

COVID-19 Federal Resource Guideline Series: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

What needed activities/services does TANF provide or pay for?

TANF funds can be used by states to create a system of care that makes family homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring. The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) has issued [guidance](#) reminding state leaders that they have flexibility in how they use TANF funds to assist families. TANF funds can be used to:

- **prevent family homelessness** (e.g. by replacing families' lost wages through generous cash assistance, funding homelessness prevention programs that provide back rent and landlord mediation assistance, and funding homelessness diversion assistance);
- **address unsheltered family homelessness** (e.g. by funding mobile outreach and case management services to unsheltered families, providing basic supplies such as diapers, leasing hotel/motel rooms for unsheltered families);
- **improve family shelters so they adhere to CDC recommendations** (e.g. by providing funding for hotels/motels to improve physical distancing within shelters, funding for case managers to assist families in shelter and hotels – including hazard pay, purchasing needed supplies for families in shelter such as food and personal protective equipment);
- **re-house families quickly** (e.g. fund diversion and rapid exit programs, support rapid re-housing, provide short- and medium rental assistance); and
- **stabilize re-housed families** (e.g. by replacing families' lost wages with cash assistance, extending rental assistance for families who have been rapidly re-housed, providing flexible financial assistance to help meet families' basic needs such as baby supplies and utilities, provide mobile case management, providing specialized support services including mental health counseling, and offering subsidized employment to help people who lost their jobs).

Who is eligible for TANF funding?

TANF funding is designed to help low-income families with children, with some restrictions.

What funds are available?

In addition to the \$16.9 billion states receive each year from the federal government to provide support to low income families with children, many states also have significant TANF funding reserves and unobligated balances (more than what McKinney-Vento receives each year) which could be tapped to realize a more comprehensive response to family homelessness. At a minimum, the funds could support a more robust response to keeping families safe from homelessness during the COVID19 crisis.

How can you find more information?

Homeless service system leaders should consider meeting with local and state TANF administrators as a first step. Help them understand the needs of families experiencing homelessness in your locality and state. Some local programs have received TANF funding through this form of advocacy. It may be valuable for homeless service leaders to educate state legislators and county officials about the needs of families experiencing homelessness, underutilized TANF resources and how they can be [used](#) to help families. In turn, legislators can take action to promote the use of TANF to respond to family homelessness. Homeless service leaders and advocates may also consider partnering with state/local TANF advocacy organizations who may have overlapping interests.