



TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE FOR NEEDY FAMILIES

By Vanessa Reilly

Colorado's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, known as Colorado Works, provides financial and other assistance. The federally funded program is overseen at the state level by the Department of Human Services and is administered at the county level. Counties have the flexibility to set their own policies regarding direct cash assistance and targeted assistance, and to invest funds in community initiatives that assist struggling families. Benefit amounts depend on household income and the composition of the household. Qualifying applicants must be seeking employment or be involved in a work-related activity when they apply for benefits, and must participate in a work-related activity while receiving benefits.

Eligible Populations

State law restricts Colorado Works eligibility to those households that include a dependent child. Eligible persons include: parents with a dependent child in the home (including expectant parents); specified caretakers with whom a dependent child is living; dependent children under age 18; and dependent children aged 18 who are enrolled in school and expect to complete their school program before age 19. At their discretion, counties may also provide services, but not cash assistance, to noncustodial parents in order to promote sustainable employment of noncustodial parents and to enable child support payments.

Other Eligibility Criteria

In order to be eligible, an applicant must:

- be a Colorado resident;
- be a United States citizen, or a qualified non-citizen who entered the U.S. before

August 22, 1996, or a qualified non-citizen who entered the U.S. after August 22, 1996, and who has been in a qualified non-citizen status for at least five years or who is in a federal exempt category;

- not be receiving financial assistance from other financial assistance programs administered by the state;
- not be an inmate of a public institution, except as a patient in a public medical institution;
- not be an inmate of any institution as a tuberculosis or mental health disorder patient, unless under the age of 21 and receiving psychiatric care under Medicaid;
- not be participating in a labor strike;
- provide a social security number or proof of application for such;
- provide verification of earned income received in the 30 days immediately prior to application; and
- provide verification of pregnancy, if applicable.

To establish initial eligibility, an applicant's income must not exceed the amount of need standard as specified for that family unit. Once eligible, 67 percent of an applicant's income will be disregarded during the certification period (up to six months), in order to encourage a transition to meaningful employment. Table 1 outlines the need standards and grant amounts for families of varying sizes.

**Table 1
Colorado Works Standards of Assistance Chart**

Specified Caretaker(s) of Children	Number of Dependent Children											
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Each Add'l.
No Specified Caretakers												
Need Standard	\$0	117	245	368	490	587	678	755	830	904	977	67
Grant Amount	\$0	128	269	404	539	646	746	832	913	995	1,086	72
One Specified Caretaker												
Need Standard	\$253	331	421	510	605	697	770	844	920	992	1,065	67
Grant Amount	\$278	364	462	561	665	767	847	929	1,012	1,092	1,172	72
Two Specified Caretakers												
Need Standard	\$357	439	533	628	716	787	861	937	1009	1,082	1,155	67
Grant Amount	\$392	483	586	691	787	865	947	1,032	1,111	1,190	1,271	72

Source: Department of Human Services.

Ongoing Requirements

Within 30 days of application, applicants receive an initial assessment in order to create an individualized employment plan. The assessment focuses on identifying the services and assistance needed to support the family in obtaining meaningful employment and achieving economic stability. From this assessment an individualized employment plan is created, which becomes a contract between the work-eligible individual or individuals in the family and the county agency. Participation in the activities outlined in an individualized employment plan satisfies the work activity requirement to receive benefits.

Benefits are limited to a lifetime maximum of five years, with limited extensions granted for cases that meet hardship or domestic violence criteria. Hardship reasons include disability; involvement in the judicial system; family instability, including the proven inability to maintain employment; inadequate or unavailable child care, housing, transportation, or employment opportunities; and other hardship reasons specified by county.

Types of Assistance

Financial assistance may be either basic cash assistance or short-term assistance. Basic cash assistance means cash, payments, vouchers, and other benefits designed to meet a family's ongoing basic needs including food, clothing, shelter, utilities, household goods, personal care items, and general expenses. This type of assistance is also

sometimes characterized as "ongoing basic cash assistance," distinguishing it from "short-term" assistance, which is one-time assistance to deal with a specific crisis situation or need, not needed to meet recurrent or ongoing needs, and that does not extend beyond four months. Recipients of ongoing basic cash assistance must receive a re-determination of eligibility every six months.

Other benefits vary by county, and can include: subsidized employment; vouchers for job placement agencies; vouchers for job skills education; family planning services; child care and transportation for families who are employed; individual development accounts; counseling, case management, transitional services, job training and other employment-related services; substance abuse control programs; domestic violence victim services; and responsible parenting and relationship education programs.

Families where children are at risk of out-of-home placement due to abuse or neglect may be eligible for participation in the Family Preservation Program, which uses TANF funds to provide services designed to ensure eligible children can be cared for in their home or in the home of a caretaker relative.