

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

For people with disabilities

Agency Involved: Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) protects the health of all Americans and provides essential human services for those who are least able to help themselves. HHS works closely with state and local governments, and many HHS-funded services are provided through state or county agencies, or through private organizations.

Summary

The TANF Program (pronounced "TAN-if") provides assistance to needy families with children so they can be cared for in their own home and helps reduce dependency by promoting job preparation, work and marriage. Funds may also be used to prevent non-marital pregnancies and encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families. Adults getting cash benefits on behalf of children are required to either be working some minimum amount or be part of an employment program.

In general, family income must be very low to qualify for TANF, and financial benefits are usually small.

In Missouri the program is called Temporary Assistance and is administered through the Family Support Division.

More details available at:

[HHF's TANF Page](#)

[Missouri's TANF Page](#)

Specific Benefits

TANF offers two types of services to families:

- Cash grants
- Case management

There may also be additional special-purpose cash or non-cash benefits. These can include Medicaid, Food Stamps, prenatal care, housing assistance, energy assistance, child care services, transportation vouchers, or job training programs.

There is a lifetime limit of 60 months (not necessarily consecutive) of receiving cash assistance under TANF.

More details available at:

[HHF's TANF Page](#)

[Missouri's TANF Page](#)

[Missouri TANF State Plan](#)

Populations Served (eligibility)

Children for whom TANF provides funds must:

- Be younger than 18 years (or young than 19, attending high school, and expected to graduate)
- Need support because there is not enough family income to meet basic needs
 - Because of the unemployment of the parents; death, physical or mental incapacity of the parents; or the continued absence of the parents from the home
- Be living with one or both parents, a relative, or legal guardian, who is applying for assistance

The parent(s) or close relative through whom TANF is providing support must:

- Have income below the state's "Initial Earned Income Threshold". The specific limit varies from state to state
 - In Missouri it is 20% of the federal poverty level.
- Have no convictions for a felony (or any crime) related to illegal possession, use, or distribution of a controlled substance after August 22, 1996
- Not be a fleeing felon and or in violation of a condition of probation / parole
- Not own resources worth more than \$1,000, excluding the home and one car
 - Recipients may own resources worth up to \$5000 once a self-sufficiency pact is signed, after application
- Legally transfer the rights to any existing child support to Family Support Division of HHS
 - Cooperate with HHS in identifying, locating, and collecting child support from any parent who is absent from the home because of divorce, desertion, or abandonment
- Help support the children by accepting employment when offered (see required work activities, below)
- Make sure all members of the assistance group (family) have social security numbers

TANF benefits **MUST** be used for the support of the children, or the "best interest" of the children.

Required Work Activities

Within two years of getting TANF cash benefits, able-bodied adults must work or be involved with activities to get work (job training, subsidized employment, job search and job readiness assistance, etc.). If they are working, they must work at least a minimum number of hours per week. Those minimum hours are:

- Single Parent or Guardian: 30 hours per week (for child older than 6, 20 hours if younger)
- Two-Parent families: 35 hours
 - 55 hours if the family gets childcare benefits

There are some alternate work requirements for different living situations (teen head of household, etc.) spelled out in the [Missouri TANF Plan](#).

There are two alternate options for the work activities: exemptions and exclusions

Exemptions

Adults through whom TANF is providing cash benefits may be exempted from the work requirements if they are:

- An individual with permanent and total disability who has applied for or is receiving either Old Age Survivor's and Disability Insurance (OASDI) benefits, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits, or employer-sponsored disability insurance
- Caretakers 60 years of age or older
- Individuals who are needed in the home to care for someone who has a physical or intellectual disability
- A single custodial parent caring for a child who is less than one year old

Temporary Exclusions

Adults through whom TANF is providing cash benefits may be temporarily excluded from the work requirements if they:

- Are victims of domestic violence
- Are temporarily disabled
- Are pregnant and in the third trimester of the pregnancy
- Lack transportation or child care
- (in Missouri) Are part of a family unification plan with Child Services which interferes with the work requirement

Protective Payee

If someone getting TANF benefits becomes ineligible for some reason (misuse of funds, failure to complete drug abuse treatment, etc.), the state agency may assign a Protective Payee to continue getting the TANF benefits, manage how the funds are used to support the children involved, and keep records to document its use. The protective payee is usually a relative, friend, clergy member, or other qualified adult.

More details available at:

[HHF's TANF Page](#)

[Missouri's TANF Page](#)

[Missouri TANF State Plan](#)

Definition of Disability

Eligibility for children can be based, in part, on the disability status of the parents. If SSA has determined that the parent has a significant disability, HHS will accept that as documentation. If not, HHS will have the state SSA Medical Determination Team review the person's application and documentation.

Exemption from the work activities requirement can be based on disability status, which is documented by receiving Old Age Survivor's and Disability Insurance (OASDI) benefits, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits, or employer-sponsored disability insurance. The agencies providing those benefits are responsible for establishing the person's disability.

More details available at:
[Missouri TANF State Plan](#)

Criminal History

The eligibility of children for TANF is not impacted by a juvenile criminal record. However, benefits cannot be provided to an adult who:

- Has a conviction for a felony (or any other crime) related to illegal possession, use, or distribution of a controlled substance after August 22, 1996 (in a Federal or State court)
 - Non-drug felony convictions are OK
- Is a fleeing felon (fleeing to avoid prosecution or imprisonment for a felony)
- Is in violation of probation / parole

If this disqualifies an adult, the child may still be able to get TANF benefits, but the benefit calculation will not include any support for the disqualified adult.

More details available at:
[Missouri TANF State Plan](#)

Substance Abuse

A history of substance abuse does not disqualify a person from receiving TANF for a dependent child, but current use of illegal drugs may. Many states require every adult applying for TANF benefits as head of their household to complete a screening questionnaire for use of illegal drugs (Missouri requires the drug test). Each state has its own rules on what happens if a person fails the drug screen questionnaire or a drug test.

In Missouri, if a person fails the drug screen questions (or if their name turns up in the state highway patrol database for a drug offense), they will have to take a drug test. If they fail the drug test, they will have to start a treatment program through Missouri DMH.

In general, a person does not lose TANF benefits in Missouri because they failed a drug test and/or are in a treatment program. If they refuse to participate in the drug test or in a treatment program, the state may appoint a protective payee to handle the TANF benefits.

In Missouri, being in treatment for substance abuse can also qualify as a "hardship" allowance when FSD considers extending TANF benefits past the 5 year lifetime limit. In addition, treatment for substance abuse may count as a "non-core activity" to meet the weekly work requirement.

More details available at:
[Overview of Missouri TANF program](#)

Application Process

A person can request an application for TANF benefits through their state agency, either by phone or e-mail. In some states the application may be available online.

After the person returns the completed application form, they should contact their local agency office for an interview to complete the process. If the person cannot physically get to the local office, a phone interview will usually work, but the person will need to mail in all the documentation needed for the application.

In many states (including Missouri), all adult heads of household applying for TANF must complete a drug screen, and possibly a drug test. If they do not, they will not be eligible for TANF benefits.

More details available at:

[Overview of Missouri TANF program](#)

Insider Tips/Comments

When the person goes for the application interview, they will need to provide documentation of their living situation and finances. Each state has slightly different document requirements, but some common ones include:

- A driver's license or state identification card
- Children's birth certificates (especially if born outside the state)
- Documentation on the person's relationship to the children, if possible
- Contact information for the parent(s) if the children are not living with them
- School records for the children (if old enough), to document attendance, residency
- The four most recent pay stubs, if possible
- If unemployed, something documenting the end of employment
- Letter or documents from other social service agencies showing other benefits the person is getting, such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI), SSDI, Veterans benefits, child support, alimony, unemployment, retirement, etc.
- A rental agreement or letter from the person's landlord, or mortgage statement that shows the person's address
- Utility bills, such as electricity, gas, and water, for a typical month
- Cancelled checks for any daycare or child support payments
- Typical medical bills the person pays, especially if they are over 60 years old or have a disability
- Social security numbers for household members
- Documentation of disability status – either a statement from an agency like SSA or voc rehab, or a statement from a doctor
- Any documents about legal obligation to pay child support

Typical Timeline

The agency usually will make a decision about a person's application within 30 days of getting all the documentation. Once an application is approved, the person usually has their first check within 5 – 10 days.

Contact Information

National:

- HHS TANF Bureau: <http://www.tanf.us/> (includes listing of state contacts)

State:

- Missouri Department of Social Services (DSS): <http://www.dss.mo.gov/>
 - 855-FSD-INFO (373-4636)

Local:

- In Missouri, you can find your local DSS office at <http://dss.mo.gov/offices.htm>

Web links for Independent research:

- [HHS website page on TANF](#)
- [Federal Office of Family Assistance - TANF](#)
- [TANF page of National Center on Children in Poverty](#)
- [SSA article on the interaction of TANF and SSI benefits](#) (very technical)

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