TANF/SSI Disability Transition Project (TSDTP)

Tri-Regional TANF Directors Meeting
Providence, Rhode Island
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Overview

• TANF/SSI Disability Transition Project (TSDTP) examines connections between TANF and SSI, and programs for TANF recipients with disabilities

• Collaboration between SSA, ACF (OPRE and OFA), and state and county TANF programs

• Learning laboratory to understand TANF-SSI link, TANF disability/employment services environment, and to pilot promising models and approaches
Background

• Overlap in TANF and SSI populations (prior research)
  – Disabilities common among TANF adults. High rates of mental illness in both populations (30% TANF and 37% SSI)
  – Employment among TANF adults with disabilities is low (18%) and very low (4%) for seriously disabled
  – Approximately 18% of TANF households include an SSI recipient

• Challenges for two programs to work together:
  – Differing missions, rules and incentives related to work and definitions of disability
  – Limited history of collaboration
  – Conflicting messages about work and disability in TANF and SSI, and difficulty navigating contrasting programs
TSDTP Phases

• **Phase 1**: Data analysis and program examination
  – Field visits; analysis of merged TANF-SSP/SSI data; technical assistance

• **Phase 2**: Pilot testing
  – Implementation monitoring and evaluation of pilots in three sites

• **Possible Phase 3**: National demonstration with rigorous evaluation depending on pilot results
Participating States/Localities

• Riverside, CA; Los Angeles, CA; Ocala region, FL; Muskegon County, MI; Hennepin and Ramsey counties, MN; New York state (data only)

• Focused on county-level operations, though state context is important

• Consulting with SSA field offices and state DDS in all sites
Program Observations
Are clients with disabilities a TANF priority?

Very different than the early day of welfare reform...

• **Key Factors:**
  – Budget and staffing constraints within TANF
  – Very tough labor market
  – Continued pressure to meet work participation rates

• **Implications:**
  – Incentive to work with the more employable
  – Incentive to exempt or ignore the harder to employ
  – Limited to smaller voluntary programs that are not marketed
  – More emphasis on SSI advocacy, but acceptance rates reported to be low
  – Clients with disabilities still face time-limits, with limited supports for transition
TANF programs with disability services emphasize barrier removal

• Employment not key goal, or only after treatment/services (e.g. mental health substance abuse) completed

• Participation in treatment not intensive, completion rates low

• Integrating services with employment is more promising but has rarely been used in TANF

• Individual Placement and Support (IPS) a “work first” approach that builds supports around competitive employment (being adapted and piloted in Ramsey County)
TANF/SSI Connection: Varied Approaches

• All sites provide some help to TANF recipients who apply for SSI
• Some contract with outside organizations for SSI advocacy services for initial applications, others do internally
• In all sites outside legal firms handle appeals on a selective basis
• Outside contractor staff may be more knowledgeable about SSI rules and navigating eligibility process, often proactive in getting documentation
• Outside organizations more likely to screen out obviously ineligible cases and achieve somewhat higher initial acceptance rates, but costs can be high and hard to justify based on outcomes
TANF/SSI Connection (cont)

• For applicants with mental health conditions, obtaining medical documentation especially difficult when they lack treatment history

• Several sites had trouble finding recipients with disabilities willing to apply for SSI despite more generous benefits and no time limits (possible reasons: stigma, child welfare concerns, lack of family services and supports)

• TANF connections with SSA field offices and DDS tend to occur at the individual case and worker level rather than through more systematic, coordinated efforts
TANF/SSI Connection (cont)

• TANF SSI advocacy staff need training on screening and assessment of potential applicants and accessing medical documentation (e.g. SOAR)

• TANF employment and eligibility staff could benefit from targeted training on SSI rules and process

• Simple communication links between TANF and SSA field offices would be helpful (e.g. designated contact staff, forum for addressing frequent problems)

• More ambitious inter-agency efforts (e.g. those for homeless adults in large cities) may only make sense if TANF applicant pool is large and if tangible benefits for both agencies
TANF/SSI Data Analysis

Preliminary Findings
Percentage of TANF recipients in given month with active SSI application between 6-8%. Figure relatively constant for TANF recipients, while percentage of adult SSP recipients with active SSI applications has declined over time.

Notes: Sample limited to states reporting their TANF/SSP universe in each year from Federal Fiscal Year 2005 to 2008. Source: Social Security Administration Disability Research File Fiscal Year 2009; Office of Family Assistance TANF and Separate State Program Monthly State Caseload Data Fiscal Years 2005-2008
SSI applications among adult TANF/SSP recipients in FY 2006 in full-reporting states

- No record of SSI application 1/1/1999-12/31/2008: 78.1%
- Applied for SSI 1/1/1999-12/31/2008: 21.9%

- No active application in FY 2006, but had applied in earlier years: 5.3%
- Adult filed an SSI application during FY 2006: 6.5%
- Adult began FY 2006 with active SSI application: 4.9%
- New application filed after FY 2006 (in 10/2006 - 12/2008): 5.2%

Sample: TANF/SSP recipients in FY 2006 in full-reporting states (n = 648,995).
Initial SSI applications peak nearly simultaneously with first month of TANF/SSP receipt

Timing of initial SSI applications relative to first month of TANF/SSP receipt

Adult TANF/SSP recipients who applied for SSI represented small portion of SSI applicants in FY 2006

• In full-reporting states, of approximately 899,700 individuals with active SSI application in FY 2006, 7 percent (approximately 62,600) received TANF/SSP at least 1 month that year
From the TANF perspective (comparing TANF/SSP recipients who applied for SSI with those who did not apply for SSI):

In full-reporting states, TANF/SSP recipients who applied for SSI were:

- Older (36 vs. 29 years old)
- Had older children (youngest child 7.5 vs. 4.3 years old)
- More likely to be white (59 vs. 47 percent)
- More likely to be no longer married (35 vs. 21 percent)
- Males more likely than female counterparts to apply (21 vs. 14 percent)
- More similar on other measures: family type, household size, number of children, education level, citizenship status
From the SSI perspective
(comparing adult SSI applicants who were TANF/SSP recipients and those who were not TANF/SSP recipients)

SSI applicants who were TANF/SSP recipients were:

• Younger (36 vs. 43 years old)
• Less likely to be white (59 percent vs. 67 percent)
• More likely to be female (78 percent vs. 49 percent)
• More likely to meet non-medical SSI eligibility rules (95 vs. 82 percent)
• Not surprising, given TANF means-test
From the SSI perspective (cont)

Among SSI applicants, TANF recipients were:

• Somewhat more likely to be denied, and less likely to be awarded, at initial level

• Among TANF/SSP recipients who were awarded, 38 percent were made at initial level, and 62 percent after appeal

• Among non-recipients, awards evenly split between initial level and after appeal
Disability Claims and Appeals for FY 2005 SSI Applicants by TANF Status (26 States)

TANF
Overall Allowance Rate: 42.1%

- Initial Level Determinations 61,202
- 0.680 Allowed 14.2%
  - 34% of all allowances
- Reconsideration Level Determinations 28,840
  - 1,890 Allowed 6.5%
  - 7% of all allowances
- 28,840 Appealed 60.5% Appeal Rate
  - 21,890 Appealed 80.9% Appeal Rate
- 3,067 Appealed Directly to ALJ (Prototype) 62.1% Appeal Rate
  - 15,233 Allowed 63.5%
  - 59% of all allowances
- 24,957 ALJ Level & Above Decisions
  - 952 pending

non-TANF
Overall Allowance Rate: 43.2%

- Initial Level Determinations 58,184
- 11,042 Allowed 19.0%
  - 44% of all allowances
- Reconsideration Level Determinations 25,072
  - 1,709 Allowed 6.8%
  - 7% of all allowances
- 25,072 Appealed 58.7% Appeal Rate
  - 18,651 Appealed 79.5% Appeal Rate
- 12,374 Appealed Directly to ALJ (Prototype) 60.2%
  - 761 pending
- 21,318 ALJ Level & Above Decisions
  - 3 pending

Note: All percentages are approximate and based on the data provided.
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