

Pandemic TANF Assistance Act

Background: The COVID-19 pandemic poses an increased risk to low-income families as it threatens their ability to access safety net programs like Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). TANF beneficiaries may be unable to complete program work requirements due to state economic closures, social distancing measures, illness, or caring for a loved one. These families and other low-income individuals are more likely to experience financial hardship during the crisis that threatens their ability to pay bills and maintain their home, care for their loved ones, and provide basic necessities.

Summary: The Pandemic TANF Assistance Act addresses short and long-term needs among low-income individuals and families affected by the COVID-19 public health emergency. It temporarily waives work requirements and other requirements for current TANF beneficiaries and creates a new Coronavirus Emergency Assistance Grant program that would allow states, territories and tribes additional resources to support low-income individuals and families from now until September 30, 2021.

Waives TANF Work and Other Requirements:

- The legislation prohibits states and tribes from sanctioning an individual receiving TANF benefits who is adversely affected by COVID-19.
- States will be held harmless for not achieving and verifying TANF work participation rates, not complying with paternity establishment and child support state requirements, and extending assistance past the 5-year limit.

Establishes a Coronavirus Emergency Assistance Grant program:

- The legislation appropriates \$10 billion for Coronavirus Emergency Assistance Grants.
- Funds may be used to provide eligible families short-term cash, non-cash and in-kind assistance to help address their basic needs, prevent household emergencies like foreclosure, forfeiture, and termination of utilities, and avoid children needing to be removed from their homes.
- Funds may be used for subsidized employment for jobs that can be performed remotely or essential work as long as individuals have access to personal protective equipment. When federal and state emergency declarations are lifted, funds may be used for a broader array of subsidized employment.

Eligibility and Access to Coronavirus Emergency Assistance Grant Funds:

- Benefits are limited to individuals negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic with incomes up to 200% of the federal poverty line.
- Total funding available to states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico will be calculated based on the number of individuals in families below the federal poverty line in the state divided by the number of individuals in families below the federal poverty line in all states (based on the most recent year of data available from the U.S. Census Bureau).
- A 3.5% set aside is dedicated for grant funding to tribes and territories other than Puerto Rico.
- States, tribes, and territories may apply for all or part of the grant funding on a quarterly basis by submitting a letter of intent to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The process for state approval and fund distribution shall be expedited by HHS and initial grant payment shall be made within 30 days of enactment.