**Using TANF Funds to Address Housing Needs: State Examples**

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**Housing Supplements for TANF Recipients**

States generally take housing needs in account in setting standardized TANF benefit level amounts (but these levels may represent only a fraction of the need). Some states do additional customization based on housing costs in determining a family’s benefit amount. For example, a few states recognize individual variations in housing costs and consider a family’s actual housing costs (up to a maximum) in setting benefit amounts. Some states provide lower standardized benefits to families whose housing costs are reduced because they receive subsidized or supplied housing or otherwise have no shelter costs. And, some states provide a supplemental housing benefit through TANF on top of the standard family grant for groups of families, such as those with high shelter cost or not receiving any housing subsidy.

Creating or increasing this type of supplemental housing benefit can be an alternative to increasing the TANF benefit level. It may be possible to garner greater political support for increasing aid to families by making the case that TANF benefits are inadequate to house a family. And targeting the extra benefits to those families who are facing market rate housing may also be more acceptable than providing an across-the-board increase. Moreover, state policymakers, like those in Minnesota and Maine, may be able to secure more funding for a housing supplement than a full TANF benefit level increase.

Here are two examples of states that provide a sizable housing supplement on top of the benefit level. The maximum supplements and calculations for the benefit vary.

* **Maine** provides a Special Need Housing Allowance (SNHA) of up to $300. Most TANF families receive the supplement and, in most instances, they receive the full additional $300 allowance. The housing supplement is available to families whose housing costs in excess of 50% of their income (formerly it was 75% threshold).  
  The state’s TANF manual provides: “TANF assistance units that incur housing costs that equal or exceed 50% of their countable income may be eligible for a special need payment of up to $300 per month. A separate application for SNHA is not required. The TANF or PaS [Parents as Scholars] application or redetermination is considered a request for SNHA. A person can receive a SNHA even if not receiving a TANF basic grant. Assignment of child support and ASPIRE participation is required in this circumstance. Child only assistance units may be eligible for the SNHA.”

(See chapter 4 of [Maine Public Assistance Manual](https://www.maine.gov/sos/cec/rules/10/ch331.htm?msclkid=09ba6f1eb4f711ecaed5da355c62349f)).

* **Minnesota’s** law states, “… MFIP assistance units are eligible for an MFIP housing assistance grant of $110 per month, unless: the housing assistance unit is currently receiving public and assisted rental subsidies provided through the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and is subject to section 256J.37, subdivision 3a; or the assistance unit is a child-only case under section 256J.88.” (See section [256J.35 of the Minnesota State Statute](https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=256J.35&format=pdf)). The housing assistance grant will be a standard payment for all families who are eligible. In 2023, the state pass legislation to index the housing supplement for inflation annually.

**Short-term housing assistance:**

There are lots of programs that do rapid rehousing, not all of them funded with TANF funds.  When they are funded with TANF funds, they generally are limited to four months of help so they are not “assistance” and don’t trigger time limits and child support and work requirements.  These programs often four kinds of support: (1) help (including financial) with the housing search process; (2) case management; (3) employment assistance; and (4) rent payments for four months.  The criticism of these programs is that they set people up to fail because four months is not enough time for people to be able to make enough progress to be able to afford the rent on their own at the end of the four months.

Two programs that have been in place a long time and may have the most to offer in terms of lessons learned and how to structure these programs are Utah (The Road Home) and New Jersey (Mercer County).  Washington, DC also has a big rapid rehousing program and uses TANF funds as one source of funding, but has not been in place as long. Here are links with descriptions to their programs:

Utah (link to the Road Home who is contracted to provide the housing services)

[About Us – The Road Home](https://theroadhome.org/about-us/)

New Jersey

[NJ TANF State Plan FFY 21 - FFY 23 DRAFT.pdf](https://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/providers/grants/public/publicnoticefiles/NJ%20TANF%20State%20Plan%20FFY%2021%20-%20FFY%2023%20DRAFT.pdf#:~:text=The%20WFNJ%2FTANF%20assistance%20program%20is%20designed%20specifically%20to,employment%20and%20child%20support%20contributions%20in%20a%20household.) (page 34 has a short description of the program)

<https://app.box.com/s/cbcn394u8fg5xeipcr6s> (Mercer County program description)

Washington, DC  (DC has done quite a bit in recent years to try and reduce family homelessness in the city so they probably can share lots of lessons learned)

[Family Re-Housing Stabilization Program   | dhs (dc.gov)](https://dhs.dc.gov/page/family-re-housing-stabilization-program%C2%A0%C2%A0)

**Emergency assistance programs:**

There are a number of states that operate emergency assistance programs, some of which are a holdover from emergency assistance that was available with federal matching funding prior to the creation of TANF and some that are newer and more targeted.  These programs often are designed with a homeless prevention focus in mind, but may have a broader focus than housing.  Emergency assistance programs often restrict eligibility to once in 12 months.  There are no TANF restrictions that define how much these payments can be.  If they are designed to provide “crisis’ assistance rather than helping recipients to meet ongoing needs, they do not trigger work requirements, time limits and child support cooperation requirements that are triggered for benefits that meet the definition of "assistance."

Emergency Rental Assistance Program in DC

[Home Page DC DHS Rental Assistance Portal](https://erap.dhs.dc.gov/)

Emergency Assistance (Rent+) in New Jersey

<https://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/dfd/programs/emergency/>

Ohio Prevention, Retention and Contingency Funds (This is a special Ohio initiative that provides funds to counties to operate programs that help families to overcome barriers to employment.  Some of these programs were quite robust during TANF’s early years, but they seem to be more limited now.)

[County PRC Plans | Job and Family Services (ohio.gov)](https://jfs.ohio.gov/cash-food-and-refugee-assistance/cash-assistance/cash-programs/prevention-retention-and-contingency-prc-program/county-prc-plans)

Mercer County has historically used a lot of its PRC funds for housing assistance: [Mercer County PRC Plan](https://jfs.ohio.gov/static/OWF/prc/county/MercerCountyPRC.pdf)

California (operates a number of different housing programs, including one that is a hybrid rapid rehousing and emergency assistance program – the Housing Support Program.  <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/benefits-services/more-services/housing-programs>

Housing Support Program: <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/cdss-programs/housing-programs/calworks-housing-support-program>

Oregon Housing Stabilization Program

<https://www.dhs.state.or.us/caf/ss/tanf/docs/hsp_factsheet_format.pdf>