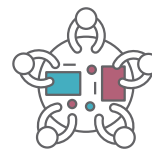


Pilot Profile: New York State

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Data Collaborative Pilot Initiative is a component of the TANF Data Innovation project. The 30-month pilot offered technical assistance and training to support cross-disciplinary teams of staff at eight state and county TANF programs in the routine use of TANF and other administrative data to inform policy and practice.

NEW YORK STATE (NYS) CASH ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS.

In New York there is effectively no time limit on the receipt of public assistance benefits. In addition to the TANF program, New York's Temporary Assistance (TA) program, administered by the state Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA), provides a state and locally funded Safety Net Assistance (SNA) program for people who are not eligible for federal TANF benefits or for people who have reached the federal TANF time limit. So while the cost burden is shifted when a client reaches the federal time limit—primarily to local districts—from a client perspective, the change from TANF to SNA has no real implications.



The pilot team at OTDA included staff from three bureaus: Employment and Advancement Services; Temporary Assistance; and Data Management and Analysis—a mix of individuals with TANF policy, program, research, database design, and analytics expertise.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS. The pilot team at the OTDA sought to understand three questions for an entry cohort of TA participants: (1) the characteristics associated with a TA participant's leaving or returning to receive public assistance, (2) subgroups who are more likely to leave or return, and (3) factors that are likely to be associated with long-term receipt of TA benefits. The team plans to use this information to predict, at the time a TA case is opened, how long a participant will use the benefits. In this way, OTDA hopes to help districts identify early on those individuals who may become long-term TA participants. The agency aims to develop a tool to help staff members make decisions about how to serve participants who may need more services, generate evidence about the impact of interventions, and help with staffing decisions.

PILOT HIGHLIGHTS

New York State's pilot project was a first step in creating a flexible platform for providing access to longitudinal data for evidence-building, program analysis, and program planning for TA and other programs, and in using the platform to answer a key programmatic question. Following the pilot experience, the team is well-positioned to perform similar and more advanced analyses.

DATA LANDSCAPE. The pilot team used administrative data from two NYS data systems: A **TA benefits reporting and tracking system**, and earnings and employment data from the **state Unemployment Insurance system**. The team built a longitudinal spell file that included all TA participants from August 2005 through January 2020 to track their experiences with public assistance during that time, including any periods during which they started, paused or stopped, or restarted participation. The team then focused its analysis on a cohort of all adults with children (and pregnant people without children) who started receiving public assistance benefits between July 1 and September 30, 2016, in a subset of counties (excluding New York City). The pilot team's analysis incorporated 16 years of public assistance history, two years of employment data before

TA entry, and 4.5 years of employment data after TA entry to observe patterns of public assistance receipt. Key variables included a participant's age, gender, race, highest educational degree attained, marital status, number of children, pregnancy status, shelter type, citizenship status, previous public assistance history, employability, number of employers worked for and total earnings in a two-year period before benefit started, and history of benefit sanctions.

APPROACH AND RESEARCH METHODS. The pilot team conducted survival analyses using Cox proportional hazards regression to understand how regional differences and people's personal characteristics known at the start of their TA spell affected their probability of leaving or returning to TA. This multivariate analysis method allowed the team to examine each factor's importance, while controlling for potential confounding factors. The team then used logistic regression to develop a model to predict who would be a long-term participant. Inputs for this predictive model included the variables listed above, indicators of county size, and county unemployment rates. The team also cross-validated the model to test whether it could discriminate reliably between long-term participants and short-term participants, and whether predictions aligned with actual outcomes.

New York State TANF Snapshot

State
SUPERVISED

County
ADMINISTERED

Number of TANF* participants (November 2020)^a

91,050

Adults

198,575

Children

* TANF is a part of the state's Temporary Assistance program



\$ 789

Maximum Monthly Earnings Threshold for Family of 3 (July 2020)^b

\$ 789

Monthly Cash Benefit for Family of 3 with No Income (July 2020)^c

\$ 5.2b

TANF and State Maintenance-of-Effort Spending (FY 2020)^d

(a) Congressional Research Service, [The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families \(TANF\) Block Grant: Responses to Frequently Asked Questions](#) (b) Urban Institute, Welfare Rules Database, [Table I.E.3. Standards for Determining Eligibility, July 2020](#) (c) Urban Institute, Welfare Rules Database, [Table II.A.4. Maximum Monthly Benefit for a Family with No Income, July 2020](#) (d) Office of Family Assistance, [TANF and MOE Spending and Transfers by Activity, FY 2020](#)

INITIAL FINDINGS AND NEXT STEPS. Key findings from the pilot team's initial analyses included the following:

- Earning history and a previous history of receiving cash assistance at the start of TA participation were the best predictors of the timing of a participant leaving or returning to TA. Working patterns or earnings two years before entry were especially important.

- Regional differences and many personal characteristics were also good predictors of the timing of leaving, returning, or both.
- The model performed well in predicting individuals whose chance of becoming long-term participants was low, but it underestimated when predicting for those with a high chance of becoming long-term participants. More powerful predictors may be needed to further improve the performance of the model.



We appreciate how the TDC pilot is emphasizing the fact that using data to create actionable evidence requires a team that includes both analytic and program staff.



New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance

Looking ahead, the team will refine the model by identifying and removing sources of bias (that is, whether the model avoided predictions that correlate with protected characteristics including race, gender, age, citizenship, and disability status) and by engaging a working group of local district TA staff members to review the model and explore how OTDA and the districts might use the model’s results fairly to improve program decisions. To that end, the team has established an expert working group of local staff members to discuss the model and its ethical use.

This profile was based primarily on reports and presentations produced by the pilot team at New York’s Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance. For more information, contact Britany Orlebeke, Director, Bureau of Data Management and Analysis (Britany.Orlebeke@otda.ny.gov). The TANF Data Innovation (TDI) Project Team—which includes MDRC (lead), Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, the Coleridge Initiative, and Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy at the University of Pennsylvania—provided technical assistance and training. Johanna Walter of MDRC was the New York TDC pilot coach. MDRC edited this document and it was designed by Public Strategies.

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