TANF **DATA** COLLABORATIVE

Pilot Profile: Utah

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.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS. The pilot team at the Utah Department of Workforce Services (DWS) initially sought to identify characteristics of families who exit the TANF cash assistance program and subsequently return. Their hope was to better understand the reasons that families return to assistance and what services might lower the likelihood of their needing TANF assistance in the future. As the pilot proceeded, the team identified additional research questions about the quality and completeness of certain data elements, as well as how that data quality impacts DWS's ability to understand factors that influence whether families return to receiving benefits.

The pilot team at DWS included a mix of staff with TANF policy, program, and data analytics expertise.

DATA LANDSCAPE. The pilot focused on conducting new analyses drawing from several types of data that are routinely used in managing Utah's TANF program: an **eligibility data system**, which includes demographics and other household characteristics, TANF cash benefits issued, and information about other benefits issued such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits, childcare assistance, and Medicaid; and a TANF **case management system**, which includes case notes and information about TANF participation activities, services, and any suspensions or termination of benefits. DWS used Individual and household-level identifiers (such as Social Security numbers, TANF case numbers and personal identifying numbers) to connect data from multiple systems including the eligibility system, the case management system, and Utah's **unemployment insurance system**.
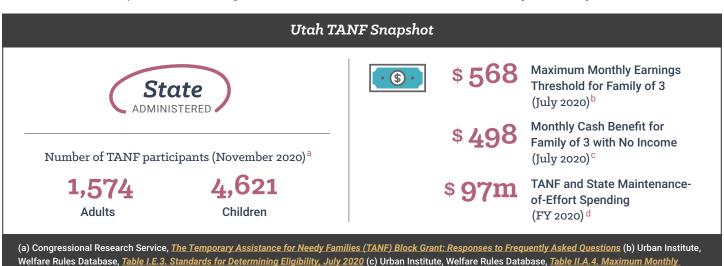
APPROACH AND RESEARCH METHODS. The Utah pilot team used a range of software for various analyses, including SQL (to extract data from the state's data warehouse), Excel (for descriptive analysis), and R (for regression analysis). The pilot team examined a series of cohorts—families that exited the TANF program during a given calendar year, beginning

with 2011. The team then followed each cohort's outcomes for several years to learn about families who returned to TANF during that follow-up period. The team ultimately looked at five-year outcomes for a 2011 cohort and a 2014 cohort, and three-year outcomes for a 2018 cohort. Adding this 2018 cohort allowed the team to observe outcomes through the end of 2021, gaining insights about potential impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Analyses of exits and return rates included descriptive statistics about demographics, household composition, and—for the 2018 cohort—the educational level of a head of household at the time the household exited TANF.

In addition, for the educational attainment variable, the team analyzed the extent of missing data in the 2011 and 2014 cohorts, and whether patterns of missing data were correlated with the race or the ethnicity of a family's head of household.

Utah TANF Snapshot

State ADMINISTERED

Number of TANF participants (November 2020)[a]

1,574 Adults

4,621 Children

$ **568** Maximum Monthly Earnings Threshold for Family of 3 (July 2020)[b]

$ **498** Monthly Cash Benefit for Family of 3 with No Income (July 2020)[c]

$ **97m** 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 Utah pilot include the following:

- The pilot team concluded that between 2011 and 2018, changes in case management practices and front-line staff training led to increasingly complete data on educational attainment of TANF program participants.

- Preliminary results suggest that in 2011, education data were most likely to be missing for Black participants, for participants whose race was unknown, and for Hispanic participants, in that order.

- Initial analysis of the 2018 cohort suggests that education level may not influence participants' rates of return to TANF benefits for the time period reviewed.

> [Before the TDC] we had a pretty big push to do our case management differently. [One unexpected] benefit was improving the quality of the data that we collect in our system... [During our pilot project] it was really kind of cool to see, "Hey, this rollout and training of staff really did have a pretty significant impact just on the quality of the data that we're collecting.

NYCOLE TYLKA
Assistant Director, Workforce Development Division, Utah Department of Workforce Services

Looking forward, Utah's pilot team aims to conduct analyses to better understand characteristics of those who return to TANF such as their post-exit earnings, employers, industries of employment, and impacts of education level.

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