

Ohio Works First Aims To Prevent Need for Assistance



Many Changes for Ohio's Families Since 1997

Only half as many Ohio families received cash assistance in October, 2000, as in October, 1997. Ohio now spends more on child care assistance and preventing welfare dependency than it does on cash assistance. These changes have come about since Ohio implemented Ohio Works First, the state's welfare reform program, in 1997.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

The 1996 federal welfare reform law, which created the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, greatly increased state and county responsibility for the program, placed time limits on receiving cash assistance, ended the guarantee of assistance, and required adults to work toward self-sufficiency in exchange for a monthly check.

Ohio has more than one billion TANF dollars each year to provide cash assistance, education, and a range of services to prevent families from depending on assistance. The federal share is \$728 million annually; the state share, or "maintenance of effort" (MOE), is nearly \$391 million. Ohio must spend its maintenance of effort money before receiving the federal money. Congress needs to reauthorize the TANF program before October 1, 2002.

To be eligible for cash assistance, a family must earn less than 60% of the federal poverty level (\$8,490 per year for a family of three). Families can earn more than 60% of the poverty level and still be eligible for other services, such as child care, health insurance, and food stamps.

What Ohio Works First Means for Families

Work Requirements and Personal Responsibility. Parents have to work—at least 30 hours per week for single-parent households, and at least 35 hours per week for two-parent households. If parents lack job skills, then they must be enrolled in approved job search, vocational education, or job skills training programs.

Each parent's "Self-Sufficiency Contract" details what the parent must do to receive cash assistance and also specifies what other support services, such as child care, Medicaid, and food stamps, the county will provide. If parents do not comply with their portion of the contract, they can lose their cash benefits.

Time Limits. Parents can receive monthly cash assistance for 36 months (these need not be consecutive months). Once this 36-month limit is exceeded, the family must wait 24 months before they may qualify for an additional 24 months of cash assistance. (Note: Child-only cases are excluded from time limits).

Ohio Works First: In Brief

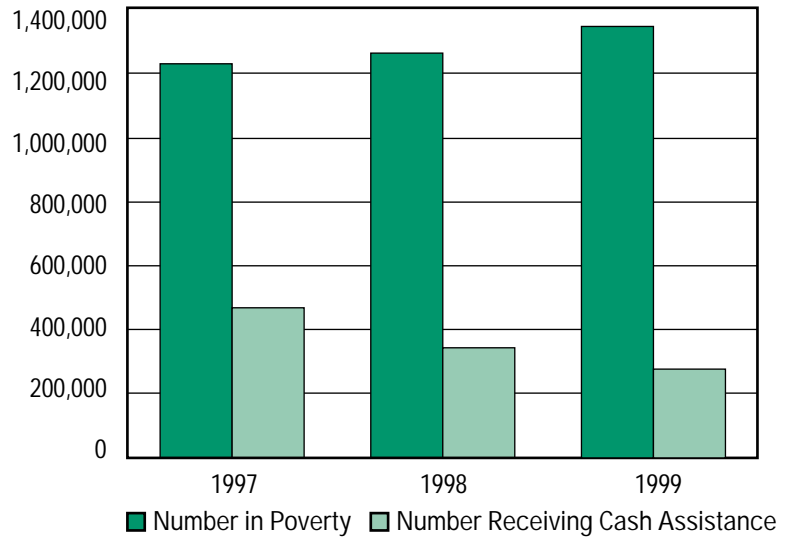
- OWF serves nearly two children for every adult.
- The number of Ohioans receiving cash assistance declined 47% between October, 1997, and October, 2000.
- 72% of the individuals on cash assistance live in Ohio's eight urban counties, compared to 50% of the state's population.
- Fewer than half of the adults receiving cash assistance statewide have a high school diploma.
- A family of three receives a maximum of \$373 per month in cash assistance.

Ohio's first 4,369 families began exhausting their 36-month time limits on October 1, 2000; 541 of these families received an extension. When families reach their time limits, they may continue to be eligible for job training, Medicaid, food stamps, and child care assistance.

How Does Ohio Help Families Avoid Welfare?

Ohio developed the Prevention, Retention, and Contingency (PRC) program in 1997 to assist families with short-term problems, in the hope of preventing long-term dependency on public assistance. Counties develop their own PRC criteria and a menu of support services based on residents' needs. This innovative program is intended to give local officials the flexibility to help families find or keep jobs before turning to cash assistance. For example, the program helps families by providing industry-specific job skills training, paying for car repairs or providing bus tickets or license plate fees so parents can get to work, and paying for uniforms and licenses that parents need for work.

Number of Poor Ohioans Compared to Ohioans Receiving Cash Assistance



Sources: Ohio Department of Job and Family Services; U.S. Census Bureau.

For sources and more information, visit the Children's Defense Fund-Ohio web site (<http://www.cdfohio.org>).



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- Briefing Guides are available on the following topics:
- Child Care Assistance
 - Child Care Quality
 - Child Poverty
 - Child Support
 - Children's Health Insurance
 - Fourth Grade Reading
 - Head Start Basics
 - Head Start Quality
 - Immunizations
 - Ohio Works First
 - School Facilities