

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF): Help for Kin Caregivers



Introduction

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) is often the only available ongoing financial support to help meet the needs of children raised by their grandparents or other relatives in kinship families. Who is considered a “relative” is defined by each state or territory.

TANF may support kinship families in several ways:

- ▶ Monthly cash to help meet the needs of children.
- ▶ Short-term help to meet a need like buying a crib or paying a utility bill.
- ▶ A pathway to access other important supports, like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)/food stamps and Medicaid.

TANF is a federal program, so it is available in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Tribal TANF is also an important resource for children and families who are members of Tribes. Because TANF funds flow from the federal government to these jurisdictions as block grants, they have a great deal of flexibility in deciding who is eligible and how much support to provide. Often, states and other jurisdictions even call TANF by different names.

This national fact sheet features common questions from kin caregivers, with answers that apply regardless of where they live. Because there are also many questions that have different answers depending on the jurisdiction, this fact sheet ends with a table that lists each state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. For each entry, it provides a link to a webpage with more information, the name of the TANF program, the operating agency’s name, and the phone number for the TANF program. **You should visit the state website or call the agency to ask questions regarding eligibility, as each state has its own guidelines and rules.**

Please share this fact sheet with kin caregivers in your community.

Questions From Kin Caregivers and Answers That Apply Across the Country

1

I hear there are two types of TANF grants. What are they?

We will refer to the two types of TANF grants as "child-only" and "family" grants. They may be called different things where you live.

Child-only grants

Child-only grants were designed to consider only the needs and income of a child. A child's income might include child support payments or a public benefit like Social Security survivor benefits. Because most children have limited income, most relative caregivers (not a relative caregiver who has adopted the child and is now the parent) should be able to receive a monthly child-only grant on behalf of the child they are raising until the child becomes an adult.

Child-only grants are usually smaller than family grants. Although they are typically not enough to meet all the needs of the child, they can be a big help. The [average grant](#) is about \$328 per month for one child, \$447 per month for two children, and \$555 per month for three children. These are the national averages, so some jurisdictions provide more and some less. All states, however, provide only slightly more money for any additional kin children in the family. It's not a per-child benefit, like foster care maintenance payments, for example.

Family grants

The second type of TANF grant is a "family grant." If a caregiver meets their jurisdiction's income and asset guidelines, they can receive a grant that addresses their needs, as well as those of the children they are raising. These grants are limited under federal law to no more than 60 months. TANF family grants typically include requirements to work or look for work.

States and territories can make some exceptions to TANF work requirements and time limits. Many make these exceptions and/or allow time extensions for caregivers who are over age 60, are needed in the home to care for an incapacitated/disabled household member, or are providing care for young children. Some states make other exceptions that are specific to kin caregivers.

2

For either type of grant, I've been told that I must give the state the right to try to collect child support from the parents. I don't want to do that. What do I do?

There is a federal requirement that you must give your right to child support to the state. However, you can ask for a [“good cause” exception](#) to this requirement. The federal government allows jurisdictions to make these exceptions, and any reason can be a “good cause” under federal policy. Some places spell out in writing how to get one of these exceptions and some do not, but all TANF agencies can grant them if they choose to do so.

3

I'm not related by blood, marriage, or adoption to the child I'm raising. (The child is my godchild, the child of a family friend, or a student I used to teach.) Can I still get a family or a child-only TANF grant?

The ability to get TANF if you are not related to the child by blood, marriage, or adoption depends on where you live. The federal government allows jurisdictions to define “relative” for TANF, and [some define “relative” to include godparents and other family friends](#).

4

If my kin child and I get TANF, can we also get Medicaid and SNAP/food stamps?

Maybe. When you apply for TANF, ask if they can check your eligibility for Medicaid, SNAP, and other supports. In several states, TANF application forms are “combined application” forms. These forms usually include TANF, SNAP/food stamps, and Medicaid. Even if the forms are not combined, states may automatically enroll TANF beneficiaries in SNAP/food stamps, child care assistance (if the caregiver is working or in school), and Medicaid.

If you apply for SNAP at the same time as a TANF child-only grant, you will be asked about your income, in addition to the child's income. In most states, your income information is only used to figure out the amount of SNAP benefits you can get.

5

My friend told me she got some short-term benefits through TANF to help her pay for her kin child's school supplies and bed. How can I get some help like that?

The federal government allows jurisdictions to use TANF funds to pay for short-term benefits. Many states and territories offer these benefits, and [a few even target them to kinship families](#). Depending on where you live, short-term benefits may be used to

cover many different types of expenses, like a utility bill or a burial. These benefits usually help with a specific crisis or need, and they will not last more than four months. To find out if this help is available, contact your TANF agency and see if they offer such help. It may be limited to kinship families with child welfare involvement, or it may have some other limitation. You won't have to meet work requirements to qualify for this assistance.

6

TANF could really help us, but I've never asked for help from the government and I don't want to start now. What should I do?

We often hear these types of comments and concerns from kin caregivers. Think of TANF as help for the children. Thirty years ago, Congress said that one of the three primary reasons they created TANF was to help keep children together with their parents or relatives.

Also, know that most people need help to meet the many needs of children they did not expect to raise. Consider the costs. It [costs about \\$303,000](#) for a couple with a median household income to raise a child for 18 years. This does not even include the cost of college. The costs of extra food, clothes, child care, and health care all add up.

Other Resources That May Help

- ▶ [GrandFacts Fact Sheets](#) – Fact sheets for each state and several territories and Tribes, each with jurisdiction-specific data and information on services and kinship programs operated through community-based organizations
- ▶ [Kinship Navigators](#) – Many communities have kinship navigators who can help kinship families access TANF and other programs
- ▶ [2-1-1](#) – Staffed phone lines and websites to help connect families to services
- ▶ [Medicaid & the Children's Health Insurance Program \(CHIP\)](#) – Find out more about these health insurance programs through this longstanding website
- ▶ [SNAP](#) – This website has contact information for local SNAP offices

Table

Please note that many states do not provide easily accessible information about child-only grants online, and it may be necessary to call the TANF program to learn about child-only eligibility and the application process. If your state or community has a [kinship navigator](#), they may also be able to provide information and/or assistance.

State/Territory and Link to Information	Name of TANF Program	Operating Agency	Phone Number
<u>Alabama</u>	Family Assistance	Department of Human Resources	334-242-1773; 334-242-1950
<u>Alaska</u>	ATAP (Alaska Temporary Assistance Program)	Department of Health	800-478-7778
<u>Arizona</u>	TANF, CA (Cash Assistance)	Department of Economic Security	800-432-7587
<u>Arkansas</u>	TEA (Transitional Employment Assistance)	Department of Human Services	501-682-8375
<u>California</u>	CalWORKs (California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids)	Department of Social Services	916-651-8848
<u>Colorado</u>	Colorado Works/TANF	Department of Human Services	800-536-5298
<u>Connecticut</u>	TFA (Temporary Family Assistance)	Department of Social Services	855-626-6632
<u>Delaware</u>	TANF	Department of Health and Social Services	302-255-9040
<u>District of Columbia</u>	TANF	Department of Human Services	202-671-4200
<u>Florida</u>	TCA (Temporary Cash Assistance)	Department of Children and Families	850-245-7105
<u>Georgia</u>	TANF	Department of Human Services	877-423-4746
<u>Hawaii</u>	TANF	Department of Human Services	808-586-4997

<u>Idaho</u>	TAFI (Temporary Assistance for Families in Idaho)	Department of Health and Welfare	877-456-1233
<u>Illinois</u>	TANF	Department of Human Services	800-843-6154
<u>Indiana</u>	TANF	Family and Social Services Administration	800-457-8283
<u>Iowa</u>	FIP (Family Investment Program)	Department of Human Services	800-972-2017
<u>Kansas</u>	Successful Families Program	Department for Children and Families	888-369-4777
<u>Kentucky</u>	K-TAP (Kentucky Transitional Assistance Program)	Cabinet for Health and Family Services	502-564-3440
<u>Louisiana</u>	FITAP (Family Independence Temporary Assistance Program)	Department of Health	888-524-3578
<u>Maine</u>	TANF	Department of Health and Human Services	855-797-4357; 207-287-3707
<u>Maryland</u>	TCA (Temporary Cash Assistance)	Department of Human Services	800-332-6347; TTY: 800-735-2258
<u>Massachusetts</u>	TAFDC (Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children)	Executive Office of Health and Human Services	877-382-2363
<u>Michigan</u>	FIP (Family Independence Program)	Department of Health & Human Services	844-799-9876; TTY: 833-285-5910
<u>Minnesota</u>	MFIP (Minnesota Family Investment Program)	Department of Children, Youth, and Families	651-431-4000 or No English: 651-539-7700

<u>Mississippi</u>	TANF	Department of Human Services	800-948-3050
<u>Missouri</u>	Temporary Assistance	Department of Social Services	855-373-4636; TTY/TDD: 800-735-2966 / 800-735- 2466; Relay Missouri: 711
<u>Montana</u>	TANF	Department of Public Health and Human Services	406-444-1788; 844-680-4700; 888-706-1535
<u>Nebraska</u>	ADC (Aid to Dependent Children) / TANF	Department of Health and Human Services	800-383-4278; Lincoln only: 402-323-3900; Omaha only: 402-595-1258; TDD: 402- 471-7256
<u>Nevada</u> (see also <u>this page</u>)	TANF	Department of Human Services	775-684-0800
<u>New Hampshire</u>	TANF / FANF (Financial Assistance to Needy Families)	Department of Health and Human Services	603-271-9700
<u>New Jersey</u>	WFNJ (Work First New Jersey)	Department of Human Services	609-588-2400
<u>New Mexico</u>	New Mexico Works	Department of Workforce Solutions	800-283-4465
<u>New York</u>	FA (Family Assistance)	Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance	800-342-3009
<u>North Carolina</u>	Work First	Department of Health and Human Services	800-662-7030; 919-527-6335
<u>North Dakota</u>	TANF	Department of Health and Human Services	800-755-2716; 701-328-2332; Relay TTY: 800-366-6888

<u>Ohio</u>	OWF (Ohio Works First)	Department of Job and Family Services	866-635-3748
<u>Oklahoma</u>	TANF	Department of Human Services	866-411-1877; 405-521-4391
<u>Oregon</u>	TANF	Department of Human Services	800-699-9075
<u>Pennsylvania</u>	TANF	Department of Human Services	800-692-7462
<u>Puerto Rico</u>	TANF (Ayuda Temporal a Familias Necesitadas)	Administración de Desarrollo Socioeconómico de la Familia (ADSEF)	787-289-7600
<u>Rhode Island</u>	Rhode Island Works	Department of Human Services	855-697-4347; TTY: 800-745-5555
<u>South Carolina</u>	TANF	Department of Social Services	800-616-1309
<u>South Dakota</u>	TANF	Department of Social Services	605-773-4678
<u>Tennessee</u>	Families First/TANF	Department of Human Services	833-772-8347
<u>Texas</u>	TANF	Health and Human Services Commission	2-1-1; 877-541-7905
<u>Utah</u>	Specified Relative Program	Department of Workforce Services	801-526-9675
<u>Vermont</u>	Reach Up	Agency of Human Services	800-479-6151
<u>Virgin Islands</u>	TANF	Department of Human Services	St. Thomas: 340-774-0930; St. Croix: 340-718-2980; St. John: 340-776-6334
<u>Virginia</u>	TANF	Department of Social Services	855-635-4370

<u>Washington</u>	TANF	Department of Social and Health Services	877-501-2233
<u>West Virginia</u>	WV WORKS	Department of Health and Human Resources	800-642-8589; 304-558-0684
<u>Wisconsin</u>	W-2 (Wisconsin Works)	Department of Children and Families	Milwaukee only: 414-227-4633; rest of state (not Milwaukee): 855-757-4539
<u>Wyoming</u>	POWER (Personal Opportunities with Employment Responsibilities)	Department of Family Services	307-473-3948

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The Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network: A National Technical Assistance Center (Network) helps government agencies and nonprofits in states, Tribes, and territories work across jurisdictional and systemic boundaries to improve supports and services for families in which grandparents, other relatives, or close family friends are raising children whose parents are unable to do so. For more information, please visit www.GKSNetwork.org.

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