



## Forum Session Meeting Announcement

**Friday, April 27, 2007**  
11:45am — Lunch  
12:15–2:00pm — Session

# Ten Years After Welfare Reform: How Is TANF Working for Needy Families?

### A Discussion Featuring:

**Ron Haskins, PhD**

*Senior Fellow, Economic Studies*  
*Co-Director, Center on Children and Families*  
The Brookings Institution

**LaDonna Pavetti, PhD**

*Senior Fellow*  
Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

**Susan Golonka**

*Program Director for Human Services*  
Center for Best Practices  
National Governors Association

### Location

**Reserve Officers Association  
of the United States**  
One Constitution Avenue, NE  
Congressional Hall of Honor  
Fifth Floor  
(Across from the Dirksen Senate  
Office Building)

### Registration Required

Space is limited. Please respond  
as soon as possible.

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# Ten Years After Welfare Reform: How Is TANF Working for Needy Families?

## OVERVIEW

*The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA), reauthorized in 2005 after a long review process, brought dramatic change to low-income families who depend on income-support programs. In addition to block granting the old Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) to the states and instituting a new Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, the PRWORA law had strong work requirements and strict time limits on receipt of assistance but provided a series of work supports to address clients' needs. This Forum session will look at welfare reform and review what we know and what we still need to understand about the effect of this expansive change on low-income families.*

## SESSION

The transformation of welfare programs began just over ten years ago, and it represents a major landmark in public social policy in the United States. The change of welfare from a federal entitlement program to a state block grant program with work requirements and time limits for recipients' participation constitutes an extraordinary paradigm shift. Swirling around the debate on welfare reform in the mid-1990s was an unusual set of issues that addressed core American values and approaches toward governance. These issues included federal versus state roles and responsibilities and how income maintenance should address problems of dependency, self-sufficiency, and work. Debate raged, bills were vetoed, and, in the end, President Clinton signed legislation that represented a radical change to public policy.

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) replaced AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children), a cash assistance program primarily for low-income single mothers and their children, with a new program called Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). With some exceptions, the new program requires work in exchange for assistance, which is time-limited. Recipients must engage in work activities for a specified number of hours per week, although states are given some flexibility to exempt certain individuals, such as single parents with children under one. Under TANF, a parent is ineligible for any further cash assistance after five cumulative years of receipt; exceptions can be granted for "hardship" cases, but such exceptions are limited.

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TANF was accompanied by a wide range of work supports. PRWORA authorized more federal funding for child care, strengthened child support enforcement laws, and guaranteed Medicaid coverage under “transitional medical assistance,” or TMA, for up to one year for parents leaving the cash assistance program. In addition, states were given considerable flexibility in designing their TANF programs, including using federal dollars to create community service jobs and to offer employers incentives to hire. Many states engaged in “work first” strategies designed to quickly move recipients into available jobs.

Welfare caseloads have fallen dramatically, particularly since the passage of TANF, and there is no doubt that years of a strong national economy helped. Many studies have documented the remarkable decrease in the number of people receiving public assistance since reforms began in the 1990s, from over 4 million families when PRWORA was passed to about 2 million now. This decline includes those recipients who went to work, as well as thousands of low-income parents who formerly might have received cash assistance but may not have applied for assistance after reform—the so-called “diversion cases.”

Most observers of welfare reform agree that an evaluation of the program must consider many factors beyond caseload. And nearly all analysts express serious concern about the effects of reform on certain groups of people: those who are at the lowest end of the income spectrum; those sanctioned or removed from TANF rolls after reaching time limits; those lacking basic skills and with limited literacy; and those with health, mental health, or addiction problems that prevent them from meeting TANF work requirements.

The congressional reauthorization of TANF in 2005 brought debate that echoed the discussion of the 1990s, highlighting once more the ideological differences and unanswered questions about the economic, social, and health status of low-income people. Reflecting the perception of the program’s success, particularly in reducing caseloads, Congress extended a modified TANF program through 2010. The reauthorized TANF legislation and the administration’s 2006 regulations implementing it further emphasize the work requirements.

The ten-year mark seems like an opportune time to pause and review the effect of TANF and other welfare reforms on needy families. This Forum session will look at what has happened to low-income families and children since TANF was adopted in 1996, and how they may fare in the coming years, as states continue to revise their programs in response to the new federal reauthorization requirements. A group of experienced analysts will review the basic program design and experience to date. They will also discuss ongoing concerns as states implement new TANF requirements and continue to try to integrate income maintenance, work support, health, and other social service programs in communities across the country.

## SPEAKERS

**Ron Haskins** is a senior fellow in economic studies and co-director of the Center on Children and Families at The Brookings Institution. Before joining Brookings, Dr. Haskins served on the staff of the House Committee on Ways and Means. He worked on welfare reform and the development of TANF legislation in several positions for the Committee, including service as the majority staff director of the Subcommittee on Human Resources. He also served on the White House staff as a senior advisor to the President for welfare policy. A former child development researcher, Dr. Haskins holds a PhD degree in child development and has published widely on subjects related to welfare reform, poverty and children's issues, marriage, and education.

**LaDonna Pavetti**, a senior fellow at Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., is a nationally recognized expert in welfare policy research, specializing in the implementation of welfare reform and employment strategies for people who are hard to employ. She has worked in a number of research positions in academia, industry, and government, as well as with the Urban Institute and at the Research Triangle Institute. She holds a PhD degree in public policy from Harvard University.

**Susan Golonka** is program director for human services at the Center for Best Practices of the National Governors Association (NGA). Ms. Golonka currently directs NGA's policy analysis, research, and technical assistance efforts on welfare reform, low-income families, work supports service integration, and child welfare. She represented NGA during the national debate and passage of welfare reform in 1996. Ms. Golonka's earlier experience includes positions at the Family Impact Seminar, on the U.S. Senate staff, and in state government.

## KEY QUESTIONS

- What is the status of welfare reform and low-income families after more than a decade? What are the best measures of the success or failure of welfare reform? What are the key areas of agreement and disagreement about the effect of welfare reform and the TANF program on needy families?
- What do we know about the characteristics of the poorest families? About those sanctioned and removed from the program? About those with limited skills; literacy difficulties; or health, mental health, or addiction problems? About people in the so-called diversion cases?
- How much have support programs such as federal child care subsidies, Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) expansions, Medicaid, and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) contributed to the successful effort to replace cash assistance with work? Can those programs be sustained at the necessary levels in view of the increasing pressures on state and federal budgets?

- How will recent reauthorization changes affect the decade-long transformation in the way welfare is administered and viewed? How were support programs affected by the TANF reauthorization?
- How much do we know about the interaction of the health needs of low-income people with TANF? For example, what do we know about the ability of the TANF program to work effectively for persons with disabilities, or for people who have a disabled child or a parent in the household where caregiving and health responsibilities limit an individual's ability to work outside the home?
- To what extent can or should welfare reform be equated with poverty reduction? How could other poverty reduction programs be structured in light of what has been learned from welfare reform?



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