent caretaker, and table III.B.4 describes work-related activity requirements for nonparent caretakers.

C. What level of assets can a family have and still be eligible?

If the family passes the nonfinancial eligibility tests, the next step in determining TANF eligibility may be an asset test. Most states restrict the amount of assets a family may hold and still be eligible for assistance; however, these amounts vary greatly by state and by type of asset. If the family's total assets exceed the amounts established by the state, the family is ineligible for assistance.

Asset Limits for Applicants (Table I.C.1)

States determine the maximum value of assets—including vehicles—an applicant family may hold and still remain eligible for benefits. Table I.C.1 describes each state’s asset tests for applicants. The first column of the table provides the limit on the value of countable assets a family may hold and still be eligible for assistance. The second column describes whether some or all of the value of a vehicle is excluded in determining the amount of a family’s assets for eligibility purposes; any portion not excluded is counted as part of the family’s total asset value, which is then compared to the asset limit. When a portion of the vehicle’s value is exempted, the value may be given in terms of equity or fair-market value. The fair-market value is the amount for which the vehicle could be sold, while the equity value is the fair-market value minus any amount still owed on the vehicle. When a family still owes money on a vehicle, the equity value will be less than the fair-market value, so this distinction is important when comparing vehicle exemption amounts across states. Policy highlights for 2021 include:

- All but nine states have asset limits for applicants. In states with asset tests, the limits that apply to most applicants range from \$1,000 in seven states to \$15,000 in Michigan. (California’s asset limit for assistance units with an older adult or a person with a disability is \$15,317. The asset limit for all other assistance units is \$10,211.)

Related tables: Asset limits may be different for determining the initial eligibility of applicants compared to the continuing eligibility of recipients. For information on the asset test for recipients, see table IV.A.3. Tables L8 and L9 provide information on asset limits for recipients and the vehicle exemption for recipients, respectively, for selected years from 1996 through 2021.

D. How is income counted in determining eligibility?

Once a family has passed any asset test imposed by the state, the family’s available income is computed for eligibility purposes. States have discretion in determining what portion and types of earned and unearned income are counted, in addition to whose income is counted, for eligibility purposes.³⁷ In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government instituted special pandemic unemployment programs that increased the availability of unemployment aid

³⁷ While there are many types of income, this report only addresses state variations in the treatment of earnings (in chapter I, Initial Eligibility and chapter IV, Ongoing Eligibility), child support payments (in chapter IV, Ongoing Eligibility), and unemployment compensation (appendix 2). The WRD captures variations in the treatment of certain other types of income, including interest income and lump-sum income. Currently, no state counts income from tax refunds such as the Earned Income Tax Credit or Child Tax Credit.

as well as the benefit amounts, and states could determine whether to count the additional unemployment assistance when determining income eligibility and benefit computation. The treatment of pandemic unemployment income in 2021 is captured in appendix 2.³⁸

Generally, if people are considered part of the assistance unit, their earned and unearned income is counted as part of the unit's total (gross) income. Many states also count a portion of or all income from certain individuals who are not part of the assistance unit but who have an obligation to support a member of the assistance unit. Typically, states view a portion of the income of these individuals as being required for their own needs; they "allocate" that portion to the individual and any remaining income is deemed available to the assistance unit as unearned income. This income may or may not actually be available to the unit, but the state assumes the individual bears some financial responsibility and therefore requires that a portion of the individual's income count as income of the unit. In particular, when a stepparent or a grandparent (the parent of a minor parent) lives in the same home as the applicant but is not considered part of the assistance unit, a portion of that person's income is sometimes counted as part of the applicant's income for eligibility and benefit computation purposes. Other groups of individuals whose income may receive special treatment are nonparent caretakers and immigrant parents who are members of the household but not included in the assistance unit.

Treatment of Grandparent Income (Table I.D.1)

When minor parents are potentially eligible to head their own assistance units, a portion of their parents' income may be deemed available to the minors unit when determining eligibility and benefits. When the grandparents' (the parents of the minor parent) income is deemed available to the unit, the state may allow grandparents to disregard a portion of their earned income, similar to the earned income disregards available to applicants. States may also allow for an additional disregard approximating the amount of the grandparents' basic needs and the needs of their dependents outside the TANF assistance unit. The remaining income is deemed available to the minor parent's TANF unit and is counted as unearned income for eligibility and benefit computation purposes.

Table I.D.1 describes the treatment of grandparent income for applicants. The first column indicates if the state deems income in this situation, the second column indicates the initial

³⁸ Another type of pandemic aid—"economic impact payments" (also referred to as "stimulus checks")—was not considered as income by any state's TANF program. For more information about states' policies in response to the pandemic, see Shantz, Katie, Sarah Knowles, Ilham Dehry, and Linda Giannarelli (2023). *State TANF Policies During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. OPRE Report 2023-003, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services., and the full underlying database.

earned income disregard available to the grandparents, and the third column describes any other disregards available to the grandparents (which are most often disregards approximating the grandparents' basic needs). The table also indicates the income standards used by states to determine any needs-based disregard. Key policies from 2021 include:

- Thirty-eight states require a portion of the grandparent's income be deemed available to the minor parent.
- Three states (Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Vermont) do not require deeming of income from the grandparent.
- In the remaining 10 states, there is no policy regarding deeming since the minor parent is included in an assistance unit with the grandparent (the minor parent's adult parent).

Information pertaining to disregards for child support payments for dependents outside the home or alimony is not captured in the table but can be found in the WRD.

Related tables: See table I.E.3 (Standards for Estimating Eligibility) to determine the income standards listed in the final column for a family of three. For more information about minor parents, see table I.B.3, which describes whether minor parents are potentially eligible to head their own TANF units.

Treatment of Stepparent Income (Table I.D.2)

In states where a stepparent is either always excluded from the assistance unit or given the option to be excluded from the assistance unit, a portion of the stepparent's income may be deemed available to the unit. As with their policies for grandparent deeming, states generally allow stepparents to disregard a portion of their earned income, similar to the earned income disregards available to applicants. States may also allow stepparents to subtract from their income a second disregard approximating the amount of their basic needs and the needs of their dependents outside the TANF assistance unit. The remaining income after these disregards is deemed available to the stepparent's spouse and the spouse's dependents and is counted as unearned income for eligibility and benefit computation purposes.

Table I.D.2 describes the deeming process for stepparents' income. The first column indicates if the state deems income, the second column indicates the initial earned income disregard available to the stepparent, and the third column describes any other disregards available to the stepparent (which are most often needs-based disregards). The table also indicates the income standards used by states to determine any needs-based disregard. Policy highlights for 2021 include:

- Twenty-eight states require that some of the stepparent’s income be deemed to the unit.
- D.C. does not require deeming of income from the stepparents.
- In the remaining 22 states, there is no policy regarding deeming since the stepparents must be included in the unit.

As noted for table I.D.1, information pertaining to disregards for child support payments for dependents outside the home or alimony is not captured in the table, but can be found in the WRD.

Related tables: See table I.E.3 (Standards for Estimating Eligibility) to determine the income standards listed in the final column for a family of three. For additional information on whether stepparents are potentially eligible to be included in the assistance unit, see table I.B.4.

Treatment of Income and Assets of Nonparent Caretakers (Table I.D.3)

In general, the treatment of a nonparent caretaker’s income and assets depends on whether that person is included in the assistance unit. Typically, if caretakers are included in the unit, then their income and assets are counted; if caretakers are not included in the unit, then their income and assets are not counted. This means that a “child only” unit (composed of a child living with a nonparent caretaker who is not counted in the unit) often has a countable income of \$0. However, states may establish different policies, such as treating income differently for eligibility determination versus benefit computation. Table I.D.3 describes the state policies regarding the income of nonparent caretakers. Key highlights from the 2021 data include:

- For caretakers who are not in the assistance unit, three states (Arizona, Nevada, and Texas) include at least a portion of their income for eligibility and/or benefit computation.
- All 47 states that include at least some caretakers in the assistance unit count at least a portion of the included caretaker’s income for eligibility and benefit calculations.

Related table: For information on whether nonparent caretakers are included in the assistance unit, see table I.B.11.

Treatment of Income of Parents Excluded from the Assistance Unit Due to Immigrant Status (Table I.D.4)

In many cases, the restrictions placed on immigrants’ eligibility for TANF (see Tables I.B.5 through I.B.7) result in a parent not being eligible to be in the assistance unit, while one or more children are potentially eligible. For example, in the case of two lawful permanent

residents who have been in the United States for three years, and who have a baby who was born in the United States, the baby is potentially eligible for TANF (because he or she is a citizen) while the parents are still within the five-year bar, and therefore ineligible in many states. In all cases when a parent is in the household but is not included in the assistance unit, either all or a portion of the parent's income is considered available to the potentially-eligible children for purposes of determining their eligibility and benefits. As with grandparent and stepparent deeming, states often allow parents who are excluded from the unit due to immigrant status to disregard a portion of their earned income, similar to the earned income disregards available to applicants. States may also allow additional disregards, and some states only count a prorated portion of the parent's income.

Table I.D.4 describes state policies that apply to units in which a child has a parent who is living in the household but not eligible to be part of the assistance unit due to immigrant status. The first column indicates if the state deems income from immigrant parents in this situation, the second column shows the initial earned income disregards available to the immigrant parent, the third column reflects any additional income disregards provided, and the fourth column conveys the computation methods used in determining both eligibility and benefits. Key highlights from the 2021 data include:

- Five states deem all the excluded parent's income available to the unit for both eligibility and benefit calculations.
- Forty-seven states allow parents who are excluded from the unit due to immigrant status to disregard some portion of their income, with different disregards sometimes used for eligibility determination and for benefit computation.
- A large majority of states (47) utilize the "standard" method of computation—adding deemed income to the unit's other income, and then performing the eligibility and benefit computations with the unit size of the eligible members. Other states use other formulas. California and Montana, for example, compute eligibility and benefits using the family size that includes the family members who are ineligible due to immigrant status, but cap the benefit at the maximum payment for the family size that includes only the eligible members. Oregon also computes eligibility using the unit size that includes family members who are ineligible, but computes the benefit using the unit size that only includes eligible members.
- One state—Wisconsin—does not allow eligibility for families in which a parent in the household is excluded due to immigrant status.

Related tables: Tables I.B.5, I.B.6, and I.B.7 describe the variation in state policies concerning the eligibility of pre-PRWORA and post-PRWORA noncitizens.

E. How much income can a family have and still be eligible?

To determine initial eligibility for benefits, many states use income eligibility tests—that is, tests that compare the unit’s gross or net income amount to a specified income threshold. If the applicant’s countable income (for purposes of that test) exceeds the threshold, the applicant is not eligible to receive benefits. Income eligibility tests and the calculation of countable income vary greatly across states.³⁹

This section of the Databook describes the types of eligibility tests in the states, the earned income disregards used for the net income tests, and the income eligibility standards used for the various tests. It also presents a calculation of the maximum income for initial eligibility at application. The first three tables in this section must be used together to fully understand the income eligibility tests in each state.

Income Eligibility Test for Applicants (Table I.E.1)

To determine initial eligibility for benefits, most states impose income eligibility tests on applicants. States use the total gross income calculated from the unit’s earned and unearned income as a starting point for these tests. States may impose one income test on applicants or use a combination of tests, which might include a gross income test, a gross earnings test, an unearned income test, and/or a net income test.

A gross income test compares the unit’s total income (earned and unearned, including any deemed income) with a state-determined standard. If the unit’s income is less than the standard, the next test is applied (if applicable) or the unit is considered eligible and a benefit is computed. A gross earnings test and an unearned income test operate similarly, but only the unit’s earned income is used for a gross earnings test and only the unit’s unearned income is used for an unearned income test.

States may also impose net income tests, either after a gross income test or in lieu of it. Net income is calculated by subtracting the state’s earned income disregards from the unit’s gross

³⁹ Appendix 2 includes information on states’ treatment of unemployment income during the COVID-19 pandemic. For more information about states’ policies in response to the pandemic, see Shantz, Katie, Sarah Knowles, Ilham Dehry, and Linda Giannarelli (2023). *State TANF Policies During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. OPRE Report 2023-003, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services., and the full underlying database.

earned income and then adding the unit's unearned income to this amount. The net income is then compared to an income standard determined by the state. If the net income is less than the standard, the next test is applied (if applicable) or the unit is considered eligible and a benefit is computed.

Table I.E.1 describes states' income eligibility tests for determining whether an applicant is eligible for assistance.⁴⁰ The table indicates the state income standard used for each test. "No explicit tests" indicates that either the state imposes no income tests on applicants (other than the implicit test inherent in the benefit computation formula) or the state imposes an income test, but the calculation of the test and disregards allowed for the test are no different from those used to calculate the benefit. Policies from 2021 include:

- Forty-four states have explicit net or gross income tests for applicants.
- Nineteen states require applicants to pass two or more income eligibility tests.
- Seven states have no explicit income eligibility tests for applicants.

Related tables: Table I.E.3 provides the eligibility standards used to determine eligibility for a three-person family. Tables I.D.1, I.D.2, and I.D.4 describe policies concerning the deeming of income from grandparents, stepparents, and immigrant parents, respectively, that may be used when determining gross income for income eligibility tests. Table I.E.2 describes the earned income disregards that may be used for net income tests. Table I.E.4 combines information on the income eligibility tests applied to applicants with information on the earned income disregards and eligibility standards to show the maximum earnings a family can have and still be eligible for TANF. Table L3, in the last section of this report, provides the same information as in table I.E.4 for selected years from 1996 through 2021.

Earned Income Disregards for Initial Income Eligibility Purposes (Table I.E.2)

States that impose a net income test generally disregard a portion of the unit's earned income before comparing the income to the state's income standard. The amount of disregarded earned income varies greatly across states. Table I.E.2 describes the earned income disregards applied to applicants' income in determining net income for the income eligibility tests.⁴¹ When a state has more than one net income test and imposes different disregards for the tests, the table will show two rows for the state describing both the disregard and for which net income

⁴⁰ In some states, applicants with earnings are ineligible for cash assistance. In these cases, table I.E.1 describes the income eligibility tests an applicant must pass to be eligible for nonfinancial assistance.

⁴¹ Some states consider units who have received assistance in one of the previous four months as recipients for the purpose of earned income disregards, even if they stopped receiving assistance and are reapplying for benefits.

test the disregard applies. When a state has no explicit net income tests, the table indicates “No explicit net income test.” Some states have net income tests but do not apply a general earned income disregard; instead, they may disregard earnings only for specific expenses, such as child care. In those cases, “No disregards allowed” appears in the table. Key policies from 2021 include:

- Fifteen states have no explicit net income test for initial income eligibility purposes, so this table is not applicable. (In states that do not impose an explicit net income test as defined by the WRD, a unit’s net income affects eligibility status by impacting whether they are eligible for a positive benefit.)
- One state (Ohio) has a net income test that allows applicants to deduct specific costs, including dependent care expenses, but they do not disregard any other earnings in applying the net income test.
- Two states (California and Texas) have two different net income tests, which use different disregards.

Additional disregards for child care expenses paid by a family or special disregards for units affected by a family cap or time limit are not included in the Databook; however, this information is included in the WRD.

Related tables: In some cases, states also use net income tests to determine a recipient’s continuing eligibility. The earned income disregards used in applying net income tests for recipients’ ongoing eligibility are captured in table IV.A.5. (When a state has established different earned income disregards for applicants and recipients, the disregards are generally lower for applicants and higher for recipients.) See table II.A.1 for the earned income disregards used in computing net income for purposes of determining the benefit level; whether a unit is eligible for a positive benefit is an implicit net income test in most states.

Standards for Determining Eligibility (Table I.E.3)

As described earlier, most income tests involve state-established income amounts that vary by the size of the assistance unit. The WRD includes the standards for each family size from 1 through 12. Table I.E.3 provides the standards for a three-person assistance unit.

Table I.E.3 identifies the standard by the name used in the caseworker manual. Under the former AFDC program, the standard for income eligibility tests was called the “need standard.” Currently, because of the complexity of state programs, there is no longer a single need standard concept. States may compare an assistance unit’s income against multiple standards,

depending on the type or amount of income. Therefore, the term “need standard” is not used in the table unless the state explicitly uses it to refer to its eligibility standard. Key policies from 2021 include:

- Standards for determining eligibility vary significantly across states. The values for a family of three range from a \$188 “Recognizable Needs” standard in Texas to a \$4,281 “Standard of Need” in New Hampshire.

These values must be interpreted in conjunction with the information in other tables. The numbers do not by themselves indicate the maximum income at which a family may be eligible. That maximum depends on multiple policies, and on whether a family’s income is earned or unearned.

Some details concerning eligibility standards are not included in table I.E.3. In some states, different dollar amounts are used in different regions of the state; in those cases, table I.E.3 includes the amounts for the most populous area of the state. In other states, the amounts may be higher for families with certain types of “special needs,” such as a pregnancy; the amounts in table I.E.3 assume no special needs. Also, a few states vary standards for one-parent families, two-parent families, and child-only units; table I.E.3 includes values for a one-parent family with two children. Some states prorate the eligibility or benefit standards depending on whether a unit pays for shelter; the amounts in the table assume the unit pays all shelter costs and does not live in public housing or have a housing voucher.

Related tables: These standards by themselves are not comparable across states, since the income tests differ. To determine how the standards are used in practice, see tables I.D.1, I.D.2, I.D.4, I.E.1, and IV.A.4.

Maximum Earnings for Initial Eligibility for a Family of Three (Table I.E.4)

Table I.E.4 synthesizes the various financial rules related to initial eligibility to provide information on the maximum amount a family of three can earn and still be eligible for assistance. The calculation incorporates information on the income eligibility rules for applicants, earned income disregards for eligibility and benefit computation, benefit computation policies, and the eligibility and payment standards. The calculation determines the maximum amount of earnings an applicant can have and still be technically eligible for assistance in each state. Technical eligibility does not mean the unit will necessarily receive a cash benefit, but the unit will have passed all eligibility tests and will be eligible for some positive amount. Most states distribute a cash benefit only if it is greater than \$10.

The calculation assumes the assistance unit includes one parent and two children, has only earned income, has no child care expenses, contains no children subject to a family cap, has no special needs, pays for all shelter costs with no subsidies, and is subject to the benefit standard that applies to the majority of the state's caseload.

Key findings for 2021 include:

- The maximum monthly earnings a family of three can have at application and be eligible for TANF varies significantly across states. The values for a family of three range from \$268 in Alabama to \$2,413 in Minnesota.
- Across the states, the average (mean) earnings level that is the maximum possible amount allowing initial TANF eligibility is \$965. The median figure is lower, at \$890.

Related tables: Table L3 provides the maximum income for initial eligibility for selected years from 1996 through 2021. Table IV.A.6 provides information on the amount of earnings a *recipient* may have and remain eligible for assistance. (The figures for recipients may differ from those for applicants due to differences in income eligibility tests and earnings disregards.)

Benefits

The tables in this chapter of the Databook describe key aspects of the rules for calculating and distributing the assistance unit’s benefit as of July 1, 2021. The tables include information on how benefits are calculated, the maximum benefits for different types of assistance units, and how benefits are administered. Information about special benefit computation policies implemented by some states in response to the COVID-19 pandemic can be found in appendix 3.⁴²

A. If a family passes all eligibility tests, what is received?

Rules for calculating benefits apply once the family has passed all eligibility tests, both nonfinancial and financial. State rules for calculating benefits vary, and the calculations across states range in complexity. In the more straightforward calculations, net income is subtracted from a state-determined standard (often called the payment standard), which varies by family size, and the benefit paid is the difference (sometimes referred to as the income deficit). Some states, however, either use more complex calculations or pay a flat grant amount. The following section describes these policies in greater detail.

Earned Income Disregards for Benefit Computation (Table II.A.1)

When states use net income for benefit computation, they disregard a portion of the assistance unit’s income in calculating the income of the unit. Table II.A.1 describes the earned income disregards allowed when calculating the benefit. If a state pays a flat grant amount (explained further below), then earned income disregards are not relevant to benefit computation and “no disregards – flat grant amount” appears in the table. In some cases, states use different earned income disregards to determine the benefit of a unit in its first month of eligibility versus subsequent months. This information is included in the tables and notes. Policies for 2021 include:

- All 49 states that vary benefits with income use an earned income disregard.

⁴² For more information about states’ policies in response to the pandemic, see Shantz, Katie, Sarah Knowles, Ilham Dehry, and Linda Giannarelli (2023). *State TANF Policies During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. OPRE Report 2023-003, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services., and the full underlying database.

- Of the states that do have earned income disregards for benefit computation, 34 have a disregard that applies in all months (including Virginia whose income disregard amount varies by unit size) and 15 states have an income disregard that changes over time.

Some states disregard a portion of the child care expenses paid by a family or allow special disregards for units subject to a family cap or time limit. Those disregards are not included in the table, but are captured in the WRD.

Related tables: Disregards for benefit computation and income eligibility may differ. For information on the earned income disregards used for an applicant’s income eligibility, see table I.E.2. See table IV.A.5 for the earned income disregards used with income eligibility tests for recipients’ ongoing eligibility. Table L4, in the last section of this report, describes the earned income disregards used for benefit computation for selected years from 1996 through 2021.

Benefit Determination Policies (Table II.A.2)

Table II.A.2 describes how states compute benefits for units that pass all applicable eligibility tests. In many states, net income is subtracted from a state-determined payment standard, which typically varies by the size of the assistance unit. The benefit paid to the family is then the difference between the net income and state payment standard, sometimes referred to as the income deficit. In other states, a statutory maximum benefit is imposed, generally varying by family size. In these states, the benefit is either the income deficit or the statutory maximum, whichever is less. Still other states multiply the income deficit by a percentage, which is sometimes referred to as the benefit reduction rate. This percentage of the income deficit is the benefit provided to the unit. Some states combine both a statutory maximum and benefit reduction rate into their calculation. Finally, some states provide a fixed (flat grant) amount, regardless of family income. Policies for 2021 include:

- A majority of states (34) compute benefits for all or most of their caseload by subtracting income from a selected dollar amount (a payment standard); the benefit equals the difference (the income deficit).
- Fifteen states pay only a portion of the income deficit, impose a maximum, or use both of those strategies in combination.
- Two states—Arkansas and Wisconsin—determine benefits for eligible families in a way that does not vary with family income.

Related tables: For the income standards named in this table, table II.A.3 gives the value of the standard for a three-person family. Table II.A.4 combines information from table II.A.2 with information on benefit standards for various family sizes and presents the benefit paid to an assistance unit with no net income and with two, three, four, five, or six members. Table II.A.1 describes the earned income disregards allowed in calculating the net income used for benefit computation, and tables I.D.1, I.D.2, I.D.4, and IV.A.2 include policies on the treatment of unearned income (amounts deemed from grandparent units, stepparent units, immigrant parents, and treatment of child support income). Table L5, in the last section of this report, provides the maximum benefits paid to a three-person unit for selected years from 1996 through 2021.

Standards for Determining Benefits (Table II.A.3)

As described earlier, benefit computations involve state-established income amounts that almost always vary by the size of the assistance unit. The WRD includes the benefit standards used for each family size from 1 through 12. Table II.A.3 provides the standards for a three-person assistance unit with one adult and two children. The first two columns of the table describe what we refer to in general terms as the “payment standard”—the dollar amount from which net income is subtracted, or the flat grant amount in the few states that use that approach. The first column gives the state’s name for this standard, and the second column gives the amount of this standard for a three-person family. In states that impose a statutory maximum benefit, the third and fourth columns of the table provide the state’s name for that standard and the amount of the maximum benefit for a three-person family. Policy highlights from 2021 include:

- Twelve states have a statutory maximum benefit. The amount for a family of three ranges from \$260 in Mississippi to \$1,068 in Minnesota. (The amount for Minnesota includes the SNAP allotment; excluding the portion intended for food assistance, the maximum benefit in Minnesota is \$632.)

In some states, different dollar amounts are used in different regions of the state; in those cases, the table includes the amounts applied to the most populous area of the state with a footnote indicating that the benefits are not constant across the state. In other states, the amounts may be higher for families with certain special needs, such as a pregnancy; the amounts in the table assume no special needs. Also, a few states have different sets of standards for one-parent families, two-parent families, and child-only units (in other words, the payment standard might differ for a single parent with two children compared with a married couple with one child, even though both units have three people); the table shows the values

for a one-parent family with two children. Finally, some states prorate the eligibility or benefit standards depending on whether a unit pays for shelter; the amounts in the table assume the unit pays all shelter costs and does not live in public or subsidized housing.

Related tables: The standards by themselves are not necessarily comparable across states, since benefit computation procedures differ. To determine how the standards are used in practice, see table II.A.2. Table II.A.4 provides the benefit paid to two- to six-person units with no other income, and table L5 provides the three-person maximum benefits for selected years from 1996 through 2021. Table II.A.5 provides the benefit paid to a unit consisting of a single child, with no adults.

Maximum Monthly Benefit for a Family with No Income (Table II.A.4)

The maximum benefit calculation combines the information on a state's benefit computation policies with the dollar amounts used for benefit computation to present the benefit paid to a unit with no income. If a state computes benefits as a payment standard minus net income, then this figure will simply equal the payment standard. In other cases, this figure will equal a statutory maximum benefit (which is less than the payment standard). In still other cases, it will be a percentage of the payment standard. Table II.A.4 provides information on the maximum benefit in each state for family sizes two through six. The calculation assumes the assistance unit includes one parent and the other unit members are children, the unit contains no children subject to a family cap, no assistance unit members have special needs, the unit pays for all shelter costs with no subsidies, and the unit is subject to the benefit standard that applies to the majority of the state's caseload. Key findings for 2021 include:

- The maximum monthly benefit for a family of three with no income ranges from \$204 in Arkansas to \$1,098 in New Hampshire.
- Across the states, the average (mean) maximum monthly benefit for a family of three is \$501. The median figure is slightly lower, at \$498.

Data for family sizes larger than six people may be found in the WRD.

Related tables: Table L5 provides the benefit paid to a three-person assistance unit with no net income for selected years from 1996 through 2021. Table II.A.5 gives the maximum benefits paid to child-only units with one child.

Maximum Monthly Benefit for a Child-Only Unit with One Child, No Income (Table II.A.5)

Table II.A.5 provides the maximum monthly TANF benefit that could be paid to a child-only unit consisting of a single child. Information is shown for three different circumstances that may lead to child-only units: when the child lives with a nonparent caretaker who has never been included in the unit, a parent or caretaker who receives SSI, or a parent who is excluded due to immigrant status. (If a state's TANF program does not provide benefits in one or more of those situations, no value is shown and more information is provided in a footnote.) Policies for 2021 include:

- Among the states whose TANF programs include at least two of these three types of child-only units, five states pay different TANF benefits depending on the reason that the unit includes only children.
- Across the states, the average (mean) child-only benefit is \$283 when the child lives with a nonparent caretaker, \$266 when the child lives with a parent excluded from the unit due to SSI receipt, and \$278 when the child lives with a parent excluded from the unit due to immigrant status.

Related tables: For more information on policies leading to a unit being child-only, tables I.B.5, I.B.6, and I.B.7 provide information on parents who are immigrants, table I.B.10 provides information on SSI recipients, and table I.B.11 provides information on nonparent caretakers.

Benefit Issuance Policies (Table II.A.6)

Table II.A.6 provides the method by which states deliver TANF benefits to families. The four possible methods for distributing benefits are: paper check, electronic benefit transfer (EBT) cards, electronic payment cards (EPC), and electronic funds transfers (EFT). An EBT card is a state-issued debit card on which benefits are deposited by the state, similar to (and sometimes the same as) the cards used by the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). An EPC card is similar to an EBT card; however, EPC cards are issued and maintained by a third-party brand, such as Visa or MasterCard, rather than the state. An EFT is an electronic direct deposit into a recipient's checking account. In addition, some states may offer benefits in the form of direct vendor payments or vouchers. These instances are footnoted.

Under the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012, states are directed to prevent the use of EBT and EPC cards "in any liquor store; any casino, gambling casino, or gaming establishment; or any retail establishment which provides adult-oriented

entertainment.”⁴³ The last column of table II.A.6 describes the locations where states prohibit the use of EBT or EPC cards, beyond those already prohibited under federal law. Policies for 2021 include:

- Forty states allow electronic benefits transfer (EBT) as a form of benefit issuance.
- Ten states allow electronic payment cards (EPC) as a form of benefit issuance.
- Twenty-nine states allow electronic funds transfer (EFT) as a form of benefit issuance.

⁴³ Public Law 112-96. Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012:
<https://www.congress.gov/112/plaws/publ96/PLAW-112publ96.pdf> (PDF).

Activity Requirements

The tables in this chapter of the Databook describe requirements that individual members of an assistance unit must meet to become or remain eligible for assistance, as of July 1, 2021. To receive benefits, most states require recipients to negotiate and sign contracts detailing what is required of individuals within the unit. These requirements vary considerably by state but can include conditions for dependent children as well as conditions for the adult head of the household. All states' TANF programs include work requirements, as well as sanctions if work requirements are not met. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many states waived these requirements, suspended sanctions, and/or provided broad exemptions in response to stay at home orders that limited participants' ability to comply with the requirements. The tables in this chapter describe any changes made in response to the pandemic in effect at any point in 2021.⁴⁴

A. Once determined eligible, what must a recipient family do to maintain benefits?

States place various types of requirements on members of the assistance unit—including not only work requirements but also other types of behavioral requirements. For example, dependent children may be required to maintain a minimum grade point average in school, and adults may be required to keep current with immunizations for their children. Fulfilling behavioral requirements can be a condition of initial and continuing eligibility.

Behavioral Requirements and Bonuses (Table III.A.1)

Behavioral requirements affect adults and minor parents in many states. Requirements imposed on children may include school, immunization, health screening, and other health requirements. Table III.A.1 captures whether the following requirements and bonuses are imposed for either initial or continuing eligibility:

- School policies may require children to attend school or to achieve at least a minimum grade point average. This Databook addresses only the school requirements imposed on dependent children, not those that may be imposed on minor parents. (Although not

⁴⁴ For more information about states' policies in response to the pandemic, see Shantz, Katie, Sarah Knowles, Ilham Dehry, and Linda Giannarelli (2023). *State TANF Policies During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. OPRE Report 2023-003, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services., and the full underlying database.

included in this report, information about school requirements for minor parents is available in the WRD.)

- States may also offer a school bonus, which provides financial incentives for assistance units whose children meet specific attendance or achievement standards.
- Immunization policies require parents/caretakers to have their children immunized. Sometimes, proof of immunization for children is not required if they are enrolled in school because the school systems impose their own immunization requirements. Additionally, the immunization requirement may be waived if the immunization requirement might risk a child's health or violate a family's religious beliefs.
- Health screening requirements may include regular checkups for both children and adults, although the requirements usually apply only to children. Other health requirements primarily involve compliance with the rules of the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment (EPSDT) program.

Requirements are only included in this table if (1) they are either explicitly mentioned in the state's TANF manual as a requirement for cash assistance or recipients must sign a contract including one of the requirements to receive benefits and (2) a sanction results from noncompliance. The dollar amounts of bonuses and the dollar amounts of sanctions for not complying with requirements are not included in the table but are available in the WRD. This table also captures behavioral requirement suspensions in place in 2021 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴⁵

Standard policies from 2021 include:

- Thirty-seven states have some sort of school requirements recipients must follow to remain eligible.
- Twenty-four states have immunization requirements for recipients.
- Five states require health screenings for recipients.

⁴⁵ For more information about states' policies in response to the pandemic, see Shantz, Katie, Sarah Knowles, Ilham Dehry, and Linda Giannarelli (2023). *State TANF Policies During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. OPRE Report 2023-003, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services., and the full underlying database.

B. What work activities are required?

Under the TANF block grant, the federal government requires states to (1) meet the annual work participation rates determined by the federal government and (2) ensure that every recipient is working (as defined by the state) as soon as the state determines he or she is able or after 24 months of benefit receipt, whichever is earlier.⁴⁶ States that do not meet the federal requirements may be sanctioned financially.⁴⁷ States may determine who is exempt from activities requirements, what activities are possible for non-exempt recipients, and what sanctions are imposed on individuals who do not comply with requirements.⁴⁸

Work-Related Activity Exemptions for Single-Parent Head of Unit (Table III.B.1)

States may, but are not required to, exempt certain individuals or groups from participating in work-related activities. Table III.B.1 describes each state's rules for exempting a single-parent head of an assistance unit from work-related requirements. The table includes exemptions for individuals who are working a specified number of hours in an unsubsidized job, are ill or incapacitated, are caring for an ill or incapacitated person, are older than a state-specified age, are in a specified month of pregnancy, or are caring for a child under a specified age. An additional column captures exemptions from work-related activity requirements that were instituted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and in place in 2021.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ The work participation rate is the percentage of the state TANF caseload with a work-eligible individual that must be participating in work activities in order to meet federal requirements. In 2021, federal rules required that among a state's cases that include a work-eligible individual, 50 percent participate in work activities an average of 30 hours a week (an average of 20 hours per week if a single-parent family with a child under 6); two-parent families (with two work-eligible individuals) were required to participate at a rate of 90 percent for an average of 35 hours a week. The caseload reduction credit reduces states' work participation rate targets. For more information on the work participation rate, see the FFY 2014 and 2015 TANF Report to Congress available at https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ofa/12th_annual_tanf_report_to_congress_final.pdf (PDF).

⁴⁷ Though the work participation rate was not waived during the COVID-19 pandemic, states are not necessarily financially penalized for failure to meet this requirement. For more information on the work participation rate during the COVID-19 pandemic, see "Questions and answers about TANF and the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic," March 24, 2020, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ofa/policy-guidance/tanf-acf-pi-2020-01-questions-and-answers-about-tanf-and-coronavirus-disease>.

⁴⁸ What a state requires of a particular group of recipients may be more or less than what would be required for those individuals to "count" as participating in work activities for purposes of federal calculations. The Welfare Rules Database captures work requirements and other policies as determined by the states, rather than the policies to meet the federal participation requirements.

⁴⁹ For more information about states' policies in response to the pandemic, see Shantz, Katie, Sarah Knowles, Ilham Dehry, and Linda Giannarelli (2023). State TANF Policies During the COVID-19 Pandemic. OPRE Report 2023-003, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services., and the full underlying database.

Standard policies for 2021 include:

- Thirty-two states exempt single-parent unit heads from work requirements if they are ill or incapacitated.
- Eighteen states exempt single-parent unit heads from work requirements if they are 60 years or older, one state (New Jersey) exempts single-parent heads if they are 62 years or older, and six states exempt single-parent heads if they are 65 years or older.
- Eight states exempt single-parent unit heads from work requirements during some portion of a pregnancy.
- Three states (Colorado, Idaho, and New Mexico) do not allow any of the work-related activity exemptions shown in the table.

The exemptions shown in this table are the most common, but this list is not exhaustive. For other exemption criteria, see the WRD. Also, some states will consider some of these criteria as “good cause” for noncompliance, even if they do not provide an explicit exemption in these cases.

Related tables: See Table L6 for information about the exemptions for a parent caring for a young child for selected years from 1996 through 2021.

Work-Related Activity Requirements for Single-Parent Head of Unit (Table III.B.2)

Work programs vary widely from state to state based on several factors, including who must work, how much work is required, and what activities are considered work. Table III.B.2 provides a general overview of state activity requirements. The table describes when the recipient must begin participating, the activities that may be allowed, and how many hours the recipient must participate each week, including what share of those hours can be spent in education and training programs. Not all assistance units have the same work requirements. For simplicity, this table only includes the activities requirements for units headed by a single-parent 20 years old or older with children at least 6 years of age. Work activity requirements for other units may be found in the WRD. The table also captures activity requirement suspensions in place in 2021 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ States used a variety of methods to adjust activity requirements in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. States that suspended activities requirements temporarily terminated the requirement to participate in any activities. In states with activities exemptions, states instead exempted participants from the requirements using a blanket exemption, an exemption from only certain activities, a good cause exemption for all participants, or determined good cause on a case-by-case basis. For more information about states’ policies in response to the pandemic, see

Standard policies for 2021 include:

- Thirty-six states require single-parent unit heads to immediately meet work requirements upon benefit receipt.
- Forty states require single-parent unit heads to work a minimum of 30 hours per week.

This table should be interpreted as providing an overview of states' work-related activity policies rather than a full picture of those policies. In particular, caseworker manuals (which are the primary source documents for the WRD) do not generally indicate the likelihood that a recipient will be assigned to one activity or another. Thus, two states could have the same potential activities but have very different policies for how often different activities are assigned in practice. Alternatively, one state might include a potential activity not listed in another state's list but in practice rarely assign anyone to that activity. Despite these limitations, the table provides a starting point for understanding the range of work-related requirements across states.

Sanction Policies for Noncompliance with Work Requirements for Single-Parent Head of Unit (Table III.B.3)

If adults required to participate in activities do not comply with the requirements, the state can sanction the unit. States have discretion in defining what constitutes noncompliance and the consequences for noncompliance. Typically, if a recipient does not participate in assigned activities for the specified number of hours, the recipient is not complying and could be sanctioned. A sanction generally results in the removal of the noncompliant individual from the unit for benefit computation, a percentage reduction in the entire unit's benefit, a full benefit sanction, or complete case closure. A full benefit sanction results in the unit losing its entire benefit for some period, whereas a complete case closure often requires the applicant to reapply after the sanction period. Often states increase the severity of the sanction based on the number of times or the amount of time the individual is noncompliant.

Table III.B.3 describes sanction policies for failing to comply with work requirements. The table provides both the initial sanction (for the first instance of noncompliance) and the most severe sanction (after multiple instances of noncompliance). For both the initial and most severe sanctions, the table describes the amount of the reduction in benefits and the duration of the sanction. When the sanction is described as "adult portion of the benefit," the state re-

Shantz, Katie, Sarah Knowles, Ilham Dehry, and Linda Giannarelli (2023). State TANF Policies During the COVID-19 Pandemic. OPRE Report 2023-003, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services., and the full underlying database.

computes benefits using an assistance unit size that excludes the noncompliant adult. (If the adult has any income, some or all of it is deemed available to the children to prevent an increase in benefit.) When the sanction is instead described as “pro rata portion of the benefit,” the state reduces the benefit by one-half in the case of a two-person unit with a noncompliant member, by one-third in the case of a three-person unit with a noncompliant member, and so on.

The table includes two additional columns that describe sanction policies in place in 2021 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many states suspended or removed sanctions to support families who were unable to comply with activity requirements. If a state “suspended new sanctions,” individuals would not be newly sanctioned for failure to comply with activities requirements. When a state “lifted existing sanctions,” families had their active sanctions removed at the beginning of the pandemic and were allowed to receive benefits if otherwise eligible. This table also describes the treatment of assistance units who had their sanction lifted once the sanction suspension ended in the footnotes.⁵¹

Standard policy highlights from 2021 include:

- Eleven states reduce the entire TANF benefit by a fixed percentage for the first case of noncompliance with work requirements. Eight states reduce the TANF benefit by removing the adult portion of the benefit for the first case of noncompliance with work requirements. Illinois and Maryland reduce the adult portion of the benefit by 30 percent. Washington reduces the TANF benefit by the adult portion or 40 percent, whichever is greater.
- Thirty states close the TANF case as the most severe sanction for noncompliance with work requirements.

The WRD includes more details on sanctions, including any sanctions that occur between the initial and most severe sanctions.

Related table: See table L7 for information about the most severe sanction for selected years from 1996 through 2021.

⁵¹ For more information about states’ policies in response to the pandemic, see Shantz, Katie, Sarah Knowles, Ilham Dehry, and Linda Giannarelli (2023). *State TANF Policies During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. OPRE Report 2023-003, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services., and the full underlying database.

Work-Related Activity Requirements for Parents Outside the Unit and Nonparent Caretakers (Table III.B.4)

Parents and caretakers who are not included in the assistance unit are generally not required to engage in work-related activities. However, in some cases, adults who are not included in the assistance unit are still subject to work-related activity requirements, with variations in policy across states and by the reason that the adult is not in the unit. Nonparent caretakers who are in the assistance unit are generally required to participate in the same way as parents, but these policies vary across the states. Table III.B.4 shows the work-related activity requirements for parents who are not in the assistance unit due to immigrant status or due to time limits. The table also shows the policies for nonparent caretakers who are not in the assistance unit and for nonparent caretakers who are in the assistance unit. An additional column captures activity requirement suspensions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, in effect at any point in 2021.⁵²

Key policies for 2021 include:

- Thirty-seven states do not require parents outside the assistance unit due to immigrant status to participate in work requirements. Participation is required in 11 states and optional in three states.
- Among the four states in which a child-only unit may be created due to a family reaching a time limit, two states (Indiana and Oregon) require parents outside the assistance unit due to time limits to participate in work requirements, one state (Texas) offers parents outside the assistance unit due to time limits the option to participate in work requirements, and one state (California) does not require parents outside the assistance unit to participate in work requirements.
- Forty-nine states do not require nonparent caretakers outside the assistance unit to participate in work requirements; their participation is optional in two states (New York and Oklahoma).
- All of the 47 states that ever include a nonparent caretaker in the assistance unit require those caretakers to participate in work requirements.

⁵² For more information about states' policies in response to the pandemic, see Shantz, Katie, Sarah Knowles, Ilham Dehry, and Linda Giannarelli (2023). *State TANF Policies During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. OPRE Report 2023-003, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services., and the full underlying database.

Ongoing Eligibility and Transitional Benefits

The tables in this chapter of the Databook describe key aspects of the rules that affect recipients' ongoing eligibility as of July 1, 2021. After a family applies for assistance and passes all eligibility tests, its members become recipients and a benefit is calculated. However, the recipients still face eligibility requirements that affect their ability to continue receiving benefits. States may impose income and asset tests on recipients, which generally differ from the initial eligibility tests for applicants. Having an additional child may or may not affect eligibility limits and benefits. States also impose time limits, which reduce or eliminate benefits to recipients based on their accumulated total months of benefit receipt. Additionally, states may provide some "transitional" cash benefit to families who are leaving TANF. The following four sections describe the requirements that affect ongoing eligibility and transitional assistance.

A. What eligibility tests must recipient families pass for continuing eligibility?

Like applicants, recipients must pass both nonfinancial and financial tests to remain eligible for assistance each month. The nonfinancial rules generally do not vary for applicants and recipients; however, for some rules, such as two-parent eligibility, they may. Unlike nonfinancial rules, the financial rules often differ for applicants and recipients. The following provides more information on two-parent hours tests, treatment of child support income, asset tests, income eligibility tests, and earned income disregards for recipient units, as well as the maximum amount a recipient can earn and remain eligible.

Eligibility Rules for Two-Parent Recipient Units In Which Neither Parent Has a Disability (Table IV.A.1)

In addition to the standard eligibility tests that all recipient units must pass, some states impose "hours tests" on two-parent units. Under an hours test, the unit is not eligible if the principal wage earner is working more than a specified number of hours per month. States may apply this rule when determining the initial or continuing eligibility of two-parent families. For states providing benefits to two-parent families, table IV.A.1 describes the hours test imposed on two-

parent recipients where neither parent has a disability (“unemployed-parent” families, in the former AFDC program).⁵³ Policies for 2021 include:

- Forty-six states have no limit on hours worked per month for two-parent recipient units in which neither parent has a disability.
- Mississippi and South Dakota limit the hours worked in a month to 100.

Related tables: See table I.B.2 for details on the hours test for applicants and table L2 for information on the rules for two-parent units for selected years from 1996 through 2021.

Treatment of Child Support Income for Recipients (Table IV.A.2)

TANF recipients are required to assign their child support income to the state. The state then decides what portion, if any, of the child support collected is counted for eligibility determination; what portion, if any, is transferred to the family as unearned income; and how much of the portion transferred to the family is counted as income in determining the benefit.⁵⁴ Table IV.A.2 describes each state’s treatment of child support income for recipients.

The first column of the table displays the amount of collected child support counted for recipients’ eligibility determination (regardless of whether any is transferred to the family). Those states that do *not* count child support collections for determining recipients’ eligibility typically establish some method to ensure that families with high and continuing child support amounts do not remain on TANF indefinitely. The second column of the table shows what portion of the collected child support is transferred to the family as unearned income, and the third column indicates how much of that transferred amount is disregarded for benefit computation. As an example, the \$50 “pass-through” that was allowed under AFDC would be represented in this table with a “\$50” coded in both the second and third columns; \$50 is transferred to the unit as unearned income, and, of that amount, all \$50 is disregarded for benefit computation.

⁵³ Louisiana, New Hampshire, and North Dakota no longer provide TANF benefits to two-parent assistance units in which neither parent has a disability. Also, in some states, benefits are provided to two-parent units under solely state-funded or separate state programs funded by state monies rather than the TANF grant. The table includes those states as providing benefits to two-parent families regardless of the funding source.

⁵⁴ States are required to pay a share (equal to the state’s Medicaid match rate) of all child support collected on behalf of TANF recipients to the federal government. States may still provide all child support collected to the recipient; in that case, the state must use other funds to pay the federal share.

Key policies in place as of July 2021 include:

- Twenty-eight states consider at least a portion of the child support income collected by the state for purposes of a recipient's eligibility.
- Twenty-two states do not transfer any portion of the child support collected to the family.

Asset Limits for Recipients and Related Assets Policies (Table IV.A.3)

States determine the maximum amount of assets—including vehicles and restricted assets—a family may hold and still remain eligible for benefits. Table IV.A.3 describes each state's asset tests for recipients. The first column of the table provides the limit on the value of unrestricted assets a family may hold and still be eligible for assistance. Unrestricted assets include the cash value of any asset the state counts toward the limit, regardless of the asset's purpose. The asset limits applied to determine a recipient's ongoing eligibility may vary from limits applied to determine an applicant's initial eligibility.

The second column describes whether some or all of the value of a vehicle or vehicles is excluded in determining the amount of a family's assets for eligibility purposes. When a portion of the vehicle's value is exempted, the value may be given in terms of equity or fair-market value. The fair-market value is the amount for which the vehicle could be sold, while the equity value is the fair-market value minus any amount still owed on the vehicle. When a family still owes money on a vehicle, the equity value will be less than the fair-market value, so this distinction is important when comparing vehicle exemption amounts across states.

The last three columns describe programs that allow families to save money in a special account, often with no fees, sometimes with their savings matched with funds from the government or other entity (referred to as the match rate in the tables), and with some requirements placed on the uses of the funds. These programs may be available to non-TANF as well as TANF families, but even those not explicitly connected with the TANF program are shown in the table to provide a more complete picture of asset-related policies affecting TANF families. In states that limit the countable assets that families may have and still be eligible for TANF, the funds in an account of this type are not counted against the asset limit. For example, a unit may be allowed to save money toward educational expenses or the purchase of a home without that money counting toward its overall asset limit. Some, but not all, restricted accounts are federally defined individual development accounts (IDAs). In the table, accounts that states specify as IDAs are distinguished from other restricted accounts.

Key policies from 2021 include:

- All but nine states have asset limits for recipients. For the states that do have asset limits for recipients, the limit that applies to most recipients ranges from \$1,000 in Georgia, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Texas to \$15,000 in Michigan. (California’s asset limit for assistance units with an older adult or a person with a disability is \$15,317. The asset limit for all other assistance units is \$10,211.)
- Forty states offer some type of restricted asset account.

Related tables: See tables L8 and L9 for information on asset rules in effect in selected years from 1996 through 2021. See table I.C.1 for the asset tests applied at application.

Income Eligibility Tests for Recipients (Table IV.A.4)

Table IV.A.4 describes income eligibility tests that states impose to determine whether a recipient (whose income might have increased since initial eligibility) is eligible to continue receiving benefits. The table indicates which state income standard is used for each test. Even if a family passes all eligibility tests, it is possible in some states that the family will not qualify for a positive benefit under the state’s benefit computation formula. In those cases, the family will not receive a benefit. In some cases, states have streamlined their eligibility policies and do not perform any income tests other than the implicit test imposed by benefit computation. In these states, the table indicates “no explicit tests.” Key policies for 2021 include:

- Twenty-eight states have an explicit net income, gross income, unearned income, or gross earnings test for recipients.
- Nine states require recipients to pass two or more income eligibility tests.
- Twenty-three states have no explicit income eligibility tests for recipients.

Related tables: To determine the value of the particular standard for a family size of three, see table I.E.3. Tables I.D.1, I.D.2, and I.D.4 describe policies concerning the deeming of income from grandparents, stepparents, and immigrant parents, table IV.A.2 shows the extent to which child support collections are counted in determining gross income for income eligibility tests, and appendix 2 captures the treatment of unemployment insurance income during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021. Table IV.A.5 describes the earned income disregards used for the net income tests listed in IV.A.4. The tables in sections I.B, I.D, and II.A are also relevant to ongoing eligibility. In most states, recipients are required to pass both nonfinancial and financial tests to continue receiving benefits.

Earned Income Disregards for Continuing Income Eligibility Purposes (Table IV.A.5)

Table IV.A.5 describes the earned income disregards associated with the net income tests in table IV.A.4, which may differ from the amount of earnings disregarded for purposes of initial eligibility or from the amount of earnings disregarded for benefit computation. Policies for 2021 include:

- Ten states use earned income disregards for recipient eligibility purposes.
- All but one of the remaining states do not use an earned income disregard because they do not have an explicit net income test. In Oregon, recipients without earnings who are not in the JOBS Plus component face an explicit net income test, but it only includes unearned sources of income.

Related tables: Table I.E.2 contains the earned income disregards that apply to new TANF applicants for the purpose of determining their initial eligibility, and table II.A.1 gives the earned income disregards for benefit computation.

Maximum Earnings for Ongoing Eligibility for a Family of Three (Table IV.A.6)

Table IV.A.6 synthesizes the various financial rules related to ongoing eligibility to provide information on the maximum amount of income a family of three can earn and remain eligible for assistance in the 2nd, 7th, 13th, and 25th month of combining work and welfare. This calculation incorporates information on the income eligibility rules for recipients, earned income disregards for ongoing eligibility and benefit computation, benefit computation policies, and the eligibility and payment standards. The calculation determines the maximum amount of earnings a three-person family can have and still be technically eligible for assistance in each state, in each month. Technical eligibility does not mean the unit will necessarily receive a cash benefit—most states only distribute a cash benefit if it is over \$10—but the unit will have passed all eligibility tests and be eligible for some positive amount.

The calculation assumes the assistance unit includes one parent and two children, has only earned income, has no child care expenses, contains no children subject to a family cap, has no special needs, pays for all shelter costs with no subsidies, and is subject to the benefit standard that applies to the majority of the state's caseload.

Policy highlights for 2021 include:

- The maximum earnings a recipient can have and remain eligible for assistance in month two ranges from \$585 in Arizona to \$3,660 in Massachusetts. Five states have no maximum in the second month.

- In 16 states, the maximum earnings allowed are lower at the 25-month point (the latest month shown in the table) compared with maximum possible earnings in the 2nd month.

Related tables: Table I.E.4 provides information on the amount an applicant may earn and be eligible for assistance. Table L3 displays how much an applicant may earn and be initially eligible for selected years from 1996 through 2021.

B. Are children eligible if born while the family receives benefits?

Benefits to recipients who give birth to a child while receiving aid may or may not be affected by the addition of the child to the assistance unit. A type of policy often referred to as a “family cap” prevents or limits an increase in a family’s benefit when another child is born. In the states with this type of policy, the benefit increase an assistance unit would otherwise receive for adding another member to the unit is limited.

Family Cap Policies (Table IV.B.1)

Table IV.B.1 describes states’ family cap policies. The table first indicates whether the state imposes a family cap, then provides the number of months following the case opening after which a newborn child is excluded from the assistance unit. The table also describes the impact on the benefit when an additional child is born (whether there is no increase in benefit or some increase smaller than what would occur in the absence of a family cap). In some cases, the amount of cash paid directly to the family does not increase, but the increment that would have been paid in the absence of the policy is instead paid to a third party or provided in the form of a voucher. That information is noted in the table as “none (voucher)” and is explained further in the footnotes. States with “none (disregard)” displayed in the table increase the earned income disregards for families that have a capped child; again, more details are provided in the footnotes. The table also indicates how long a cap, once applied, endures. The table indicates “always capped” if a family is never able to regain benefits for a capped child, even after the case has been closed for a period. Otherwise, the table provides the number of months a family must remain off TANF for the cap to be removed—that is, for the child to be included in the benefit computation should the family apply for assistance again. Policies for 2021 include:

- Twelve states have a family cap policy.

- For the states with family cap policies, seven states do not increase the cash benefit for an additional child born to the unit. Arizona allows an additional earned income disregard for each month the unit member is excluded, equal to the lost benefit amount for units subject to the family cap. South Carolina provides benefits through vouchers up to the amount of increase in cash benefits the unit would have received for the child.
- Three states (Connecticut, Florida, and Georgia) do increase the benefit, but at less than the normal increment.
- Nine states will not remove the special treatment of the capped child after the family's case has been closed for a specified number of months. Of the three states that discontinue special treatment after case closure, a family's case must have been closed anywhere between 1 month in Tennessee to 12 months in North Dakota in order for the state to remove the family cap.

Related tables: See table L10 for information on states' family cap policies in selected years from 1996 through 2021.

C. How long can a family receive benefits?

Since the passage of PRWORA, assistance units that include adults have generally been able to receive no more than 60 months of federally-funded TANF aid. Therefore, most states have limited the number of months an assistance unit that includes adults may receive benefits. (Child-only units are generally not subject to time limits.)

States impose two basic types of limits on recipients: (1) lifetime limits (either the federal 60-month lifetime limit or a shorter state-determined limit), which permanently eliminate the entire benefit, or (2) other intermittent state time limits (periodic time limits, benefit waiting periods, or benefit reduction time limits), which interrupt or reduce benefits for a certain period but do not eliminate them entirely. Both types of time limits may terminate benefits to the entire unit or just the adults in the unit. In addition, while some states impose only the 60-month federal lifetime limits or only other state time limits, other states impose a combination of the two types.

Not all assistance units are subject to time limits. States may continue to provide federally-funded benefits to up to 20 percent of their caseload (referred to as the "hardship exemption")

beyond the federal 60-month lifetime limit.⁵⁵ Exactly which families are eligible to receive this extension of benefits (which adds months of assistance after reaching the federal lifetime limit) varies by state. Families who receive a hardship exemption remain eligible as long as the circumstances that led to their extension continue to exist. In addition, states may use state-only funds to provide various exemptions (which stop the time limit clock from accruing months towards the 60-month lifetime limit) or extensions (which extend assistance beyond 60 months).

Time Limit Policies (Table IV.C.1)

Under TANF, the federal government imposed a maximum 60-month lifetime limit on receipt of TANF funds by families with an adult. Therefore, a family is generally no longer eligible for federal cash assistance if an adult family member has received federally-funded TANF assistance for 60 months, either consecutively or nonconsecutively.⁵⁶ Some states have adopted shorter lifetime limits, while others have chosen to fund recipients after the 60 months with state dollars. States may also choose to terminate benefits only for the adults in the unit, in which case all children in the assistance unit remain eligible for benefits as a child-only unit after the lifetime limit expires.

The first four columns of table IV.C.1 describe states' lifetime limit policies.⁵⁷ The first column indicates the total months in which the state allows benefits, and the second, third, and fourth columns identify whose benefits are terminated. The final column describes policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, in place in 2021. If a state suspended time limits, families do not accrue months or cannot be newly terminated due to reaching the time limit. In states that removed time limits, families that have already reached the time limit may reapply and receive benefits if otherwise eligible.⁵⁸

Standard policies for lifetime time limits in 2021 include:

- Thirty-six states have a lifetime limit of 60 months.

⁵⁵ Note that federal rules refer to this policy as a hardship "exemption," but the WRD definition would consider this policy an "extension," as it adds additional months of assistance after a family reaches the lifetime limit.

⁵⁶ The TANF regulations indicate that the federal 60-month lifetime limit does not apply to child-only units (units that include no adults). However, a few states count months in which units are child-only because of the ineligibility of their parents based on immigrant status or illegal activity.

⁵⁷ This table describes time limit policies that apply to units with an adult in the assistance unit.

⁵⁸ For more information about states' policies in response to the pandemic, see Shantz, Katie, Sarah Knowles, Ilham Dehry, and Linda Giannarelli (2023). *State TANF Policies During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. OPRE Report 2023-003, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services., and the full underlying database.

- In states with time limits, 47 states terminate the benefit for the entire unit once the time limit is reached. Two states (California and Oregon) terminate the benefit for the adult only. Indiana terminates the benefit for the adult only once the benefit reduction time limit is reached and for the entire unit once the lifetime limit is reached.

States have developed several other time limits that interrupt or reduce benefits. These limits are imposed instead of or in addition to the lifetime limits and include periodic limits and benefit waiting periods. Under a periodic limit, a unit (or the head of the unit) may receive benefits for only a specified number of months in a given period. For example, a state might impose a 12-out-of-24-month periodic limit on the unit, in which the unit is eligible to receive only 12 months of benefits in any 24-month period. Under a benefit waiting period, a unit (or the head of the unit) is ineligible for benefits for a specified number of months after the unit has received benefits for another specified number of months. To use the 12 and 24 example again, a unit may receive 12 months of assistance and is then ineligible for 24 months. This means the unit may receive 12 months of benefits over any period, but after it receives its 12th month of assistance, it will be ineligible for benefits for the next 24 months. Both the periodic limit and the benefit waiting period limit may apply to the entire unit or just the adult head of the unit. The intermittent time limit columns of table IV.C.1 describe other state time limit policies. The first of these columns describes the type of other time limit imposed, and the second and third columns identify whose benefits are terminated. Policies for intermittent time limits in 2021 include:

- Eight states have time limit policies other than lifetime limit policies. Of those eight states, three impose a periodic time limit and five impose a benefit waiting period.
- Seven states terminate the benefit for the entire unit once this non-lifetime time limit is reached and one state (Texas) terminates the benefit for the adult only.

Related tables: Tables IV.C.2(a) and (b) and IV.C.3(a) and (b) describe time limit exemption and extension policies.

Time Limit Exemption and Extension Policies (Tables IV.C.2(a) and (b) and IV.C.3(a) and (b))

Exemption and extension policies are important for understanding time limits in the states. Exemptions and extensions could significantly increase the number of months beyond the state or federal time limit that an assistance unit may receive benefits and, depending on the criteria, could impact a substantial portion of a state's caseload. As defined for the purposes of the WRD, exemptions are policies that stop a recipient's time-limit "clock" before it reaches the 60-

month lifetime limit, and extensions are policies that prolong a recipient’s eligibility once the unit has reached the 60-month lifetime limit.

Tables IV.C.2(a) and (b) and IV.C.3(a) and (b) describe time limit exemption and extension policies, respectively. The exemption and extension policies for both lifetime limits and other limits are displayed in the tables. If the policies vary depending on the type of time limit, the differences in the policies are described in the tables’ footnotes. The funding source for benefits received under an exemption or extension may vary between federal and state funds. Families receiving an exemption from the time limit are assumed to be funded with state-only dollars. Families receiving an extension may be funded with federal dollars if they meet the federal “hardship exemption” criteria as described above; however, states may also use their own funding for other extensions. In some cases, a state may use its own funds to provide an exemption or extension in a manner not permitted by federal TANF rules. For example, several states allowed an exemption or extension for months during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021.⁵⁹ Any policies in the tables that conflict with federal TANF requirements are assumed to use other funding. Similarly, states that provide extensions for all families after reaching the 60-month federal lifetime limit are assumed to be using non-federal funds.

Standard time limit exemption and extension policies for 2021 include:

- Forty-one states provide time limit exemptions for at least one of the circumstances listed in the tables.
- Forty-six states provide time limit extensions in at least some cases shown in the tables.

Related tables: Table IV.C.1 describes the time limit policies for each state.

D. What happens after cash assistance ends?

While some families might lose TANF eligibility after reaching a state or federal time limit, other families might become ineligible due to other circumstances, such as increased earnings. Several states elect to provide a transitional cash benefit to these families.

⁵⁹ For more information about states’ policies in response to the pandemic, see Shantz, Katie, Sarah Knowles, Ilham Dehry, and Linda Giannarelli (2023). *State TANF Policies During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. OPRE Report 2023-003, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services., and the full underlying database.

Transitional Cash Benefits (Table IV.D.1)

Table IV.D.1 describes state policies for providing continued cash benefits to families transitioning off the TANF program, usually due to increased work and earnings. The table captures only those transitional benefits paid as cash. (Some transitional benefits are in the form of increases in supplemental food benefits.) Also, the table only captures benefits provided to families who previously received TANF; it does not capture benefits directed more broadly at working families regardless of prior TANF receipt. The table first describes whether a state provides a transitional cash benefit and the hours of work required for participants to receive it. It also displays the monthly benefit amount and the length of time a family can receive this benefit.

Key policies for 2021 include:

- Twenty-five states provide transitional cash benefits with time limits that range from 1 month in South Dakota and Washington to 24 months in Arkansas, New Jersey, and New York.

Additional details on these rules and information on other transitional benefits—such as transitional child care benefits—can be found in the WRD.

Policies across Time, 1996–2021

This chapter of the Databook includes longitudinal tables for selected areas of policy from 1996, 2004, 2012, and 2021 (as of July 1 of each year). For years not shown in these tables, and for prior-year data for policies not covered in this section, see the full online WRD data.

To help users more easily identify changes in policies across time, the changes from one year to the next have been bolded in all the longitudinal tables. Because the tables do not represent every year, the changes may have occurred in a year before the bolded year. Information on when specific changes occurred is available in the WRD.

The following discussion provides more information on the policies included in this section and the specific policies discussed in the tables.

Formal diversion: Table L1 indicates which states have a formal diversion program that diverts eligible applicants or recipients from ongoing TANF receipt by providing a one-time cash payment directly to the family or to a vendor for expenses incurred by the family. Other strategies that states may use to divert applicants from ongoing receipt of cash benefits (such as requiring an applicant to participate in job search or resource and referral services) are not identified as diversion programs in the table.

States did not have the option to divert units under AFDC. However, a few states experimented with diversion through waivers. Generally, diversion programs began as pilot projects in a few counties and, after TANF, were expanded statewide.⁶⁰

Two-parent eligibility: Table L2 describes states' deviation from the prior federal AFDC rules for two-parent, assistance units in which neither parent has a disability, over time. The key AFDC policies were the 100-hour rule for applicants and recipients, a 6-out-of-13-quarter work history test, and a 30-day waiting period. "Standard AFDC" describes the states that impose the AFDC rules. "Modified" describes the states that no longer impose all the former AFDC requirements on units but still impose some additional requirements. The specific combination of modified rules is footnoted. States that no longer impose any special requirements on two-parent units are denoted by "none."

⁶⁰ Years in which the state implemented a diversion program as a pilot project in only a few counties are footnoted.

Many states began modifying or removing special requirements for two-parent units under waivers. This process continued under TANF, which does not require states to impose any special requirements on two-parent units.

Initial eligibility at application: Table L3 calculates the amount of earnings a three-person unit can receive and still be technically eligible for assistance. Technically eligible means the unit is eligible for assistance but may not actually receive a cash benefit. Most states will not pay out a benefit for less than a specified amount (usually \$10), but as long as the unit's potential benefit is positive, the unit is technically eligible. The calculations in this table are based on the states' income eligibility tests, earned income disregards, benefit computation, and eligibility and payment standards.

Earned income disregards for benefit computation: Table L4 describes the earned income disregards allowed in determining net income used for benefit computation. The disregards in this table apply to recipients.⁶¹ Earned income disregards for benefit computation under AFDC were a standard \$120 and 33.3 percent for the first four months, \$120 for the next eight months, and \$90 thereafter. Through waivers, many states began changing their disregard policies, which often allowed units to keep more of their income and remain eligible for aid. This broadening of disregards continued under TANF, which allows states to determine their own disregard policies.

Maximum monthly benefit for a family of three with no income: Table L5 indicates the benefit that a family of three will receive if it has no income. The benefits are calculated assuming the assistance unit includes one parent and two children, contains no children subject to a family cap, has no special needs, pays for all shelter costs with no subsidies, and is subject to the benefit standard that applies to the majority of the state's caseload.

Maximum benefits have always varied across states. Benefit computation formulas and payment standards were two policies that states were able to determine under AFDC. The wide variation in states' benefits still exists under TANF. In many states, benefits have changed relatively infrequently across time.

Work-related exemption when caring for a child under X months: Table L6 indicates what age a child must be under for the unit head to be exempt from work-related requirements. The unit head is assumed to be a single parent age 20 or older with a high school diploma or GED.

⁶¹ If units in the first month of receipt (applicants) receive different disregards, they are footnoted. This table does not include disregards related to child care or any other special disregards for units affected by family caps or time limits.

Under AFDC, parents were exempt from the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) program if they had children younger than 36 months old.⁶² Under waivers, many states began reducing the age of the child exemption. Then, with the passage of TANF, the federal government reduced the maximum age for the exemption to 12 months for the states' participation rate calculations. States can exempt units with children younger or older than 12 months, but units with children over 12 months old will be included in their work participation rate denominator. States with waivers were allowed to continue their previous exemption policy under TANF until the waivers expired.

Most severe sanction policy for noncompliance with work requirements for single-parent adults: Table L7 describes the most severe sanction policy for noncompliance with work requirements. Under AFDC, the worst-case sanction for not complying with work requirements was the removal of the adult for benefit computation purposes. The unit was sanctioned for six months or until compliance, whichever was longer. By 1996, a few states had begun to impose more severe sanctions on noncompliant units. These policies continued and expanded under TANF. The federal government requires that all states sanction individuals for not complying with work requirements, but states are allowed to determine the severity of the sanction.

Asset tests: Tables L8 and L9 describe the asset limits and vehicle exemptions for recipients, respectively. If the tests differ for applicants, they are footnoted. Since the beginning of TANF, states' asset limits (and the decision whether to impose limits) have generally trended toward fewer restrictions or higher asset thresholds. Under AFDC rules, the federal government set the maximum amount of assets a unit could retain and still remain eligible at \$1,000 of countable assets, with an exclusion of \$1,500 of the equity value of a vehicle. During the early 1990s, states began experimenting with higher asset limits and vehicle exemptions through waivers. Under TANF, states determine the maximum allowable level of assets.

Family caps: Table L10 indicates which states have implemented family cap policies. States did not have the option to cap additional children under AFDC. However, a few states experimented with family caps through waivers.⁶³ TANF neither requires nor prohibits family cap policies.

⁶² States had the option to require JOBS participation of parents with children as young as 12 months old.

⁶³ Years in which the state imposed a family cap as a pilot project in only a few counties are footnoted.

Appendix 1: Component Descriptions

The WRD and this report define a state's TANF program as having a component when the state divides its entire caseload into mutually exclusive groups that are treated differently across more than one policy area. These groups are usually defined by more than one characteristic. Not every state uses components. For those that do, appendix table 1 describes how recipients are divided among the components, how long recipients can remain in the various components, and any interaction between the components in the state.

Appendix 2: Treatment of Unemployment Insurance Income

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government created special federally-funded unemployment assistance programs that expanded eligibility for benefits, increased benefit amounts, and lengthened the number of weeks that people could receive benefits. States had discretion in how they counted the unemployment income under these pandemic programs as well as unemployment aid under the regular unemployment insurance benefit system—which includes state-determined benefits that last 26 weeks in most states, plus a shorter period of Extended Benefits that triggers on automatically during periods of high unemployment.⁶⁴ This table captures the treatment of different types of unemployment income for initial eligibility determination, continuing eligibility determination, and benefit computation. The first column of this table shows states’ treatment of unemployment benefits under the regular unemployment insurance benefit system, not counting the pandemic programs; specifically, the table shows whether these benefits were disregarded at any point during 2021. The second column indicates the treatment of Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC), which provided recipients with an additional \$300 in weekly benefits on top of their state benefits, starting in January 2021.^{65,66} Finally, the third column shows the treatment of benefits paid under Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA, which allowed some people to be eligible who would not have qualified under regular policies), and Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC, which extended weeks of benefits). Information on states’ treatment of all earned and unearned income can be found in the Welfare Rules Database.

⁶⁴ For more information about states’ policies in response to the pandemic, see Shantz, Katie, Sarah Knowles, Ilham Dehry, and Linda Giannarelli (2023). *State TANF Policies During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. OPRE Report 2023-003, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services., and the full underlying database.

⁶⁵ For information on the FPUC benefits provided for a period in 2020, see Shantz, Katie, Linda Giannarelli, Ilham Dehry, Sarah Knowles, and Sarah Minton (2022). “State TANF Policies During the COVID-19 Pandemic” OPRE Report 2021-233. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

⁶⁶ For information on expansions to unemployment compensation, see U.S. Congressional Research Service, “Unemployment Insurance: Legislative Issues in the 117th Congress”, May 12, 2021, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46789> (PDF).

Policy highlights for 2021 include:

- Two states, Arizona and Hawaii, did not count regular unemployment insurance benefits and Extended Benefits for eligibility determination and benefit computation at some point in 2021.
- Thirty-three states did not count the \$300 Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC) benefits as income, and eight states did not count the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) and Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC) benefits.

Appendix 3: Special Benefit Computation Policies During the COVID-19 Pandemic

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, some states offered additional benefits to eligible recipients. This table captures the amount and frequency of additional benefit payments between March 2020 and December 2021. (Note that the period of time covered by this table is longer than for any other table included in this report, in order to include states that provided extra benefits in either 2020 or 2021.)⁶⁷ The first column of this table shows the benefit determination policy in the month the special benefit was offered and whether the additional amount is calculated based on the number of children or total members of the assistance unit. For states that did not provide a special benefit, this column captures that the state's benefit computation policy is the standard benefit a unit would be eligible for under the state's policies prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (see table II.A.2 for the standard benefit determination policies). The second column captures whether the additional benefit was a one-time payment or was reoccurring, as well as which month(s) the additional benefit was in effect. This table also includes information about how the additional benefit was treated by other benefit programs for eligibility determination and benefit calculation, when available. Additional information on states' benefit computation policies can be found in the related tables II.A.1, II.A.2, II.A.3, II.A.4, and II.A.5, and in the full underlying database.

Key policies for 2021 include:

- Ten states issued a special benefit to eligible recipients at some point in 2020 or 2021.

⁶⁷ For more information about states' policies in response to the pandemic, see Shantz, Katie, Sarah Knowles, Ilham Dehry, and Linda Giannarelli (2023). *State TANF Policies During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. OPRE Report 2023-003, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services., and the full underlying database.

Appendix 4: State Policy Changes Between 2020 and 2021

For the policies captured in the tables, this appendix describes the policy changes that occurred between the 2020 and 2021 Databook tables (that capture policies as of July 1 of each year). In any given year, there are also corrections made in the WRD database to historical coding that are reflected in that year's tables. This list includes the changes between the two years that were due to policy updates; it does not include changes due to an improved understanding of existing policies or temporary changes in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶⁸

Table I.B.8. Treatment of Non-caretaker Adults in Household

- South Dakota and Wyoming made policy changes which increased the amount that benefits are reduced when a non-caretaker adult living in the household is not included in the TANF unit and is sharing living costs.

Table I.B.9. Eligibility Requirements for Children

- Nevada updated their eligibility policy for children living with nonrelative caretakers.

Table I.C.1. Asset Limits for Applicants

- Massachusetts eliminated the asset test for applicants.
- Two states, California and Oklahoma, increased the asset limit for applicants.
- Two states, California and Indiana, increased the amount of the vehicle exemption for applicants.

⁶⁸ For information on temporary policy changes made in response to the COVID-19 pandemic between 2020 and 2021, see Shantz, Katie, Sarah Knowles, Ilham Dehry, and Linda Giannarelli (2023). *State TANF Policies During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. OPRE Report 2023-003, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services., and the full underlying database.

Table I.D.1. Treatment of Grandparent Income

- California changed how they calculate earned income disregards for all families, which also affected the disregards applied prior to deeming for grandparents excluded from the unit.

Table I.D.2. Treatment of Stepparent Income

- California changed how they calculate earned income disregards for all families, which also affected the disregards applied prior to deeming for stepparents excluded from the unit.

Table I.D.3. Treatment of Income and Assets of Nonparent Caretakers

- Massachusetts eliminated the asset test for all families, which also affected the treatment of assets for nonparent caretakers.

Table I.D.4. Treatment of Income of Parents Excluded from the Assistance Unit Due to Immigrant Status

- California changed how they calculate earned income disregards for all families, which also affected the disregards applied prior to deeming for parents excluded due to immigrant status.

Table I.E.1. Income Eligibility Tests for Applicants

- States that test income against the Federal Poverty Guidelines updated their eligibility test to reference the more recent year's guidelines (AZ, NV, NM, NY, OH, WI).

Table I.E.2. Earned Income Disregards for Initial Income Eligibility Purposes

- California changed the earned income disregard from \$500 and 50 percent of the remainder to \$550 and 50 percent of the remainder.

Table I.E.3. Standards for Determining Eligibility

- Twenty-five states increased their income standard amounts, either by increasing the dollar amounts or because their policy is set to use the most recent poverty guidelines when calculating the amounts (AK, AZ, CA, CT, DE, FL, IL, IN, ME, MA, MN, NE, NV, NH, NM, NY, OH, RI, SC, SD, TN, VA, WA, WI, WY).

Table I.E.4. Maximum Earnings for Initial Eligibility for a Family of Three

- Nineteen states made policy changes that resulted in higher limits on the maximum earnings an applicant could receive in a month and still be eligible for assistance (AK, CA, CT, IL, ME, MA, MN, NE, NV, NH, OH, RI, SC, SD, TN, VA, WA, WV, WY).

Table II.A.1. Earned Income Disregards for Benefit Computation

- Three states changed how they calculate earned income disregards for benefit computation (CA, NY, PA).

Table II.A.2. Benefit Determination Policies

- One state, Mississippi, changed how the benefit amount is calculated.

Table II.A.3 Standards for Determining Benefits

- Nineteen states increased their payment standard amounts, either by increasing the dollar amounts or because their policy is set to use the most recent poverty guidelines when calculating the amounts (AK, CT, DE, IL, ME, MA, MN, NE, NH, OH, RI, SC, SD, TN, TX, VA, WA, WV, WY).
- Seven states updated the dollar amounts used for their statutory maximum benefits (ME, MN, MS, NE, TN, VA, WA).

Table II.A.4 Maximum Monthly Benefit for a Family with No Income

- Seventeen states made policy changes that resulted in higher maximum monthly benefit amounts for a family with no income (CT, IL, ME, MA, MS, NE, NH, OH, RI, SC, SD, TN, TX, VA, WA, WV, WY).

Table II.A.5 Maximum Monthly Benefit for a Child-Only Unit with One Child, No Income

- Sixteen states made policy changes that resulted in higher maximum monthly benefit amounts for child-only units with one child and no income (CT, IL, ME, MA, MS, NE, OH, RI, SC, SD, TN, TX, VA, WA, WV, WY).
- New Hampshire made policy changes that resulted in higher maximum monthly benefit amounts for child-only units with one child and no income living with a non-parent caretaker or living with a parent excluded from the unit due to immigrant status.

Table III.B.3 Sanction Policies for Noncompliance with Work Requirements for Single-Parent Head of Unit

- Maryland updated their initial and most severe sanction policies.

Table IV.A.2 Treatment of Child Support Income for Recipients

- Washington changed their policy from counting no child support for eligibility determination for recipients to counting all child support. The state also changed the portion of child support collection transferred to the family and disregarded for benefit computation from none to \$50 for families with one child and \$200 for families with two or more children.
- Wyoming changed the portion of child support collection transferred to the family and disregarded for benefit computation from none to \$100 for families with one child and \$200 for families with two or more children.

Table IV.A.3 Asset Limits for Recipients and Related Assets Policies

- Massachusetts removed the asset limit for recipients.
- Two states, California and Oklahoma, increased the asset limit for recipients.
- Two states, California and Indiana, increased the amount of the vehicle exemption for recipients.

Table IV.A.4 Income Eligibility Tests for Recipients

- States that test income against the federal poverty guidelines update their eligibility test every year to reference the more recent year's guidelines (AZ, CA, CT, IN, NM, NY, VA, WI).

Table IV.A.6 Maximum Earnings for Ongoing Eligibility for a Family of Three

- Twenty-one states made policy changes that resulted in higher limits on the maximum earnings a recipient could receive in a month and still be eligible for assistance (AK, CA non-exempt component, CT, DE, IL, IN, ME, MA, MN, NE, NH, OH, PA, RI, SC, SD, TN, VA, WA, WV, WY).

- California made policy changes that resulted in a lower limit on the maximum earnings a recipient in the exempt component could receive in a month and still be eligible for assistance.

Table IV.C.3(a) Time Limit Extension Policies

- Washington added an extension for those unemployed due to high local unemployment.

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