



**STRENGTHENING**  
At Risk and Homeless  
Young Mothers and Children

## Opportunities to Improve Services to Homeless and At-Risk Families with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Resources in 2010

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An initiative of the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, in partnership with The National Center on Family Homelessness, National Alliance to End Homelessness and ZERO TO THREE: National Center for Infants, Toddlers and Families.

**T**emporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) will not be reauthorized in 2010 as was anticipated. There are, however, significant opportunities to improve how TANF programs serve homeless and at-risk families. By taking full advantage of the opportunities, homelessness planners can set the foundation for TANF reauthorization legislation that will improve services to all families.

### Opportunity 1:

#### **Expand Opportunities for Homeless Families Under the TANF Emergency Contingency Fund.**

There is close to \$3.2 billion remaining available to states under the existing TANF Emergency Contingency Fund (ECF) through September 30, 2010.<sup>1</sup> While some states have accessed a substantial proportion of the ECF funds they are eligible to receive, other states have been slow to access the funds. Philanthropic and nonprofit spending on low-income families has been effectively used in some states to leverage the ECF resources. Substantial education and state level advocacy has been needed to leverage both public and private funds to take advantage of ECF.

There may be new resources for ECF. Legislation before Congress would provide a TANF ECF extension, which would provide \$2.5 billion in new funds that states can use to subsidize the increased costs they incur serving low-income families through September 30, 2011.

The TANF ECF can be critical resources to support efforts to end family homelessness. Specifically, ECF can be used to:

- *Make HPRP go further.* The TANF funds can be used to provide short-term rental assistance to families (up to four months). It can also be used to meet expenses that HPRP cannot meet, for example, furniture assistance.
- *Provide employment.* The TANF funds can be used to pay all, or part, of a person's paycheck. Parents who have been rapidly re-housed and have limited job skills can receive on-the-job experience and bring home a paycheck.
- *Increase families' income.* The TANF funds can be used to increase the cash assistance families receive, providing more resources that they can put toward meeting their housing needs.

<sup>1</sup> Detailed information on the amount of TANF ECF each state is entitled to receive and the amount of ECF funds already claimed can be accessed from the Office of Family Assistance, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Approved TANF Emergency Fund Applications by Category*, <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/tanf/apprTANFemerfund.html>

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**States appear particularly interested in using TANF ECF to provide employment opportunities for low-income families and the Administration is also encouraging the use of ECF to provide subsidized employment.**

Homelessness planners can educate state officials about employment strategies for families who have experienced homelessness and ensure that homeless families are targeted for any employment initiatives implemented. Such employment opportunities should not be limited to those who are the most “work ready” but should also serve those with more significant barriers to work who can use new opportunities to build skills.

To ensure states are making the most of existing and future ECF resources for homeless families, state and local homelessness planners can:

- Educate Members of Congress, state and local officials about the opportunities to serve homeless families under the proposed ECF extension;
- Develop or expand capacity, within homelessness systems or through new partnerships, to offer employment opportunities for parents experiencing, or transitioning out of homelessness; and
- Encourage state officials to target ECF-generated employment opportunities and appropriate supports to families who have experienced homelessness and others parents with multiple employment barriers.

Should the TANF ECF be extended there will not be enough resources dedicated to allow each state to receive the full amount they are eligible for. States should be prepared to act quickly to ensure they get the full ECF resources they are entitled to receive.

## Opportunity 2:

### **Improve states' capacity to implement new strategies for homeless families and single men by supporting the Fatherhood, Marriage, and Families Innovation Fund.**

The President's FY 2011 budget includes \$500 million for competitive state grants to support and test innovative new approaches to serving families with significant barriers to economic self-sufficiency and for noncustodial fathers. \$250 million would be dedicated to interventions for noncustodial fathers and \$250 million would be available for families with significant challenges. States would have a great deal of flexibility in the design of interventions but would be expected to demonstrate improved family and individual outcomes.

Noncustodial fathers and families with significant barriers to economic self-sufficiency comprise a large segment of those who experience homelessness. The number of state grants that will be awarded will likely be limited, so state and local homelessness planners should be sure they are on the forefront of preparing their state to take advantage of these new resources, should they become available, to promote new, comprehensive interventions for at-risk and homeless people.

Local and state homelessness planners and providers can:

- Educate Members of Congress, state and local officials about the opportunities to serve homeless and at-risk families and single men under the proposed Innovations Fund;
- Develop proposals for innovative service approaches for both target populations that state officials can use as a template to apply for federal funds; and
- Ensure that any submission made by states to seek Innovation Funds fully integrates the needs of individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

There is also an opportunity to strengthen the Fatherhood, Marriage, and Families Innovation Fund by coordinating the program with another proposed federal initiative, the Homeless Families Demonstration.

The FY 2011 budget included funds for a Homeless Families Demonstration (under the Housing and Services for Homeless Persons Demonstration) which would provide 6,000 new housing subsidies for at-risk and homeless families. The vouchers would be jointly administered by the Departments of Housing and Urban Development, Health and Human Services, and Education. The jointly administered vouchers will leverage resources from each federal agency, and facilitate the identification of at-risk and homeless families, to provide comprehensive services to families.

The two federal initiatives have overlapping intents, to promote better outcomes for very vulnerable families. In part, this is achieved by improving the availability and the flexibility of mainstream resources to provide more comprehensive and richer interventions to families who are at heightened risk of faring poorly.

Homeless and at-risk families can be better served by ensuring the two initiatives are coordinated at the federal level. Ideally, states that apply for a grant under the Fatherhood, Marriage, and Families Innovation Fund could apply for housing subsidies under the Homeless Families Demonstration within the same grant submission. A states' grant proposal could include a plan for how at-risk and homeless families would be served under the Innovation Fund and how allocation of the housing subsidies among the many at-risk and homeless families targeted with those funds would be managed. Since states will be required to demonstrate improved outcomes for all families (not just those receiving housing subsidies), there will likely be a strong incentive to target the subsidies where they are most critically needed. Finally, successful approaches piloted under the Fatherhood, Marriage, and Families Innovations Fund will inform future TANF reauthorization. By ensuring housing subsidies are available to states as they develop new approaches to serve the most vulnerable families, homelessness

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planners can increase the attention to evaluating and meeting families' housing needs by state and local TANF officials.

If the two federal resources are not coordinated federally, homelessness planners can promote coordination at the state or local level. Homeless planners should support both federal initiatives and encourage their state and local government officials to pursue both sets of funds. Homeless planners should strongly promote coordination of plans for the use of these funds and this coordination can strengthen grant applications, even if the funds are awarded separately.

## Opportunity 3:

**Capture and promote lessons from communities using TANF ECF and Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP) to serve at-risk and homeless families to educate state and local TANF officials and Members of Congress on how federal TANF resources can be better used to serve families.**

With new TANF ECF and HPRP resources, states and local communities have piloted an array of new approaches to serve at-risk and homeless families. These new approaches are taking hold in communities where they have never been tried before. The successful strategies are gaining new local supporters and demonstrating what can be achieved to stabilize homeless families and provide foundations from which families can build greater economic self-sufficiency.

This provides an exciting new opportunity to build support for successful approaches with Members of Congress and with state and local officials. It will allow TANF reauthorization, when it occurs, to incorporate successful approaches and reflect the lessons of what has already been achieved in local communities. There is a historical parallel. Before TANF was enacted in 1996, many states had waivers that allowed them to test new approaches to providing assistance to low-income families. The enactment of TANF incorporated many of the shifts

already underway at the state level. Building state and local capacity and support for strategies that end homelessness with ECF and HPRP resources can increase the likelihood that future TANF reauthorization proposals will result in better services for families.

Local and state homelessness planners can:

- Regularly communicate with Members of Congress, state and local officials about the lessons being learned from HPRP and ECF funded initiatives locally and from communities across the country;
- Develop proposals for improving HPRP and ECF initiatives and encourage coordination of these resources to serve at-risk and homeless families; and
- Encourage states and local communities to modify existing TANF program requirements and services to better serve homeless families.

## Summary

In large, state and local TANF programs are not serving homeless and at-risk families well. These programs are not preventing their clients from becoming homeless and, too often, the resources they provide are not a major factor in helping families quickly exit homelessness.

The TANF ECF, the Marriage, Fatherhood, and Families Innovation Fund and the Homeless Families Demonstration can allow states to greatly improve their services to at-risk and homeless families. The success of these initiatives, and lessons learned from HPRP, can become very important tools to inform TANF reauthorization and improve services to families nationally. State and local partners can maximize these new opportunities to immediately improve services to families experiencing a housing crisis while have a long lasting impact on how TANF programs work to prevent and end family homelessness.

# Strengthening At Risk and Homeless Young Mothers and Children Opportunities to Improve Services to Homeless and At-Risk Families with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Resources in 2010

*Strengthening At Risk and Homeless Young Mothers and Children* is generating knowledge on improving the housing, health and development of young homeless and at-risk young mothers and their children.

*Opportunities to Improve Services to Homeless and At-Risk Families with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Resources in 2010* was written by Sharon McDonald, Senior Policy Analyst, National Alliance to End Family Homelessness. This policy brief is a product of the National Alliance to End Family Homelessness on behalf of the Strengthening At Risk and Homeless Young Mothers and Children Coordinating Center, which is a partnership of The National Center on Family Homelessness, National Alliance to End Homelessness and ZERO TO THREE: National Center for Infants, Toddlers and Families. The Coordinating Center provides technical assistance to program sites, conducts cross-site process and outcome evaluations and develops a range of application products from the study sites.

*Strengthening At Risk and Homeless Young Mothers and Children* is an *Initiative* of the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation.



For more information on this *Initiative*, please contact The National Center on Family Homelessness, 181 Wells Avenue, Newton Centre, MA; (617) 964-3834 or at [www.familyhomelessness.org](http://www.familyhomelessness.org).



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