

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF): Washington

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The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program provides grants to states to provide families with cash assistance and related support services. States have broad discretion to determine eligibility for their TANF cash assistance programs and can restrict who can receive cash assistance and in what amount. These policies are often rooted in racist and sexist ideas about parents — especially Black mothers with low incomes — that have influenced cash assistance programs for over a century and resulted in marked racial discrepancies with respect to who receives benefits. Two policies that have racist roots are the work requirement (which requires TANF recipients to participate in “work activities” as a condition of receiving cash benefits) and the family cap (which says that children born or conceived while a family receives cash assistance are not counted in determining benefits). Some states have done away with these policies in recent years, and the COVID-19 pandemic has led to changes in many state programs. This state specific report—which is part of a larger survey—looks at 19 states and provides an overview of each state’s stance with regard to the work requirement and family cap.

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