

TANF and Child Support Moving Forward: Lessons Learned from the COVID-19 Pandemic

What is the background for the study?

The COVID-19 pandemic and accompanying economic shocks have created unprecedented disruption and challenges for human services programs and the families they serve. The pandemic caused State, Tribal, and county TANF and child support programs to face increased demand for assistance and services at the same time that shutdown orders and social distancing upended program operations and service delivery. In addition, the pandemic changed the composition of the programs' caseloads and the needs of the families served.

The pandemic also provided an opportunity for program staff to generate ideas and adopt new and innovative practices. Meeting the demands of this crisis situation included shifting modes of service delivery, adapting processes and practices, developing new forms of collaboration, and implementing new policies.

What is the study's focus?

Through this study, the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) in the Administration for Children and Families at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services seeks to document and learn from program innovations that TANF and child support programs have made in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This study will advance knowledge about the implications of the pandemic for TANF and child support operations and what that has meant for the customers they serve. It will describe adaptations programs made, how staff and customers experienced these changes, and what changes may be continued longer-term. OPRE has contracted with Mathematica and its partner, MEF Associates, to design and conduct the study.

How will the study be conducted?

The Moving Forward: Lessons Learned from the COVID-19 Pandemic study includes several key activities:

- Conduct knowledge development activities, including a scan of the literature and consultations with policymakers, practitioners, and researchers to understand key adaptations that programs made in response to the pandemic and identify potential sites for further examination.
- Administer a short web-based questionnaire to TANF and child support staff and conduct follow-up interviews with select program staff.
- Conduct brief, semi-structured interviews with a small number of child support and TANF customers.

When will the study happen?

The study began in September 2021 and will continue through September 2025.

What will the study produce?

The study team will produce and disseminate a mix of written products that highlight key study findings based on the literature scan and their interviews with TANF and child support program staff and customers.

To find out more

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