

TANF/SSI Disability Transition Project, 2008-2011

Overview

Numerous studies have identified substantial overlap in families and individuals served by the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) programs. Over the past decade, as the TANF program has developed policies to help recipients enter the workforce and increase self-sufficiency, it has become increasingly important for TANF agencies to screen applicants and recipients in order to meet their needs. Individuals who appear to have a disability that interferes with work pose a challenge with respect to work and work-related activity requirements. For these individuals, TANF agencies may take any number of actions, one of which may be to refer the individual to the Social Security Administration (SSA) to apply for SSI. However, given the strict definition of disability for becoming eligible for SSI, it is likely that many TANF recipients never become eligible, even if they have some form of disability. It is in the interest of TANF applicants and recipients and of TANF agencies that the screening for disability be as accurate as possible. And because well-informed referrals for SSI applications permit the best use of SSA's adjudicative resources, it is in the interest of SSA as well.

To improve program interaction, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), which administers the TANF program, and the Social Security Administration (SSA), which administers the SSI program, are working together and in collaboration with several states and localities to examine the overlap in the TANF and SSI populations, document current approaches for identifying and working with individuals with a disability, and to identify approaches to work more effectively and efficiently with individuals who may be eligible for SSI.

The TANF/SSI Disability Transition Project (TSDTP) will take place in two major stages, each lasting approximately 12 months. The *first stage* consists of understanding the current environment through data exchange, analysis and model development. During this stage, the project team will work with each site to document the number of cases involved and their current procedures for identification of disability and referral to SSI. ACF and SSA are finalizing data-exchange agreements with five states, involving six local TANF agencies, chosen based on their interest in participating and the belief that their programs would yield useful information. Following the data analysis, ACF, SSA and their evaluation contractors, MDRC and the Lewin Group, will work with sites to develop locally-driven innovations for engaging individuals with disabilities in employment-related activities and making appropriate referrals. These innovations will be supported by sound logic models and a conceptual framework.

In the *second stage* of the project, programmatic innovations will be pilot-tested and monitored for program performance. This stage will document the implementation of innovative approaches and provide recommendations for evaluating these or similar pilot interventions. For the entire project, states and local agencies will have opportunities for input, including by participating in the Advisory Committee, chaired by SSA staff, which will oversee the initial data exchange and analysis.

The overall goal of the project is to provide valuable information to a broad audience of TANF and SSI administrators, program operators, policymakers and stakeholders, on the overlap between TANF and SSI, approaches for best serving individuals with a disability, and possibilities for program improvement and reform. ACF and SSA intend to use TSDTP findings to determine appropriate next steps, which may include a demonstration project to evaluate local innovations.

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