



Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) is a federal block grant that supports public assistance programs. Services for needy families funded with TANF funds include cash assistance for the purchase of basic needs such as food, clothing, housing, and personal care items; job preparation and work supports such as transportation, vehicle repair, and items that assist individuals in continuing employment or becoming employed; education and training, excluding tuition.

In order to receive federal TANF funds, a state must continue to expend state and local resources at a level known as the “maintenance of effort” or “MOE.” Montana’s annual MOE is about \$14.3 million.

Funds must be expended to achieve one of four TANF purposes:

1. To provide assistance to needy families for a limited time period of 60 months
2. To end dependency of needy parents by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage
3. To prevent and reduce out of wedlock pregnancies
4. To encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families

States must also meet other federal requirements including work participating rates, data reporting requirements, limiting beneficiary to a maximum of 60 months per lifetime of benefits, and assignment of child support to the state by the beneficiary.

States set the eligibility requirement for cash assistance benefits and services provided with TANF funds. Those eligible to receive TANF cash assistance benefits include minor children, specified caretaker relatives with whom the minor child is living such as a parent, the minor child’s blood-related/adoptive minor siblings or minor step-siblings living with him/her, pregnant women in their last trimester who have no other eligible children, and refugees, victims of severe forms of trafficking and other qualified aliens.

Montana uses the gross monthly income (GMI) standard (total income less allowable deductions) to determine TANF eligibility. The standard is based on the 2011 federal poverty level (FPL). A family’s GMI must be at or below 30% of the 2011 FPL to be eligible for cash assistance benefits. Currently, a family of three would be eligible with a monthly income of \$463.

States also set the monthly benefit amounts that TANF families receive. The 2013 Legislature increased benefit levels to 33% of the 2011 FPL; at this level a household of three receives \$510. In addition to cash benefits, federal and state TANF funds may be used for other services benefitting eligible Montana families such as child care and child welfare.