



**BOLD  
THINKERS  
DRIVING  
REAL-WORLD  
IMPACT**

# How TANF Agencies Support Families Experiencing Homelessness

*2022 Regions I-IV East Coast  
TANF Directors' Meeting  
August 10, 2022*

# Study's Primary Research Questions



- To what extent are TANF agencies across the country using TANF funds to serve and support families experiencing or at-risk of homelessness?
- What approaches and strategies are TANF agencies using to serve these families?
- What do those findings mean for TANF policymakers and Continuum of Care (CoC) leaders trying to address homelessness?

# Study Components



Document Review of 25  
States' TANF Plans and  
Policies  
(Spring 2018)

Site Visits to Five  
Communities using TANF to  
Support Families  
Experiencing Homelessness  
(Fall 2018/Winter 2020)



Web-based Survey of  
State/Territory TANF  
Administrators and Sample  
of Local Administrators  
(Summer 2019)

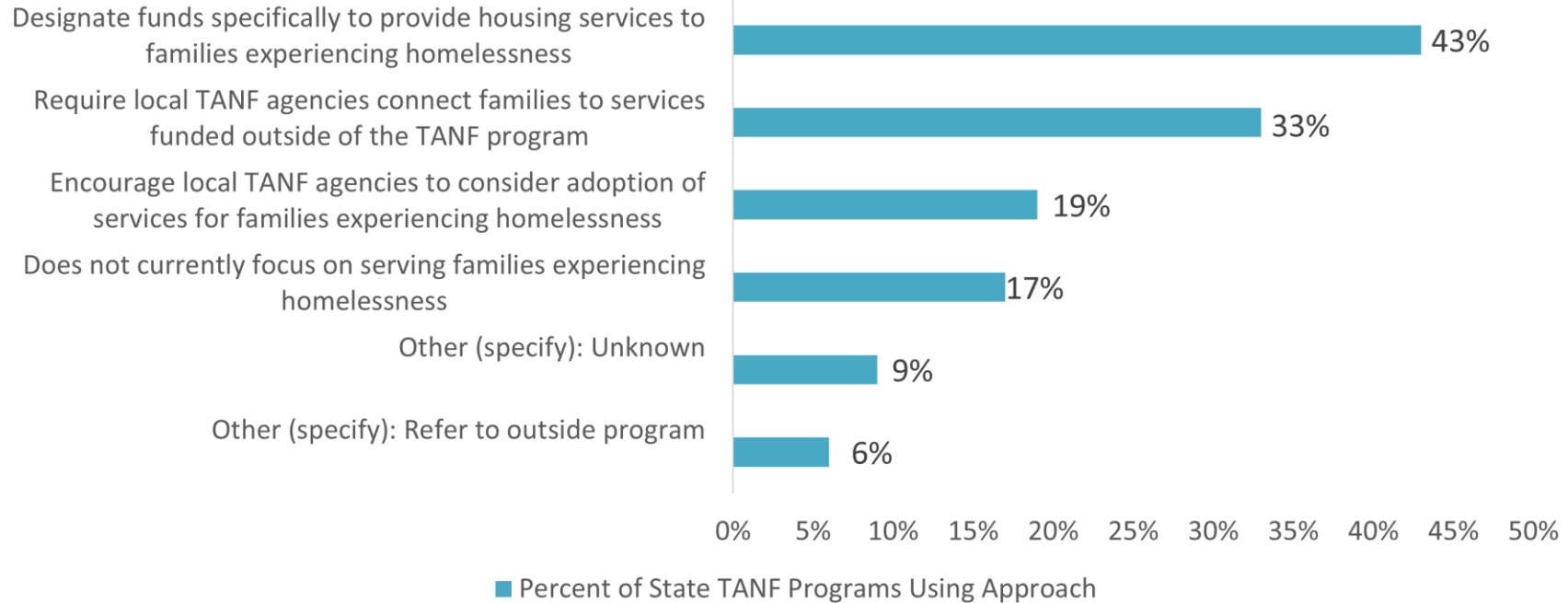


Innovative Approaches  
to Using TANF  
Assistance to Help  
Families Experiencing  
Homelessness



- TANF funds can be used to:
  - Help provide homeless prevention services
  - Offer transportation and child care assistance for families
  - Serve as bridge to other housing supports (e.g., long-term housing subsidies)

# States have a Spectrum of Approaches to Assist Families Experiencing Homelessness



Source: Survey of State TANF administrators, N=47

# Factors that Motivate TANF Agencies to Help Families Experiencing Homelessness



- Federal and regional guidance
- State-level policy changes
- State recognition of community need
- Requests from homeless service providers
- Recognition of “Housing First” philosophy and adoption of rapid re-housing model



# Common Models of Assistance



# Model 1: Administer Assistance Directly




- TANF agencies directly administer programs to provide rental and other housing-related assistance
- Often, TANF agencies help families pay their rent
- Study sites: Boulder, Mercer, and Shasta Counties

# Model 2: Fund an Intermediary to Provide Assistance



- TANF agencies provide funding to existing homeless service providers to operate housing programs
- Allows for expansion of housing assistance
- Level of TANF agency involvement varies
- Study sites: Atlanta and Nashville



# Partnering with Local Housing Organizations

# Continuums of Care (CoCs)



- TANF agencies can benefit from:
  - using existing eligibility and intake systems (e.g., coordinated entry systems) as referral source to identify families in need of assistance
  - CoC's expertise in serving families experiencing homelessness within the jurisdiction
  - information sharing through CoC planning and coordination meetings

# Public Housing Agencies (PHAs)



- By partnering with PHAs, TANF agencies can help families access long-term housing subsidies after TANF housing assistance ends
  - Important approach in high-cost housing markets
  - In four of our five sites, TANF agencies directly coordinate with local PHAs to help families access housing subsidies

# Local Homeless Service Providers



- Local homeless service providers offer:
  - Valuable insight into program design and service delivery
  - Deep knowledge of local rental market
  - Existing relationships with landlords
- TANF funds can support existing rapid re-housing programs operated by local providers

# Partnership Challenges



- Aligning TANF-funded programs with other services to eligible families (e.g., differing poverty thresholds or definitions of homelessness)
- Balancing differing program goals and priorities
- Coordinating decision-making across different organizations
- Reducing duplication of effort among case managers



# TANF Agencies' Approaches to Providing Housing and Other Services



# Two Approaches to Fund and Provide Temporary Rental Assistance



## Short-term rental assistance

- Fixed amount of funding to help families bridge gap until qualify for long-term housing subsidy or raise income through employment
- TANF agencies make cash payments directly to families or their landlords for a set number of months

## Tapered rental assistance

- Provide varying amount of aid, but begin by paying up to 100% of families' rent for up to a few months' time
- Gradually decreases the rental subsidy over a set period of time



## **Housing-related**

- Housing search assistance
- Application assistance
- Rental arrears
- Utility assistance
- Move-in assistance

## **Non-housing-related**

- Child care assistance
- Behavioral and physical health services
- Non-housing focused financial counseling
- Employment-related transportation assistance

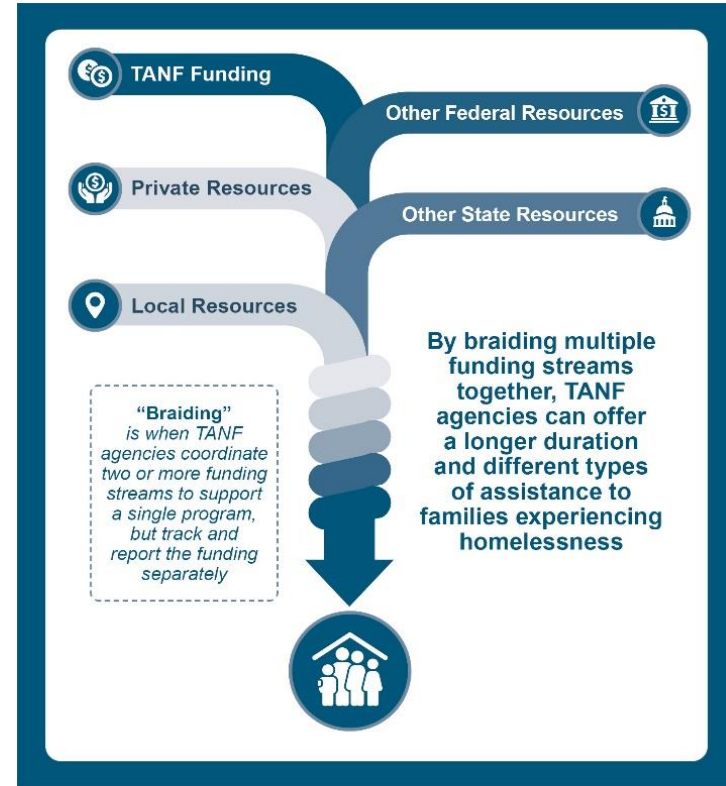
# TANF Agencies Can Support Broader Case Management



- Case manager role can be filled by TANF agency staff **or** the TANF agency can fund another organization to provide case management
- Families meet with case managers regularly who connect them with services and help them meet their goals
- TANF case managers may need additional expertise to support families through housing search and placement process

# Braiding TANF Funding with Other Funding Sources

- Offers a longer duration of assistance
- Access to different types of assistance
- Greater flexibility
- Increase the number of families being served





BOLD  
THINKERS  
DRIVING  
REAL-WORLD  
IMPACT

# Study Summary

# Summary of Study Findings



- Many states do not target TANF funds to assist families experiencing or at-risk of homelessness
- State policy changes most frequently encourage TANF agencies to focus on helping families experiencing homelessness
- Most TANF programs coordinate or fund other housing services

# Study Implications for TANF Agencies



- CoCs can offer expertise on supporting families experiencing homelessness
- TANF agencies should explore fully integrating employment services and job training with housing assistance
- TANF agencies should consider braiding their funding with other public and private funding streams to amplify their ability to help families experiencing homelessness

# Four Research Briefs



- *Assisting Families Experiencing Homelessness with TANF Funding: Findings from a Survey of TANF Administrators*
- *Approaches to Assisting Families At Risk of Homelessness with TANF Funds*
- *Using TANF Funding to Provide Housing Assistance During the COVID-19 Pandemic*
- *Supporting Families Experiencing Homelessness: Strategies and Approaches for TANF Agencies*





BOLD  
THINKERS  
DRIVING  
REAL-WORLD  
IMPACT

## Project Website:

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/how-tanf-agencies-support-families-experiencing-homelessness>

*Lauren Dunton*

*Senior Associate*

*lauren\_dunton@abtassoc.com*