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WELFARE REFORM

Data Available to Assess TANF's Progress

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Abbreviations

ACF	Administration for Children and Families
AFDC	Aid to Families With Dependent Children
ASPE	Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation
CPS	Current Population Survey
HHS	Department of Health and Human Services
JOBS	Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training
LA FANS	Los Angeles Family and Neighborhood Study
NLSY	National Longitudinal Survey of Youth
NSAF	National Survey of America's Families
OBRA	Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1981
PRWORA	Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996
PSID	Panel Study of Income Dynamics
RDD	random digit dialing
SIPP	Survey of Income and Program Participation
SPD	Survey of Program Dynamics
TANF	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

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Accountability * Integrity * Reliability

United States General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

February 28, 2001

The Honorable Walter W. Herger
Chairman, Subcommittee on Human Resources
Committee on Ways and Means
House of Representatives

The Honorable Nancy L. Johnson
House of Representatives

Over 4 years have passed since federal welfare reform legislation was enacted, replacing the legal entitlement to cash assistance under the Aid to Families With Dependent Children (AFDC) program with the promotion of work and personal responsibility.[1] The policy and research community has been asking what has happened to low-income families since the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) created the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant, replacing the federal entitlement to assistance and institutionalizing reforms that had been initiated by many states. Overseen by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) at the federal level, TANF makes $16.8 billion in federal funds available to states each year through 2002. While TANF delegates wide discretion to the states to design and implement the program, it does specify four broad program goals that focus on children and families:

- providing assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives;
- ending the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage;
- preventing and reducing the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies; and
- encouraging the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

As TANF has been implemented by the states, the Congress has asked questions about a broad range of issues concerning welfare reform's consequences. Several issues—for example, the circumstances of those who have left TANF and the characteristics of those currently receiving cash assistance—relate to what has happened to low-income families since

[1]Title I of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, P.L. 104-193, established the TANF block grant program.

TANF has been in effect. The Congress also has asked about the extent to which any changes that have occurred in low-income families' life circumstances, such as TANF recipients' increases in employment and earned income and decreases in births, can be attributed to TANF rather than to other factors, such as changes in economic conditions. These questions will be especially important when the program is considered for reauthorization in 2001.

To determine what data will be available from planned and existing research to address these and other questions, you asked us to examine (1) the type of data that will be available from national surveys and studies of welfare reform to help assess progress towards TANF's goals and (2) the usefulness of the data for assessing TANF's progress nationwide. Our major objective was to examine data already collected by national surveys of low-income families and for major studies of welfare reform to identify data available for use in a comprehensive assessment of TANF for the reauthorization debate. We did not examine study findings; rather, we examined the data that have been collected or will be collected as part of the considerable body of research about TANF that is accumulating.[2] The focus on data also addresses issues raised by several critiques of this work that have emerged. The critiques that examine the methodology of this research agree that, for welfare reform research, the quality and comprehensiveness of the existing data are cause for concern. Two critiques in particular question whether the major national survey designed to provide information to assess TANF at the national level—the Survey of Program Dynamics (SPD)—has "a sufficient number of observations" for an analysis of TANF's effects in individual states.[3]

To determine what data will be available, we considered all of the national surveys and welfare reform studies discussed in six major critiques of

[2]See Christine Devere, Gene Falk, and Vee Burke, *Welfare Reform Research: What Have We Learned Since the Family Support Act of 1988?* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, Oct. 20, 2000) for a summary of findings about the effects of welfare reform initiatives.

[3]The Census Bureau conducts the SPD, a longitudinal survey of a nationally representative sample of families, with emphasis on eligibility for and participation in welfare programs, employment, earnings, the incidence of out-of-wedlock births, and family well-being. The provision in PRWORA that authorized the SPD specified that the sample be drawn from the 1992 and 1993 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) samples. However, the original samples for the SIPP were designed to be nationally representative, not to be representative of any state.

welfare reform research, as well as surveys and studies available through the Research Forum and the Welfare Information Network, the major clearinghouses for welfare reform research.[4] We also interviewed HHS officials about their perspective on welfare reform data and asked welfare experts to nominate key pieces of work in the field for inclusion in our review. We selected a sample of surveys and studies that resulted in 187 individual data sets related to TANF reauthorization issues.[5] For each data set, we analyzed the content of the data to determine (1) the range of TANF-related data topics covered; (2) the level of detail the data offer; (3) the data's quality, including, where relevant, the sampling method, sample size, response rate, and attrition rate; and (4) how the data could be used to provide the Congress with an understanding of what has happened under TANF. Appendix I provides additional details about our methodology and its limitations. We conducted our work between January 2000 and January 2001 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Results in Brief

National, state, and local data will be available to help assess progress toward TANF's goals, but these data address the goals to differing degrees. National data, which include data collected in national surveys and information that all states report to HHS, include extensive information related to TANF's two goals of providing assistance to needy families and ending dependency on government benefits but have limited information about TANF's goals of preventing out-of-wedlock pregnancies and promoting family formation. The data pertain to such issues as changes in the TANF caseload, use of noncash assistance by current and former TANF recipients, recipients' participation in work activities, employment status and earnings, and family well-being. Although there are national data on the incidence of out-of-wedlock births and marriage among TANF recipients and other low-income families, these data include only very recently available information on states' strategies to prevent out-of-wedlock pregnancies or promote family formation. Data from studies of welfare reform at the state and local levels contain the same kind of information as national data, but they also include information about areas very recently

[4]See fig. 8 in app. I for a list of the major critiques.

[5]A data set is a body of data gathered for analysis by a single data collection method, such as by survey or from welfare case records or the administrative records of programs such as the Unemployment Insurance or federal income tax systems.

covered by national data. For example, data are available about the birthrates and marriage patterns of individuals who participated in programs, some of which had provisions intended to foster marriage and discourage out-of-wedlock pregnancy. Much of these data come from waiver evaluations—evaluations conducted in states that experimented with their welfare program, under a waiver from HHS, prior to TANF.

The usefulness of existing data for assessing TANF's progress varies. National data can be analyzed to develop a descriptive picture of TANF for the nation as a whole. However, of the seven national data sets we reviewed, only two can be used to describe the lives of families receiving TANF within individual states. To gain information about TANF's effects in the states, data from waiver evaluations and demonstrations can be used instead. In many cases, these data were collected by randomly assigning welfare recipients to groups subject to different welfare provisions, allowing employment, earnings, and well-being of the groups to be attributed to the provisions. However, most waiver and demonstration data were collected in localities and so cannot be used to assess state-level effects. We examined nearly 40 data sets that could be analyzed for information about the circumstances of former recipients. However, only a subgroup of these data sets met criteria that allowed the sample to be generalized statewide. These data sets represented 15 states. In some cases, the value of survey data collected from those who left welfare was limited because few former recipients actually responded to the surveys. In general, the need for information about TANF's progress will have to be balanced against the challenges of rigorous data collection from the low-income population.

Background

PRWORA overhauled the nation's welfare system by abolishing the previous welfare program, AFDC, and creating the TANF block grant. PRWORA established four broad goals for TANF, which included (1) providing assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives; (2) ending dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage; (3) preventing and reducing the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies; and (4) encouraging the formation and maintenance of two-parent families. Unlike the previous program, TANF gives states great flexibility to design programs that meet these goals. However, while states have flexibility, the programs they design must meet several federal requirements that emphasize the importance of work and the temporary nature of TANF. For example, PRWORA requires that parents receiving

assistance engage in work, as defined by the state, after receiving assistance for 24 months, or earlier, at state option. In exercising their option, 28 states require immediate participation in work, and 9 other states require participation in work within 6 months of receiving cash assistance, resulting in great interstate variation in program provisions. Further, despite the programmatic flexibility authorized by TANF, states must meet federal data reporting requirements by submitting quarterly reports that include information from administrative records about those receiving welfare and those terminated from assistance, as well as an annual report, to HHS. The annual report contains information about program characteristics, such as states' activities used to prevent out-of-wedlock pregnancy.

In 1995, we reported[6] that the block grants enacted as part of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1981 (OBRA) carried no uniform federal information requirements.[7] We found that the program information states collected was designed to meet individual states' needs and that, as a result, it was difficult to aggregate states' experiences and speak from a national perspective on the block grant activities or their effects. Without uniform information definitions and collection methodologies, it was difficult for the Congress to compare state efforts or draw meaningful conclusions about the relative effectiveness of different strategies. In a second examination of federal block grant programs, we reported that problems in information and reporting under many block grants—the Education Block Grant, the Community Services Block Grant, and the Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Mental Health Services Block Grant—have limited the Congress' ability to evaluate them.[8] However, for the TANF Block Grant, the regulations require that states submit the quarterly TANF Data Report and the TANF Financial Report or be subject to statutory penalties. For these reports, HHS provides data reporting specifications including timing, format, and definitions for such data topics as family composition, employment status, and earned and unearned income. These

[6]*Block Grants: Issues in Designing Accountability Provisions* (GAO/AIMD-95-226, Sept. 1, 1995).

[7]OBRA created nine block grants: Community Services; Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Mental Health Services; Primary Care; Social Services; Maternal and Child Health; Preventive Health and Health Services; Education (ch. 2); Low-Income Home Energy Assistance; and Community Development (small cities).

[8]*Block Grants: Characteristics, Experience, and Lessons Learned* (GAO/HEHS-95-74, Feb. 9, 1995).

specifications facilitate the use of HHS' TANF administrative data for welfare reform research by improving the data's comparability from state to state. Several national surveys and data collected for state and local studies of welfare reform also are potential sources of data for an assessment of TANF.

National Data Sources on TANF

A number of national surveys that collect information about welfare receipt have been used in the past by researchers to analyze welfare reform or have been developed to assess current welfare reform. Four surveys—the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), the Current Population Survey (CPS), the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), and the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID)—have been used in past research on the AFDC program and the low-income population in general. Both the SIPP and the PSID have updated their questionnaires to include questions that pertain to welfare reform specifically, including questions about the work participation requirements and penalties for not complying with these and other program rules. Moreover, two national surveys are designed specifically to answer questions about welfare reform. The U.S. Census Bureau, at the direction of the Congress, is conducting a longitudinal survey of a nationally representative sample of families, with emphasis on eligibility for and participation in welfare programs, employment, earnings, the incidence of out-of-wedlock births, and adult and child well-being. This survey, the Survey of Program Dynamics, was designed to help researchers understand the impact of welfare reform on the well-being of low-income families and children. Similarly, the Urban Institute has been conducting a multiyear project monitoring program changes and fiscal developments, along with changes in the well-being of children and families. Part of this project includes a nationally representative survey of 50,000 people called the National Survey of America's Families (NSAF) that is collecting information on the well-being of adults and children as welfare reform is implemented.[9]

With the change in the fundamental structure of the nation's welfare program, there have been several efforts by private research organizations to document the policies states have adopted under TANF. The Center for Law and Social Policy and the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, in collaboration, have created the State Policy Documentation Project to

[9]Although valuable resources for assessing national programs, national surveys often are costly. For example, the 1997 NSAF cost $14 million to administer and process.

document policies in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Available on the Web, the State Policy Documentation Project contains information about state policies contained in statutes, regulations, and caseworker manuals, but it does not describe state practices. In addition, the Urban Institute has developed and made available to the public a database that documents changes in state program rules since 1996.

State and Local Data From Welfare Reform Research

Prior to and since TANF's implementation, a considerable body of research about the low-income population has been conducted to examine the circumstances of families affected by welfare reform, the effectiveness of welfare reform initiatives, and the implementation of TANF at the state level. HHS has played a major role in laying the foundation for this welfare reform research.[10] During the early 1990s, HHS granted waivers to states that allowed them to test various welfare reform provisions. In return, states were required to evaluate the effectiveness of the waiver provisions by randomly assigning welfare recipients to either participate in the waiver program or not. With the passage of TANF, states were given the option to continue their waiver evaluations as originally designed or modify the evaluation design. Several states opted to continue with their original random assignment design, while others modified their evaluation designs to focus on examining the implementation of the waivers or describe participants' employment, earnings, and well-being. Because some elements of the waivers granted to states were incorporated into many TANF programs, the waiver evaluations provide useful insights into issues and designs for research about TANF.

However, according to HHS, one aspect of waiver policies may mean that some waiver evaluations may not represent TANF requirements completely. TANF established work requirements for all adult recipients, but states could delay adhering to these requirements under their TANF program, in part or whole, if the requirements were inconsistent with state waiver policies. Under the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) program, work requirements were mandatory for a work-ready or able-bodied population, excluding a number of subgroups such as those caring for young children and the disabled. For the most part, states that continued the original random assignment design maintained some or all of

[10]The Congress also has supported the use of rigorous evaluations. For example, in 1988, the Family Support Act authorized funding for research using random assignment that led to a major examination of welfare-to-work strategies that existed before TANF.

the JOBS exemptions from work requirements and applied these exemptions in determining who was subject to time-limited assistance. Consequently, while these states' waivers may incorporate other work policies prescribed under TANF, these policies would not be expected to affect the exempt population. In contrast, in states that do not claim JOBS exemptions from work requirements, all adults are subject to work requirements and time limits on assistance. Thus, while testing TANF-like policies, evaluations that continued the random assignment design may not fully reflect the experience, outcomes, or impacts of fully implemented TANF requirements.

In addition to the waiver evaluations, HHS, as well as private foundations, has provided funding for demonstration programs across the country. The demonstration programs are pilot projects designed to measure the effects of a particular strategy, rather than an entire program, on welfare recipients or those eligible to receive welfare. Many of these demonstration programs were intended to increase employment, decrease out-of-wedlock pregnancy, or promote marriage. For example, in the late 1980s, several demonstration programs aimed at decreasing teen pregnancy among welfare recipients were developed. One program, the New Chance Demonstration, randomly assigned teen mothers receiving welfare to participate in a program that offered education or training classes and other support services and then compared the accomplishments of these teen mothers with those of teen mothers who did not participate in the program.

Given states' greater responsibility for welfare programs under PRWORA and the larger number of people leaving the welfare rolls, there has been general interest among program administrators and state and local policymakers about the condition of those who are no longer receiving TANF, otherwise known as "leavers." In response to this concern, a growing body of research about leavers has been initiated at both the state and federal levels. Generally, researchers have found that once low-income families leave welfare, they become hard to keep track of. Moreover, we previously reported that studies of former TANF recipients' status differ in important ways, including geographic scope, the time period covered, and the categories of families studied, which limits the comparability of the data across states.[11] In order to facilitate cross-state study comparisons, the

[11]See *Welfare Reform: Information on Former Recipients' Status* (GAO/HEHS-99-48, Apr. 28, 1999).

Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) within HHS has issued guidance to states and the research community on developing comparable measures for commonly reported outcomes and defined these outcomes. In fiscal year 1998, ASPE awarded approximately $2.9 million in grants to 10 states and three large counties to study leavers, followed by additional grants in fiscal years 1999 and 2000. ASPE also has encouraged the researchers to use comparable measures.

Research is also being conducted to examine the effects of welfare reform in metropolitan areas or neighborhoods. This area of research is important because the caseload decline in urban areas has been substantially lower than in other areas of the country. Moreover, urban areas can have higher unemployment rates and a greater concentration of poverty than suburban or rural communities; thus, insights gathered from these studies will be useful in understanding the potential for the success of welfare reform in the event of an economic downturn. For example, one study—the Three City Study—will survey primarily low-income, single-mother families from poor and moderate-income areas in Boston, Chicago, and San Antonio, with half of those surveyed being TANF recipients.[12] The survey will collect information on adult and family well-being, employment, and welfare receipt three times within 4 years.

Finally, a body of welfare reform research examines the implementation of TANF at the state and local levels. Since PRWORA has not only granted states greater responsibility for providing cash assistance but also changed the nature of cash assistance, it is important to learn how states and localities are coping with these changes. Much of the research about program implementation focuses on challenges faced by state, and in some cases local, administrators in implementing TANF. Typically, in this research qualitative data are collected by visiting state or local TANF agencies; reviewing program records; and interviewing agency officials, caseworkers, and clients. For example, the State Capacity Study conducted by the State University of New York, Rockefeller Institute of Government, is collecting data in 20 states about the implementation of TANF at the state level, such as the structure of government services and information systems used to track clients.

[12]Johns Hopkins University, in collaboration with the University of Texas at Austin, Pennsylvania State University, Northwestern University, and Harvard University, is conducting the Three City Study.

Framework for Assessing Data Availability

Because we expect much of the reauthorization debate to focus on TANF's four legislative goals, the framework for our data assessment was based on those goals. To assess whether data exist to address the goals, we first created a list of "descriptive" and "effect" research questions relevant to each goal. Descriptive questions concern a low-income individual's or family's status or behavior, such as the receipt of TANF cash assistance or support services like transportation, housing, child care, or health services; an adult's employment status and earnings; and a family's reliance on non-TANF government benefits, such as Food Stamps, Medicaid, or the Earned Income Tax Credit. Effect questions concern the extent to which changes in an individual's or family's status or behavior, such as obtaining employment, earning income, avoiding out-of-wedlock births, or forming a two-parent family, are the result of the TANF program. These research questions represent the broad issues that the Congress will consider during TANF's reauthorization.

To summarize our findings, we identified data categories associated with TANF's goals, some of which are more narrowly focused than the research questions. The data categories represent combinations of topics we found in the data, such as employment and earnings or family and child well-being, that were associated with the research questions. Figure 1 shows the relationships among TANF's goals, the research questions, and the data categories, several of which are associated with more than one question. We then compared the data categories with the HHS administrative data, the data collected by national surveys, and the data derived from existing and planned studies.

Our assessment of the data's usefulness for determining TANF's progress is based on the data's strengths and weaknesses, the design of the survey or study for which the data were gathered, and the topics to which the data related. The criteria we used in assessing the strengths and weaknesses of survey data included survey sample size, the attrition rate of respondents from whom data were collected over time, and survey response rate. For administrative data, we examined the geographic scope and the comparability of the data among states. The design features examined included what the data collection method was, whether the data were collected at one point in time or at different points in time, and whether the data were used for descriptive analysis of TANF or AFDC program recipients and their families or analysis of the program's effects. Data that can be used for descriptive analysis are useful for research that addresses questions in the descriptive column of figure 1, and data that can be used

for analyses of effect are useful for questions in the effect column of the figure.

Figure 1: TANF's Legislative Goals, Research Questions, and Data Categories Associated With Those Goals

TANF Goals	Descriptive Research Questions	Data Categories	Effect Research Questions
Provide Assistance to Needy Families So That Children May Be Cared for in Their Own Homes or in the Homes of Relatives	1. How Have the Size and Composition of the TANF Cash Assistance Caseload Changed Since Enactment of PRWORA? 2. How Has the TANF Cash Assistance Benefit States Pay to Families Changed Since Enactment of PRWORA?	• Change in Size and Composition of Caseload	
	3. What Types of Noncash Assistance Are State TANF Programs Providing to Low-Income Families? 4. To What Extent Do Former Recipients Depend on Government Benefits Other Than TANF?	• Current or Former TANF Recipients' Use of Noncash Assistance	
End Dependence of Needy Parents on Government Benefits by Promoting Job Preparation, Work, and Marriage	5. To What Extent Are TANF Work Requirements and Time Limits Being Met?	• Employment and Earnings	
	6. What Strategies Have Been Used to Promote Marriage Among Low-Income Families?	• Strategies to Promote Marriage	
		• Strategies to Promote Work • Employment and Earnings	7. What Strategies Have Been Effective in Moving Needy Parents Into Work?
		• Employment and Earnings • Family and Child Well-Being	8. What Has Been the Effect of TANF Work Requirements on Family Well-Being?
		• Marital Status • Employment and Earnings • Family and Child Well-Being	9. To What Extent Has Marriage Improved the Well-Being of Low-Income Families?
Prevent and Reduce the Incidence of Out-of-Wedlock Pregnancies		• Strategies to Prevent Out-of-Wedlock Pregnancies • Out-of-Wedlock Birthrates	10. What Strategies Have Been Effective in Preventing Out-of-Wedlock Pregnancies?
Encourage the Formation and Maintenance of Two-Parent Families		• Strategies to Promote Family Formation • Marital Status	11. What Strategies Have Been Effective in Promoting the Formation and Maintenance of Two-Parent Low-Income Families?

National, State, and Local Data Address Different TANF Goals

Together, national surveys, HHS administrative data, and data from state and local studies of welfare reform address TANF's four legislative goals.[13] The national data provide extensive information related to TANF's goals of providing assistance to needy families and ending dependency on government benefits through job preparation, work, and marriage. State and local data not only address the same goals as the national data but in some cases also provide information related to the goals of preventing out-of-wedlock pregnancies and promoting family formation.

National Data Address Two TANF Goals but Provide Limited Information on Out-of-Wedlock Pregnancy Prevention and Family Formation Strategies

National data provide detailed descriptive information related to two of TANF's goals, but limited information related to TANF's goals of preventing out-of-wedlock pregnancies and promoting family formation. HHS administrative data[14] and the six national surveys we examined—the CPS, NLSY, NSAF, PSID, SIPP, and SPD—provide descriptive information related to TANF's goal of providing assistance to needy families, including information about the change in size and composition of the TANF caseload and the use of noncash assistance by current and former TANF recipients (see fig. 2).[15]

[13]See app. II for a complete list of the national surveys and studies about welfare reform that we examined for data.

[14]HHS administrative data are data that states report to HHS on their AFDC and TANF caseloads.

[15]We reviewed only the CPS March Supplement.

Figure 2: National Data That Address TANF's Goals and Related Data Categories

Type of Data	Goal 1 Provide Assistance to Needy Families So That Children May Be Cared for in Their Own Homes or in the Homes of Relatives		Goal 2 End Dependence of Needy Parents on Government Benefits by Promoting Job Preparation, Work, and Marriage			Goal 3 Prevent and Reduce the Incidence of Out-of-Wedlock Pregnancies		Goal 4 Encourage the Formation and Maintenance of Two-Parent Families	
	Change in Size and Composition of Caseload	Current or Former TANF Recipients' Use of Noncash Assistance	Strategies to Promote Work	Employment and Earnings	Family and Child Well-Being	Strategies to Prevent Out-of-Wedlock Pregnancies	Out-of-Wedlock Birthrates[a]	Strategies to Promote Family Formation	Marital Status
HHS Administrative Data[b]	●	●	●	●	●	●[c]	●[c]	●[c]	●
Current Population Survey (CPS)	●	●		●	●				●
National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY)	●	●	●	●	●				●
National Survey of American Families (NSAF)	●	●	●	●	●				●
Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID)	●	●	●	●	●				●
Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP)	●	●	●	●	●				●
Survey of Program Dynamics (SPD)	●	●	●	●	●				●

Note: We did not assess the American Community Survey, a national survey that will collect information about welfare receipt and other measures, because the data will not be available in time for the reauthorization debate. This survey was developed by the Census Bureau as a way to provide more timely demographic information for local, state, and federal governments. The Census Bureau is currently testing the data collection instrument and sampling strategy for this survey, and full-scale

implementation for a sample of 3 million households is scheduled for fiscal year 2003. We also did not assess the National Survey of Family Growth, which collects information on fertility, family formation, and other family characteristics, because its post-TANF data will not be available in time for reauthorization. The National Survey of Family Growth is administered by the National Center for Health Statistics.

[a]Out-of-wedlock birthrates may be able to be constructed from such measures as date of marriage and child's birthdate, which many of the national surveys collect.

[b]HHS administrative data are data reported by the states about AFDC or TANF caseloads.

[c]Beginning in fiscal year 2000, each state must include this information in its annual report. The first fiscal year 2000 report was due December 31, 2000.

National data also address TANF's goal of ending dependence on government benefits by describing the circumstances of those receiving TANF and those who are no longer receiving TANF. HHS administrative records and national surveys provide descriptive information about TANF recipients' participation in work activities, employment status, earnings, and other family well-being measures. HHS administrative records contain information only about whether a recipient is working and how much income that individual earns, while national surveys collect more detailed employment and earnings data, such as the types of jobs held and the hourly wage. National data are also available about family well-being measures, which provide information about how TANF's focus on work and marriage may be changing the lives of low-income families. For instance, national surveys have information about the amount of personal income spent on health and housing, whether recipients or former recipients rent or own housing, and the well-being of children of welfare recipients. Several of the national surveys provide information about children's school attendance or developmental status, while SIPP and SPD also collect data about the number of births to teenagers. SIPP is the only national survey we examined that contains information about whether parents have had to terminate their parental rights or give a child up for adoption.

National data related to the goals of preventing out-of-wedlock pregnancy and promoting family formation are limited. While all the national data sets include information about recipients' and nonrecipients' marital status, only HHS administrative records contain information about out-of-wedlock

births among the TANF caseload.[16] However, states did not begin reporting this information to HHS until fiscal year 2000.

Aside from information about welfare reform in general, national surveys and HHS collect information about several different groups of individuals affected by TANF, including those who remain on assistance, those who no longer receive TANF, those who are diverted from TANF,[17] and those who are eligible but choose not to participate. HHS administrative data and all six national surveys collect data about current and former TANF recipients, but the type of information collected about these individuals differs. As figure 3 shows, only the NSAF and SIPP have data about those diverted from TANF, while the NLSY, NSAF, PSID, SIPP, and SPD have data about individuals who are eligible to receive TANF but do not.

[16]HHS has tracked changes in the number of out-of-wedlock pregnancies in each state with data collected by the National Center for Health Statistics, Division of Vital Statistics. HHS uses this information to award bonuses to states that have decreased their number of out-of-wedlock pregnancies.

[17]Under TANF, states may opt to offer cash diversion payments or job search services to families applying for TANF benefits. Diversion payments and services are intended to address an emergency situation and keep families from entering the welfare system.

Figure 3: National Survey and HHS Administrative Data on TANF Groups

TANF Groups and Topics	HHS Administrative Data	CPS	NLSY	NSAF	PSID	SIPP	SPD
TANF Recipients	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Number Receiving TANF	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Length of Time Receiving Assistance	●		●	●	●	●	●
Total Benefits Received in a Year [a]	●	●	●	●	●	● [b]	●
Type of Noncash TANF Assistance Received							
Child Care	● [c]	●	●	●	●	●	●
Transportation	● [c]	●		●	●	●	●
Physical Health Services	●			●	●		
Mental Health Services				●			
Case Management						●	
TANF Leavers	● [c]	●	●	●	●	●	●
Length of Time Receiving Assistance	●		●	●	●	●	●
Total Benefits Received in a Year [a]		●		●		● [b]	
Reason for Leaving TANF	●			●	●	●	●
Type of Noncash Assistance Received							
Child Care		●	●	●	●	●	●
Transportation		●			●	●	●
Medicaid		●	●	●	●	●	●
Food Stamps		●	●	●	●	●	●
Housing		●	●		●	●	●
Earned Income Tax Credit				●		●	
WIC [d]				●		●	●
Child Support Income		●	●	●	●	●	●
Supplemental Security Income		●	●	●	●	●	●
Individuals Diverted From TANF				●		●	
Types of Diversion Services Received				●		●	
Reason for Accepting Diversion							
Number Receiving Noncash Assistance						●	
Individuals Eligible for TANF but Not Participating			●	●	●	●	●
Reason for Not Participating			●		●		●

[a]The actual year varies for each survey and HHS administrative data set reviewed.

[b]SIPP collects information on total benefits received in a month.

[c]As part of TANF reporting requirements, states must report this information to HHS beginning in fiscal year 2000. States also report information on non-TANF assistance to TANF recipients, such as Medicaid, housing, and Supplemental Security Income.

[d]Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children.

State and Local Data Complement and Fill Gaps in the National Data

The state and local data we reviewed can be classified into four categories that complement and, in some cases, fill in gaps not covered by the national data. Waiver data come from evaluations that tested the effects of programs implemented by states under waivers approved by HHS prior to TANF.[18] Demonstration data come from studies that tested the effectiveness of particular strategies aimed at individuals either receiving welfare or eligible to receive welfare. Leavers data come from administrative records and surveys that describe the circumstances of those who left welfare. Finally, metropolitan and community-based data come from studies that, in general, describe the circumstances of low-income families and TANF participants in specific metropolitan areas, neighborhoods, or communities.

Waiver data have been used to examine the effects of TANF-like provisions on welfare recipients' employment status, birth rates, and marital status, as shown in figure 4. Several states have been evaluating the waiver provisions in their welfare programs by randomly assigning welfare recipients to either the waiver program or AFDC. Waiver programs require participants to follow provisions that later were required or permitted under TANF, such as being required to work or risk losing eligibility for benefits or being allowed to receive welfare for only a limited time. Most of the waiver program evaluations collected data used to analyze the effect of waivers on welfare receipt, employment, and income. Data from several of the evaluations have also been used to analyze the effects of waivers on out-of-wedlock pregnancy or family formation.

[18]Under section 1115 of the Social Security Act, HHS was authorized to grant states waivers of statutory requirements governing the AFDC program. This authority was intended to give states the flexibility to test innovations in their programs, such as limiting the length of benefit receipt or strengthening work requirements.

Figure 4: State and Local Data That Address TANF's Goals and Related Data Categories

Type of Data	Goal 1: Provide Assistance to Needy Families So That Children May Be Cared for in Their Own Homes or in the Homes of Relatives		Goal 2: End Dependence of Needy Parents on Government Benefits by Promoting Job Preparation, Work, and Marriage			Goal 3: Prevent and Reduce the Incidence of Out-of-Wedlock Pregnancies		Goal 4: Encourage the Formation and Maintenance of Two-Parent Families	
	Change in Size and Composition of Caseload	Current or Former TANF Recipients' Use of Noncash Assistance	Strategies to Promote Work	Employment and Earnings	Family and Child Well-Being	Strategies to Prevent Out-of-Wedlock Pregnancies	Out-of-Wedlock Birthrates	Strategies to Promote Family Formation	Marital Status
Waiver Data	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Demonstration Data	●	●	●	●	●	●[a]	●[a]	●[a]	●[a]
Leavers Data	●	●	●	●	●		●		●
Metropolitan and Community Evaluation Data	●	●	●	●	●				●

Note: A dot indicates that at least one data set provides information related to this issue.

[a]Data related to these topics were collected from demonstration programs operated before enactment of PRWORA in 1996.

With the passage of PRWORA, several states incorporated their waiver provisions into their TANF program and have been collecting data about the experiences of participants in the program. Some of these states chose not to continue their evaluations as originally designed, instead conducting modified evaluations that typically involved studies that will provide information on the experience of implementing the program. For example, Montana is surveying TANF participants to collect data about the duration of their welfare receipt, the types of noncash assistance they use, and their employment.

Demonstration data provide information on topics that are similar to those addressed by waiver data and have also been used to analyze the effects of programs on their participants, but demonstration data differ in two key ways. First, most demonstration data, including all data related to pregnancy prevention and family formation, were collected before

PRWORA was enacted. Second, demonstration data were collected for studies focused on how a particular approach affected program participants. In fact, many of the demonstration data we examined were used entirely to assess the effects of various strategies on participants' employment status and earnings, which helps to distinguish the effects of particular provisions included in a program like TANF.

Leavers data provide descriptive information about those who have left welfare. This information includes the length of time an individual received TANF, reasons for leaving welfare, types of noncash assistance used, and employment and earnings information. In addition, some leavers data sets contain information about former recipients' marital status, and a few have data about the number of pregnancies and births among former recipients.

Metropolitan and community-based data cover some of the same issues as the other data categories, including information about TANF work requirements and time limits. Although the same issues are addressed, the data are collected in large cities or neighborhoods in order to examine the circumstances of welfare recipients in areas that may have high concentrations of poverty or limited access to jobs. In addition, metropolitan and community-based data provide information about groups other than TANF recipients and former recipients—including individuals diverted from TANF and those who are eligible to participate in TANF but do not.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Existing Data Affect Usefulness for Assessing TANF's Progress

Although existing data provide rich information about the lives of families who are receiving or have received TANF, the strengths and weaknesses of these data affect their usefulness for understanding welfare under the TANF block grant. National data can be analyzed to gain a descriptive picture of what has happened under TANF for the nation as a whole. However, of the seven national data sets we reviewed, only two can be used to describe the well-being of families receiving TANF within individual states. Although waiver and demonstration data can be analyzed to gain information about TANF's effects, these analyses can be done within only a limited number of states and disparate localities. We examined nearly 40 data sets that could be analyzed for information about the circumstances of former recipients. However, only a subgroup of these data sets met criteria that allowed the sample to be generalized statewide. These data sets represented 15 states. In some cases, the value of survey data collected from those who left welfare was limited because few former recipients actually responded to the surveys: in some cases, former recipients could

not be located, and in other cases they chose not to answer the questions posed to them. Metropolitan and community-based data can be analyzed to describe changes over time in the lives of welfare recipients in urban centers. Much of this data collection will continue beyond 2001.

National Survey Data Provide Descriptive Information About Nation, but Not Effects in Individual States

The strength of the national data is that they were collected from samples selected randomly from the nation's population and include low-income families and TANF recipients in numbers sufficient to allow reliable estimates about these groups. In addition, most of the national data were collected for the same individuals over time, allowing changes in welfare recipients' employment, earnings, and well-being to be tracked across programs implemented at different times. However, all the national surveys have participants who drop out of the survey sample over time, and this may limit how well the samples represent the nation's welfare recipients.

National data are collected from random samples that contain low-income families and TANF recipients. Because samples from national surveys are selected randomly, they are, at the time of selection, representative of the population at large, including the welfare population. In addition, all the national data sets we reviewed have sample sizes large enough to allow reliable estimates about the nation's low-income and TANF populations—as sample size increases, the degree of precision of the estimates made using that sample also increases (see table 1).

Table 1: Overall Sample Sizes for National Data Sources

National data sources	Overall sample size
HHS administrative data[a]	164,481
CPS	50,000
NLSY	12,686
NSAF	46,000
PSID	7,000
SIPP	36,800
SPD	37,000

[a]Under the TANF data reporting system, states have the option to submit either sample data or data on their entire TANF caseload to HHS. For its fiscal year 1999 report to the Congress, HHS randomly selected approximately 200 to 400 cases each month from each state that submits data on its entire caseload. Thus, the total in column two combines data from states that submitted a sample and states that submitted data on the entire caseload.

As shown in figure 5, two national data sources collect data on individuals at one point in time; others collect data on the same individuals across time. In both cases, the data can be used for comparisons between groups of individuals living under welfare provisions implemented at different time periods.

Figure 5: Data Sources That Collect Information at One Point in Time and Across Time

	Collects Data on Individuals at One Point in Time	Collects Data on the Same Individuals Across Time
HHS Administrative Data	●	
CPS		●[a]
NLSY		●
NSAF	●	
PSID		●
SIPP		●
SPD		●

[a]The CPS rotates participants in the following way: a housing unit is interviewed at regular intervals for 4 consecutive months; for the next 8 months, the housing unit is not part of the sample; the unit is then interviewed for the next 4 months and then retired from the sample. As a result, less than 50 percent of the sample can be linked across years.

Five national surveys—the CPS, NLSY, PSID, SIPP, and SPD—collect data from the same individuals over time. For the SIPP, the Census Bureau, after a specified period, changes the group of individuals from whom data are collected. For example, the 1993 SIPP panel followed a group of individuals through 1996. In 1996, a new group was randomly selected and followed through 2000. Data collected over time could be analyzed to describe how people cycle on and off TANF, how their use of benefits changes over time, and how their family well-being changes. In addition, comparisons could be made between groups covered by different welfare provisions. For example, AFDC recipients included in the 1993-96 SIPP panel could be compared with TANF recipients who were part of the 1996-2000 SIPP panel. The NSAF, as well as HHS administrative records, has collected data

from different samples of individuals in different years. For example, in 1997 one group of people completed the NSAF; another group completed the survey in 1999. In cases such as these, the samples from different years can be compared with each other to look for changes across time.

For those national surveys that collect information about changes in welfare across time, the likelihood that survey participants will drop out over time increases, potentially affecting how well the data actually represent all members of the nation's low-income and TANF populations. In general, the greater the attrition rate, the less likely a sample is to be representative of the larger population from which it was drawn. Those who have continued participating in the survey may be different from those who stopped or dropped out. As surveys that collect data over time, the NLSY, PSID, SIPP, and SPD all have experienced sample loss, as shown in table 2. Concerns about attrition are especially significant for the SPD, because it was designed specifically to track welfare recipients from AFDC through TANF. Census has tried mathematically adjusting available responses to compensate for the survey's sample loss, but this adjustment has not sufficiently remedied the problem, according to a Census official. Census will take steps to lessen attrition through intensive follow-up with survey dropouts to enlist their participation and through the use of monetary incentives for future respondents to the survey.

Table 2: Attrition Rates for National Data Sources That Collect Data Over Time

	Attrition[a] calculated from…		
Survey	**Beginning of data collection**	**Through**	**Percentage of sample that stopped participating**
NLSY79	1979	1996	36
PSID	1968	1993	47
SPD	1992	1998	50
SIPP	1996	2000	36

Note: Attrition rates vary depending on whether deceased respondents are included in the calculation.

[a]The attrition rates for the four national surveys that collect data across time are not necessarily comparable. As the table shows, some surveys started tracking their samples earlier than others, increasing the potential for sample loss. In addition, surveys vary in when they begin counting attrition. Some start counting attrition only after the sample has been formed, while others include in the calculation those who were selected for the original sample but who could not be contacted or did not participate. See Daniel H. Weinberg and Stephanie S. Shipp, *The Survey of Program Dynamics: A Mid-term Status Report* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau, Feb. 2, 2000) for a more detailed discussion of attrition and a related measure, cumulative response rate, in the SPD, NLSY, and PSID.

For national surveys, the response rate—the number of people in the survey sample who actually responded, compared with those who were asked to respond but did not—has been large enough to allow the survey results to be generalized beyond those who completed the survey, with the exception of the 1999 NSAF. Most practitioners of survey research, including GAO, require at least a 70- to 75-percent response rate before survey data can be generalized beyond those who completed the survey. As table 3 shows, the response rate for all the national surveys except the 1999 NSAF was at or above the 70-percent standard.[19] Given the survey's response rate, using the 1999 NSAF survey data would require determining whether patterns in who responded and who did not respond existed and what this means for how well respondents represent the original sample. For those surveys that collect data on the same individuals over time, response rates sometimes are considered in conjunction with rates of attrition.

Table 3: Response Rates for National Surveys

National surveys	Response rate (percentage)
CPS	84
NLSY	90[a]
NSAF 1997	70
NSAF 1999	64
PSID	92[a]
SIPP	90[b]
SPD	89[a]

[a]This rate represents only the most recent administration of the survey.

[b]The typical response rate for the 1996 SIPP panel was in the high 80s to low 90s.

The major limitation of most existing national data is that they cannot be used for state-level analyses. In general, national data sources have state sample sizes that are too small to allow reliable generalizations about

[19]The NSAF's sample was gathered by a procedure known as random digit dialing (RDD). An RDD sample is drawn by randomly selecting entries from a list of telephone numbers for the general population. Depending on how recently the list was updated, many of the entries may not be for working telephones. Thus, the response rates of RDD samples tend to be lower.

TANF recipients within individual states. The NLSY, PSID, SIPP, and SPD collect data not from states per se, but from regions that, in some cases, include more than one state. Thus, while these data can be analyzed to provide a descriptive picture of TANF for the nation, they cannot be used within states for descriptive analyses or to analyze the effects of states' TANF provisions. This does not mean that researchers do not use these data sources for state-level analyses. For example, some researchers combine several years of CPS data to obtain adequate sample sizes within states for state-level analyses. However, Census, which administers the CPS, SIPP, and SPD, does not recommend using data from these surveys for state-level analyses, because doing so when sample sizes are small may produce findings that are not reliable.[20]

Two national data sources, HHS administrative records and the NSAF survey, can be used for state-level analysis, but with limitations. HHS administrative records provide data from all 50 states and the District of Columbia. However, the reporting requirements for these data are not completely standardized across states, so that how a variable is defined may vary among states. For example, each state may define the work or work-related activities in which TANF recipients participate as they think appropriate to the state program.

Like HHS administrative records, NSAF survey data can be used for state-level analyses. NSAF has samples large enough to allow state-level analyses in 13 states,[21] representing 58 percent of the fiscal year 1999 national TANF caseload; this is not the case in the 37 remaining states. For example, the number of low-income children surveyed for the 1997 NSAF ranged from a low of 760 to a high of 1,813 in each of the 13 states where NSAF collected samples large enough to permit state-level analysis. However, the number of low-income children surveyed in the 37 remaining states averaged 35 per state, a number too small to allow reliable conclusions about the children of TANF recipients in any of these states.

Even if the issue of sample sizes within states were resolved, obstacles to using the national data to analyze TANF's effects within states would still

[20]It should be noted that Census will expand the sample of the CPS in 2001. The sample size will be doubled, which will increase sample sizes in individual states and allow improved state-level estimates.

[21]Alabama, California, Colorado, Florida, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, New Jersey, New York, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin.

exist. The lack of information about the choices states have made about TANF policies and program rules has been identified as one of the challenges to using national data to analyze TANF's effects. However, research organizations have collected this information. The Center for Law and Social Policy has worked with the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities to document policies in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, and the Urban Institute has developed a state database that documents state program rules. Yet, even with this information, using national data to measure state-level effects poses challenges.

The first challenge is deciding with whom TANF recipients should be compared. To test TANF's effects, the employment, earnings, and well-being of individuals in the program must be compared with those of individuals who are not in the program. In the case of TANF, it would be difficult to determine what group should provide the point of comparison.[22] Because waivers introduced TANF-like policies and program rules while AFDC was still in effect, it would be difficult to select a group of welfare recipients whose experiences with welfare were not influenced by TANF.

The second challenge is determining the effect of any single welfare provision given the multiple provisions that make up states' TANF programs. For example, TANF recipients are required to work, and states must impose penalties or sanctions when recipients do not comply with work requirements. In such cases, it would be difficult to separate the combined effects of work requirements and any penalties or sanctions that were imposed into the individual effects of each.

A third challenge is detecting the long-term effects of state programs that have been recently implemented. Although PRWORA was enacted in 1996, states implemented their TANF programs at different points in time. Some states were still refining their TANF programs at the beginning of 1998. Consequently, the long-term effects of TANF may not yet be realized.

Finally, state-level analyses may not be the best way to measure TANF's effects in every state. Some states have further devolved TANF to localities, and different localities may implement a state's TANF provisions differently. In total, 17 states have given local governments responsibility for TANF program design and implementation.

[22]In program evaluation research, choosing a group with which participants in a program can be compared is referred to as "selecting the counterfactual."

Waiver and Demonstration Data Allow Assessment of TANF Effects, but Only for Localities

The strength of the waiver and demonstration data is that they can be used to analyze TANF's effects, but with few exceptions these data were collected from city and county samples rather than statewide samples. (See app. II for the localities examined.) Most of the waiver and demonstration data were collected as part of experiments—studies that randomly assigned welfare recipients to groups that were subject to different welfare provisions. Experiments, when done correctly, are recognized as the most rigorous way of determining the extent to which an observed outcome can be attributed to the program itself, rather than to differences among the program participants. Over half of the waiver data sets and virtually all of the demonstration data sets we reviewed consisted of data from experiments. Of the waiver data sets, about half were collected from city and county samples, with the others being collected from statewide samples. All of the demonstration data sets were collected from city and county samples. Overall, 6 of the 54 waiver and demonstration data sets that could be used for analyses of effect were collected from statewide samples.[23]

According to the project directors of two waiver evaluations, the high cost of conducting rigorous program evaluations may explain, in part, why data sets used to analyze TANF's effects tend to use samples from cities and counties and not entire states. Given limited resources, researchers may choose to conduct rigorous evaluations in selected cities or counties rather than sacrifice rigor to evaluate a program statewide. Data sources we reviewed for both the Vermont and Iowa waiver evaluations mentioned budget constraints as a factor that led researchers to limit their data collection efforts.

Another limitation of the waiver and demonstration data is that most often they were collected prior to the implementation of TANF. This is not surprising given that in many cases the waiver provisions and the demonstration projects were intended to test provisions before they were adopted and implemented. However, the provisions tested may not have been those ultimately adopted by the state.

Finally, in almost all cases in which waiver evaluations and demonstration projects collected survey data, response rates were above the 70-percent standard (see table 4).

[23]See app. III for a list of waiver and demonstration data sets showing the geographic scope of the sample and the type of analysis for which each data set could be used.

Table 4: Number of Waiver and Demonstration Data Sets With Acceptable Response Rates

Total waiver and demonstration data sets collected using surveys	24
Data sets with response rate at or above 70 percent	14
Data sets with response rate below 70 percent	3

Note: In seven cases, the data source we reviewed did not report a response rate.

State-Level Analyses of Leavers Data Are Possible in 15 States; in Some Cases, Picture Is Incomplete

The strength of the leavers data is that in most cases, they were collected from statewide samples. However, in some cases, leavers data collected using surveys may not be representative of a state's leaver population. Although we reviewed nearly 40 leavers data sets, on the basis of the type of data available, response rates, and the absence of significant differences between survey respondents and nonrespondents, we concluded that state-level analyses could be done for 15 states using the data sets we examined.

To be representative of a state's leavers population, survey data need to meet the 70-percent standard for response rates, or, through a comparison of survey respondents with nonrespondents, show that the two groups do not differ significantly. When a state has both administrative data and survey data available, the administrative data could be used in place of survey data that are not representative. As figure 6 shows, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina have either survey data that meet the standard for response rates or data from survey respondents who were not significantly different from nonrespondents. Arizona, Colorado, the District of Columbia, Illinois, Kansas, Missouri, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin have both administrative data and survey data. The response rate for the District of Columbia, Illinois, Kansas, Virginia, and Wisconsin was below 70 percent, but for Virginia, a comparison of respondents with nonrespondents revealed no significant differences between the two groups. Although New York has no survey data, its administrative data provide information about the state's leavers. California, Massachusetts, and Texas are the three states for which, given the available data, state-level analyses of leavers cannot be done. We previously reported that eight leavers studies covering seven states had collected adequate information to allow the study findings to be

generalized to the states' welfare populations.[24] Thus 4 states—Indiana, Maryland, Oklahoma, and Tennessee—can be added to the list of 15 states we identify in figure 6 as having data that can be generalized statewide.[25] In appendix II we list all the sources we reviewed that provide data on those who have left welfare.

[24]GAO/HEHS-99-48, Apr. 28, 1999.

[25]We examined more recent leavers data for three of the seven states in our review.

Figure 6: Leavers Data From Statewide Samples

	Administrative Data	Survey Data	Is the Survey Response Rate 70 Percent or Higher?	Do the Survey Data Provide Information Not Included in the Administrative Data?
Arizona[a]	●	●	Yes	Information About the Total Household, Hourly Wages, Hours Worked, Monthly Earnings, Food Shortages, and Other Material Hardships
Arkansas[a]	b	●	Yes	b
California	b	●	No	b
Colorado[a]	●	●	Yes	No
District of Columbia[a]	●	●	No	Information About Use of Noncash Assistance
Florida[a]	b	●	No[c]	b
Georgia[a]	b	●	No[c]	b
Illinois[a]	●	●	No	Information About Whether Work Requirements and Time Limits Are Being Met; Size and Composition of Caseload
Kansas[a]	●	●	No	Information About Use of Noncash Assistance
Massachusetts	b	●	No	b
Missouri[a]	●	●	Yes	Information About the Total Household, Hourly Wages, Hours Worked, Monthly Earnings, Food Shortages, and Other Material Hardships
New York[a]	●	d	d	d
North Carolina[a]	b	●	Yes	b
South Carolina[a]	b	●	Yes	b
Texas	b	●	No	b
Virginia[a]	●	●	No[c]	Information About Use of Noncash Assistance; Benefits Other Than TANF
Washington[a]	●	●	Yes	Information About the Total Household, Hourly Wages, Hours Worked, Monthly Earnings, Food Shortages, and Other Material Hardships
Wisconsin[a]	●	●	No	Information About Use of Noncash Assistance

[a]Leavers data can be used for state-level analyses.

[b]Only survey data were available.

[c]A comparison of respondents with nonrespondents showed no significant differences between the two groups.

[d]Only administrative data were available.

Some researchers may wish to compare those who left TANF with those who left AFDC on outcomes such as employment, earnings, and well-being. Contrasting outcomes for these two groups would require deciding which AFDC leavers provide the best point of comparison. Many factors specific to the year in which recipients left the welfare rolls would influence their employment prospects, wages, and well-being. For example, labor markets and economic conditions in a given year would influence former recipients' employment opportunities. Historical influences such as these would complicate the issue of selecting a comparable group of AFDC leavers and TANF leavers.

Metropolitan and Community-Based Data Cover Urban Centers; Data Collection Will Continue Beyond 2001

The strength of the metropolitan and community-based data is that they can be used in descriptive analyses that provide information about how the lives of low-income families and TANF participants have changed over time. Because data collection is occurring over time, in some cases it has yet to be completed. For example, the Los Angeles Family and Neighborhood Study (LA FANS) is collecting data about participation in welfare programs from residents of 65 neighborhoods in Los Angeles County over a 4-year period. LA FANS began data collection in January 2000 and will continue data collection through 2004. Most of the materials we reviewed regarding metropolitan and community-based data sets did not report information about attrition rates. When response rates were reported, they were above the 70-percent standard. Figure 7 shows the time periods for which the data are or will be available for different metropolitan areas and communities.

Figure 7: Years Covered by Data Available for Metropolitan and Community Areas

Data Source	Years Covered by Data Collection	Metropolitan and Community Areas From Which Data Are Collected	
NICHD Study of Early Child Care	1991-2004	• Little Rock, Arkansas • Irvine, California • Lawrence, Kansas • Boston, Massachusetts • Morganton, North Carolina	• In or Near Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania • Charlottesville, Virginia • Seattle, Washington • Madison, Wisconsin
Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study[a]	1998-2004	• Oakland, California • Baltimore, Maryland • Detroit, Michigan • Newark, New Jersey	• Philadelphia, Pennsylvania • Austin, Texas • Richmond, Virginia
LA FANS	2000-04	• Los Angeles County Neighborhoods, California	
Welfare, Children and Families—A Three City Study	1997-2003	• Chicago, Illinois • Boston, Massachusetts	• San Antonio, Texas
Project on Devolution and Urban Change: An Overview Assessing Impact of Welfare Reform on Urban Communities[b]			
• Administrative Records	1992-2001	• Los Angeles County, California	• Cuyahoga County, Ohio
• Community-Based Indicators	1992-2001	• Miami-Dade County, Florida	• Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania
• Survey Data	1998 and 2001		
Growing Up in Poverty: Remember the Children: Mothers Balance Work and Child Care Under Welfare Reform	1998-2001	• San Francisco, California • Santa Clara, California	• New Haven, Connecticut • Tampa, Florida
Impact of Welfare Reform on Families	1999-2000	• Milwaukee, Wisconsin	

[a]In total, data will be collected from 20 cities.

[b]Information for the three data sets was collected from all four sites.

Three of the metropolitan and community-based data sources have measures that can be used to analyze TANF's effects, even though the data

were not collected as part of an experiment.[26] For example, data from the Fragile Families study can be used to examine TANF's effects by drawing comparisons between the 3,675 unmarried parents and the 1,125 married parents who compose the survey sample in cities with populations over 200,000. Data collection for Fragile Families began in 1998 and will continue through 2004. The data have already been used to examine differences in relationship quality between married and unmarried couples, including whether a father gave money to or helped a mother in a nonmonetary way during pregnancy.

Existing Data Are More Adequate for State and Local Descriptive Analyses Than for Analyses of Effect

The current body of research on TANF addresses many issues of interest to the Congress but does not provide a comprehensive national picture of TANF. However, existing national data and data from state and local studies could be pieced together to develop a descriptive picture of what has happened to TANF participants in all 50 states. In addition, within a limited number of states and various cities and counties, existing data can be used to conduct analyses of TANF's effects.

National survey data can be used with data from HHS administrative records for descriptive analyses of TANF's progress nationwide. HHS administrative data can be used for analyses within each of the 50 states, and national survey data can be analyzed for national trends. These analyses could be compared to examine the extent to which the employment experiences, for example, of current and former TANF recipients in individual states conform with or depart from the experiences of such individuals identified with national survey data. This comparison could be extended to the individual states and localities covered by the NSAF data, waiver and demonstration data, leavers data, and metropolitan and community-based evaluation data.

While piecing the data together in this way would build on their strengths, each data type still has limitations. Specifically, national survey data provide national samples useful for comparing the lives of welfare recipients covered by welfare provisions implemented at different times.

[26]These three studies—the NICHD Study of Early Child Care, the Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study, and the Project on Devolution and Urban Change—were designed to approximate experiments. Rather than being randomly assigned to a group, individuals were classified into groups because of some attribute they did or did not have. When studies are designed this way, having or not having the attribute is believed to be the cause of any difference in outcomes for each group.

However, attrition or low response rates may affect the degree to which these samples represent all members of the nation's low-income and TANF population. Within each of the 50 states, HHS administrative data can be analyzed to gain insight into current recipients' use of noncash benefits, among other things, but the lack of standardized reporting requirements would complicate comparisons across states. Supplemental descriptive analyses for individual states can be done using NSAF survey data, leavers data, waiver and demonstration data, and metropolitan and community-based data. In addition, like the national survey data, many of these data represent multiple measures over time. However, these analyses in many cases can be generalized only to cities and counties and not to entire states.

Existing data can also be analyzed to gain information about TANF's effects. Although the 1997 and 1999 NSAF survey samples do not include pre-TANF welfare recipients, the samples do include other populations, such as low-income families who do not participate in TANF, whose employment, earnings, and well-being can be compared with those of TANF recipients, assuming adequate sample sizes for both groups. Moreover, because NSAF has sample sizes in 13 states large enough to allow state-level analyses, the employment, earnings, and well-being of TANF recipients in those states can be considered in relation to the state's TANF programs and policies. However, using the NSAF data for such analyses would require resolving the challenges to analyzing effects described earlier in this report. Similarly, although most of the metropolitan and community-based evaluation samples do not include pre-TANF welfare recipients, other populations represented in the study samples could be compared with TANF recipients. Finally, waiver and demonstration data can be analyzed to gain information about TANF's effects, keeping in mind that this information is about the effects of programs and provisions often implemented prior to TANF and implemented in cities and counties rather than entire states.

Concluding Observations

The data available for addressing TANF's goals will provide useful information, but with some limitations. Given the costs, some limitations may be difficult to overcome. Our examination of the data raised three issues.

First, for a comprehensive assessment of TANF, it is important to have data for a representative sample of TANF recipients and nonrecipients that allow for analyses of effect at the state level. The federal government has made an investment in national surveys, which either in whole or in part

are intended to gather information about the lives of TANF recipients. One of these, the SPD, was funded as a means to gather data about TANF recipients. For another, the SIPP, the Census Bureau added a special section of questions about welfare and reworded questions so that they would better capture respondents' participation in state programs. However, even with these efforts, none of Census' surveys currently being administered can be used for state-level analyses of TANF's effects because of small sample sizes within individual states. In addition, the SPD has a high attrition rate. The Census Bureau plans to take steps to improve response to the SPD through intensive follow-up with survey dropouts to enlist their participation and through monetary incentives for future respondents to participate in the survey. However, the issue of small sample sizes at the state level will remain unresolved.

Second, HHS has encouraged state agencies to study the effects of their TANF programs through the AFDC waiver requirement for experimental studies and subsequent research initiatives. Moreover, our examination of data indicates that, because of the variability in TANF program provisions across states, analysis of TANF's effects at the state and local levels can be done with the greatest confidence. However, even when conducted at the state and local levels, studies designed to examine TANF's effects tend to be costly, time-consuming, and impractical to implement in every state. In some cases, conducting an evaluation for an entire state is determined to be so expensive that data collection is limited to a portion of the state. For example, the evaluation of Vermont's waiver program focused on 6 of 12 welfare service districts. The evaluation's 42-month follow-up survey was administered to only these 6 district offices and, owing to cost constraints, included a subset of the sample for whom administrative records, rather than survey responses, were collected. Policymakers, federal and state officials, and the welfare reform research community will need to seek ways to balance the need for information about TANF's effects with the resource demands of rigorous studies.

Third, both qualitative and quantitative data may be needed to understand what has happened to former TANF recipients. Leavers are a difficult population to track, and, in some cases, using multiple methods of quantitative data collection has not necessarily increased the number of former recipients who could be located or who responded to surveys. In fact, in some of the studies we reviewed, the low rate of success in gathering data from these individuals makes the data's usefulness questionable. Surveys that used only one mode of data collection, such as telephoning former TANF recipients, generally had the lowest response

rates. Some leavers' studies followed telephone surveys with personal interviews of those who could not be reached by phone or who did not respond. However, even the use of multiple modes of data collection did not always ensure high response rates. Given the difficulties inherent in collecting quantitative data from this group, other data collection strategies that use local communication networks to identify families as well as interviews of respondents in their homes may be needed to gain information about the lives of TANF leavers.

Agency Comments

In commenting on a draft of this report, HHS said that the report will be of help to the Congress and other interested parties. In its technical comments, HHS expressed concern that in highlighting the importance of statewide samples, we understated the value of data from local samples. In response to this concern, we have noted in the report not only that findings from local samples are important but also that, in some cases, they provide data only recently available from national surveys. We concur with HHS that a sample need not be statewide in order for findings to be useful. However, we have emphasized the value of data that can be generalized to the state level because of the Congress' interest in a picture of TANF's progress nationwide. HHS' comments appear in appendix IV.

As agreed with your offices, unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution of this report until 30 days after its issue date. At that time, we will send copies to the Honorable Tommy G. Thompson, Secretary of Health and Human Services; appropriate congressional committees; and other interested parties. We also will make copies available to others on request.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me on (202) 512-7202 or David D. Bellis on (415) 904-2272. Another GAO contact and staff acknowledgments are listed in appendix V.

Cynthia M. Fagnoni
Managing Director
Education, Workforce, and Income Security Issues

Scope and Methodology

This appendix discusses in more detail our scope and methodology for identifying, selecting, and assessing studies and surveys that might provide data to help researchers as they seek to describe what has happened to recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and to estimate the effect of welfare reform on them.

Sample Design

Because no comprehensive list of data sources for welfare reform research exists, we used a judgmental sampling method for our assessment of data resources. We began our work by examining six key critiques of welfare reform research that had been issued, in draft or final form, by the fall of 1999. The six critiques listed in figure 8 both gave us insight into issues that will probably arise in assessing TANF and identified studies that may be potential sources of data for an assessment of TANF.[1]

[1]The critiques we reviewed are critical examinations of ongoing and planned research on issues arising from the welfare reform law (P.L. 104-193). The critiques were conducted by an individual or representative of a research organization known for work on social policy issues, and they considered the methodological issues involved in designing an evaluation of the welfare reform law's provisions, research issues that merit investigation, or both.

Figure 8: Six Major Critiques of Welfare Reform Research

- Besharov, Douglas J., Peter Germanis, and Peter H. Rossi.
  Evaluating Welfare Reform: A Guide for Scholars and Practitioners.
  College Park, Md.: Welfare Reform Academy, University of Maryland School of Public Affairs, 1997.
- Blum, Barbara B., and Ellen C. Berrey.
  Welfare Research Perspectives: Past, Present and Future.
  New York, N.Y.: Research Forum on Children, Families and the New Federalism, National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia University, Aug. 1999.
- Midwest Welfare Peer Assistance Network (WELPAN).
  Welfare Reform: How Will We Know If It Works?
  Washington, D.C.: Family Impact Seminar, Jan. 1998.
- National Research Council, Committee on National Statistics. Moffit, Robert A., and Michele Ver Ploeg, eds.
  Evaluating Welfare Reform: A Framework and Review of Current Work—Interim Report.
  Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, Jan. 1999.
- Rossi, Peter H.
  Research on PRWORA and TANF: What Can Be Learned From Four Major Projects Currently Underway.
  Paper given at a meeting of the Welfare Reform Academy, Washington, D.C., Dec. 1999.
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation.
  Interim Status Report on Research on the Outcomes of Welfare Reform.
  Washington, D.C.: HHS, June 1999.

We started the development of a list of data sources from three of the critiques—the Research Forum's report and its related on-line database, the National Research Council's interim report, and Peter Rossi's paper. To ensure that this list was comprehensive, we consulted with officials at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) about important bodies of work in the welfare reform research field. We also conducted follow-up interviews with HHS project officers and experts in the welfare reform research community to ensure that we had identified the most relevant national surveys and studies, particularly those that might have data about family, marriage, and pregnancy issues. As a result of these discussions and an examination of the original list, we designed a judgmental sample of potential data sources for welfare reform research that included the following categories:

- national surveys and HHS' TANF administrative data;

- studies that collected data about the major TANF subpopulations in three or more states or municipalities;
- studies of TANF leavers;
- HHS' waiver evaluations; and
- studies listed on the websites of HHS' Administration for Children and Families (ACF), HHS' Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), and the Welfare Information Network of the Finance Project.[2]

We then began to develop lists of the surveys and studies in each of the sample's categories.

The national surveys included in our list were the Current Population Survey (CPS), the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), the National Survey of America's Families (NSAF), the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), and the Survey of Program Dynamics (SPD). We used information from ASPE and from the National Conference of State Legislatures to identify leavers studies sponsored by HHS or states. Similarly, we used information from ACF to ensure that our list contained the body of research funded by ACF that focused on waivers implemented by state welfare agencies prior to TANF's authorization. As we added items to the list, we continually checked to avoid any duplication. This comparison involved our judgment, as some lists were of projects or studies and others were of study reports. Because we relied on multiple reviews of the body of work undertaken in the welfare reform research community, we believe that the list of 443 entries we compiled included the key sources of data.

Sample Selection

We selected surveys and studies systematically from this list within each sample category. We were interested in surveys or studies that were as comprehensive as possible in geographic coverage and topics addressed. Thus, we selected all of the national surveys and the HHS administrative data. We also selected all studies on the original list that by their description appeared to have produced data concerning the major subpopulations affected by TANF in three or more states, municipalities, or counties. This resulted in 55 studies and surveys.

[2]The Finance Project is a nonprofit research, technical assistance, and information organization created to improve outcomes for children, families, and communities nationwide.

We then selected studies that pertained to individual states in the following way. First we selected all leavers studies financed by ASPE. Of the leavers studies listed by the National Conference of State Legislatures and those mentioned in an article authored by Brauner and Loprest,[3] we included only those that had not been included in our previous report[4] or were not from a state that already had an ASPE-funded study. In states that had issued multiple reports for their leavers studies for people who left welfare in different years, we selected the most recent study. When a state had no ASPE-funded study or any listed by the National Conference of State Legislatures or Brauner and Loprest, but did have a report available on its Web site, we selected the Web report. Waiver studies generally produced several reports. We selected for review the most recently issued waiver report because the data topics examined were similar in the initial and later reports.

After selecting these types of studies and surveys, we removed from our list studies that did not appear to contain data that could answer our research questions or that used data from one of the national surveys on our list. In summary, we excluded literature searches, reviews of research on state policies or programs, technical assistance projects focused on improving or evaluating information systems or databases, and studies based on data from a national survey that we had included in our list. A list of 239 studies remained. Finally, we obtained advice from five welfare experts about which of these 239 studies we should include. Ultimately, we selected 17 of these studies.

In all, we judgmentally selected 141 national surveys and studies that yielded 187 data sets to review. A complete list of the national surveys and studies that we examined for data is provided in appendix II.

Data Assessment

Identifying data resources for a comprehensive assessment of TANF required criteria that could be used to assess data sets. The first step in this process was to express each of TANF's goals as a research question. In looking at the goals themselves, it is evident that some express expected results—for example, that work and marriage will improve the well-being

[3]Brauner, Sarah, and Pamela Loprest, *Where Are They Now? What States' Studies of People Who Left Welfare Tell Us* (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, May 1999.)

[4]GAO/HEHS-99-48, Apr. 28, 1999.

of low-income families. Assessing TANF's progress toward these expected results required, in part, questions about TANF's effects. However, some of TANF's goals focus on its general purpose—for example, providing assistance to needy families. In this case, assessing TANF's progress required research questions that are descriptive, that is, questions that ask what public assistance looks like under TANF. To translate TANF's goals into research questions, we considered the nature of each of TANF's goals and formulated questions to represent key issues the Congress will consider at reauthorization. As shown in figure 1, we created corresponding questions that asked for descriptions of what has happened under TANF, the effects of TANF, or both.

We then specified the information, or data topics, necessary to address our research questions. We developed a data collection instrument that listed the data topics associated with each question and used the instrument to record the data topics found in each data set examined. It is important to note that what we identified as data topics were not equivalent to specific measures. In other words, our coding captured the fact that a certain data source collected measures on employment. It did not capture the specific manner in which employment was measured. In addition to data topics, we collected such pertinent information as the unit of analysis, population, sampling method, sample size, dates covered by data collection, and design of the study for which data were gathered. We recorded response rates and attrition rates when they were relevant given the method of data collection. We also looked to see if data had been or were being collected for a comparison or control group.

To summarize our findings, we identified data categories related to TANF's goals, some of which represented the research questions and others of which were more narrowly focused. The narrowly focused data categories represented combinations of data topics, such as employment and earnings or family and child well-being, that were associated with the research questions. We took this approach for a variety of reasons. First, in making a judgment that data were available to address particular questions, we required that certain data topics be present in combination and, for effect questions, that the data were collected using control groups or comparison groups. However, a data source could provide relevant data topics, even though the data topic could not be used to address the particular question we had posed. Rather than discount the value of these data topics, we decided to note their availability. Second, in many cases, the same data topics and data categories were being used to address different questions. For example, as figure 1 shows, the data categories associated with

employment were related to 5 of our 11 questions. Presenting our findings in terms of data categories allowed us to report on all of the data topics, including those that were not available in the combinations needed to address a research question.

Finally, to assess how the data might be used for an assessment of TANF, we considered three attributes of the data. We considered the geographic scope of the sample; the data topics included in the data set; and whether or not the data could be used for descriptive analyses or analyses of effect, given the design of the study. In determining the geographic scope of the sample, we looked at the sampling method and sample size, as well as at response rates and attrition rates, since both affect how well a sample represents a population. We relied on the design of the study, the data topics included in a data set, and how researchers had used the data to make a judgment about whether the data could be used for descriptive analyses or analyses of effect. We coded data as being useable for analyses of effect when they came from a study that made comparisons between groups, one of which served as the treatment group and the other as the absence of the treatment, or the comparison group. In deciding whether a study included a treatment and a comparison group, we recognized that such groups could be formed through experimental designs, quasi-experimental designs, or statistical modeling.

Study Limitations

Because this assessment is based on a judgmental sample and the data needs of an assessment of TANF's progress are derived from TANF's legislative objectives, several study limitations should be considered. First, while every attempt was made to be comprehensive in sample design and selection, some relevant data sources may have been omitted. Second, framing the data needs for an assessment of TANF's progress around TANF's objectives, which focus on the behavior and well-being of low-income children and families, excluded from consideration the bodies of welfare reform research concerned with institutions, including studies of TANF's implementation at the state and local levels and descriptions of TANF program policies and practices. Third, the study's focus on identification of quantitative data resulted in our eliminating data from most studies that used qualitative data collection methods. Fourth, because our bibliographic sources for surveys and studies included both existing and planned surveys and studies, complete documentation for data sets was not always available. Finally, because our coding focused on whether a certain data source collected measures on specific topics, but not on the

precise measures used, we did not assess whether measures were comparable across studies.

Surveys and Welfare Reform Studies Reviewed

Table 5: National Data Sources

Source	Sponsor
HHS administrative data	HHS
CPS	Census Bureau
NLSY	Bureau of Labor Statistics, Department of Labor
NSAF	The Urban Institute
PSID	University of Michigan, Institute for Social Research
SIPP	Census Bureau
SPD	Census Bureau

Table 6: Sources of Waiver, Demonstration, Leavers, Metropolitan and Community-Based, and Other Welfare Reform Data

Study title	Principal investigator	Scope	Data source	Location
Waiver data				
Evaluation of the Arizona EMPOWER Welfare Reform Demonstration: Impact Study, Interim Report	Abt Associates	Local	Administrative and survey	Three sites in Phoenix and one site on a Navajo reservation, Arizona
Jobs First: Implementation and Early Impacts of Connecticut's Welfare Reform Initiative	Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation	Local	Administrative and survey	New Haven and Manchester, Connecticut
The Family Transition Program: Implementation and Three-Year Impacts of Florida's Initial Time Limited Welfare Program	Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation	Local	Administrative and survey	Escambia County, Florida
Indiana Welfare Reform Evaluation: Program Implementation and Economic Impacts After Two Years	Abt Associates, The Urban Institute	State	Administrative and survey	Indiana
Iowa's Family Investment Program: Impacts During the First Three-and-a-Half Years of Welfare Reform	Mathematica Policy Research	Local	Administrative	Nine counties in Iowa—five urban and four rural
Iowa's Limited Benefit Plan	Mathematica Policy Research	State	Administrative	Iowa
Iowa's Limited Benefit Plan	Mathematica Policy Research	Local	Survey and case study	Three PROMISE JOBS service delivery areas, Iowa
Second Assignments to Iowa's Limited Benefit Plan	Mathematica Policy Research	State	Administrative, survey, and case study	Iowa
Reforming Welfare and Rewarding Work: Final Report on the Minnesota Family Investment Program	Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation	Local	Administrative and two surveys	Three urban and four rural counties in Minnesota

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Study title	Principal investigator	Scope	Data source	Location
Achieving Change for Texans Evaluation: Net Impacts Through December 1997	University of Texas at Austin, Center for the Study of Human Resources	Local	Administrative	10 counties in Texas
Recipients of the Texas One-Time Benefit Payment: An Interim Report	University of Texas at Austin, Center for Social Work Research	Local	Survey	Hidalgo and Cameron counties, Texas
Forty-Two-Month Impacts of Vermont's Welfare Restructuring Project	Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation	Local	Administrative and survey	6 of 12 welfare district offices, Vermont
Wisconsin Self-Sufficiency First/Pay for Performance Program: Results and Lessons From a Social Experiment	University of Wisconsin-Madison, Institute for Research on Poverty	Local	Administrative	Dane, Dodge, Jefferson, and Waukesha counties in Wisconsin
Year Three Progress Report: Customer Characteristics and Employment Patterns	University of Maryland, Baltimore, School of Social Work	State	Administrative	Maryland
Interim Report for the Enhancement to the Process and Impact Analysis of the Youth Employment and Training Initiative	Illinois State University, Department of Social Work	Local	Administrative and survey	Chicago, Illinois
Montana FAIM Evaluation: Evaluation Design[a]	Abt Associates	State	Administrative and survey	Montana
A Proposal to Complete the Evaluation of Employment First, Nebraska's Welfare Reform Program[a]	Mathematica Policy Research	State	Survey	Nebraska
Evaluation of Welfare Reform in New Hampshire: Mid-Evaluation Summary Report	University of New Hampshire	State	Administrative and two surveys	New Hampshire
Evaluation of the North Carolina Work First Program: Initial Analysis of Administrative Data	Maximus	State	Administrative	North Carolina
Evaluation of North Dakota's Training, Education, Employment, and Management Program: Final Report	Berkeley Planning Associates	Local	Administrative	Seven counties in North Dakota
Early Impacts of the Virginia Independence Program: Final Report	Mathematica Policy Research	Local	Administrative	Lynchburg, Petersburg, and Portsmouth; and Prince William and Wise counties, Virginia
An Overview and Synthesis of the Project of State Level Child Outcomes	Child Trends	State and local	Survey	Indiana; New Haven and Manchester, Connecticut; Alachua and Escambia counties, Florida; nine counties in Iowa; and seven counties in Minnesota

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Study title	Principal investigator	Scope	Data source	Location
Final Impact Report: The Evaluation of "To Strengthen Michigan Families"	Abt Associates	Local	Administrative	Four local service offices: Kalamazoo (Kalamazoo County), Madison Heights (Oakland County), McNichols/Goddard, and Schaeffer/Six Mile (Wayne County), Michigan
A Final Report on the Impact of New Jersey's Family Development Program	Rutgers University	Local	Administrative	10 counties in New Jersey
A Final Report on the Impact of New Jersey's Family Development Program: Results From a Pre-Post Analysis of AFDC Case Heads From 1990-1996	Rutgers University	State	Administrative	New Jersey
Ohio Works First Evaluation Plan[a]	Macro International	State	Administrative and survey	Ohio
California Welfare Reform Impact Evaluation	University of California, Berkeley	[b]	[b]	[b]
Findings From Year Two of the Minnesota Work First—MFIP Evaluation	Maximus	[b]	[b]	[b]
Process Study of South Carolina Family Independence Program	Urban Institute	[b]	[b]	[b]
Demonstration data				
Struggle to Sustain Employment: The Effectiveness of the Post-Employment Services Demonstration	Mathematica Policy Research	Local	Administrative and survey	Chicago, Illinois; Riverside, California; Portland, Oregon; and San Antonio, Texas
National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies: Evaluating Alternative Welfare-to-Work Approaches: Two-Year Impacts for Eleven Programs	Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation	Local	Administrative and survey	Atlanta, Georgia; Columbus, Ohio; Detroit and Grand Rapids, Michigan; Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Portland, Oregon; and Riverside, California
National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies: Impacts on Young Children and Their Families Two Years After Enrollment: Findings From the Child Outcomes Study	Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation	Local	Survey	Atlanta, Georgia; Grand Rapids, Michigan; and Riverside, California
New Hope for People With Low Incomes: Two-Year Results of a Program to Reduce Poverty and Reform Welfare	Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation	Local	Administrative	Milwaukee, Wisconsin
The New York State Child Assistance Program: Five-Year Impacts, Costs and Benefits	Abt Associates	Local	Administrative	Niagara, Monroe, and Suffolk counties, New York
Building Opportunities, Enforcing Obligations: Implementation and Interim Impacts of Parents' Fair Share	Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation	Local	Administrative	Dayton, Ohio; Grand Rapids, Michigan; and Memphis, Tennessee

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Study title	Principal investigator	Scope	Data source	Location
Teenage Parent Demonstration	Mathematica Policy Research	Local	Administrative and survey	Camden and Newark, New Jersey; Chicago, Illinois
Blueprints for Violence Prevention: Prenatal and Infancy Home Visitation by Nurses	University of Colorado, Cornell University, University of Rochester, and University of Denver	Local	Administrative and survey	Memphis, Tennessee; Elmira, New York
New Chance: Final Report on a Comprehensive Program for Young Mothers in Poverty and Their Children	Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation	Local	Survey	16 locations in California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Oregon, and Pennsylvania
The National Evaluation of the Welfare-to-Work Grants Program	Mathematica Policy Research, The Urban Institute, and Support Services International	Local	[c]	8 to 10 localities nationwide
Leavers data				
Evaluation of the North Carolina Work First Program: Status of Families Leaving Work First After Reaching the 24-Month Time Limit	Maximus	State	Survey	North Carolina
Arizona Cash Assistance Exit Study: First Quarter 1998 Cohort Final Report	Arizona Department of Economic Security, Office of Evaluation	State	Administrative and survey	Arizona
Arkansas Well-Being Survey	Berkeley Policy Associates	State	Survey	Arkansas
Los Angeles County Post-TANF Tracking Study	Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation	Local	Survey	Los Angeles County, California
Bay Area Family Well-Being Survey: A Study of Welfare Leavers in Alameda and Contra Costa Counties	The Sphere Institute	Local	Administrative and survey	Contra Costa and Alameda counties, California
Examining the Circumstances of Individuals and Families Who Leave TANF: Assessing the Validity of Administrative Data	The Sphere Institute	Local	Administrative and survey	San Mateo County, California
Evaluation of the Colorado Works Program: First Annual Report 1999	Berkeley Planning Associates	State	Administrative and survey	Colorado
The Status of TANF Leavers in the District of Columbia: Interim Report	The Urban Institute	State	Administrative and survey	District of Columbia
After Leaving WAGES	Florida State University	State	Survey	Florida
Georgia Welfare Leavers Study: Initial Results	Georgia State University, Applied Research Center	State	Survey	Georgia
When Families Leave Welfare Behind: First Survey Findings for Illinois Families in Transition	University of Illinois at Springfield, Institute for Public Affairs, and University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, School of Social Work	State	Administrative and survey	Illinois

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Study title	Principal investigator	Scope	Data source	Location
A Survey of Kansas Households Leaving the Temporary Assistance for Families Program: Final Report	Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services	State	Administrative and survey	Kansas
How Are They Doing? A Longitudinal Study Tracking Households Leaving Welfare Under Massachusetts' Reform	Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance	State	Survey	Massachusetts
Tracking of TANF Clients, First Report of a Longitudinal Study (Mississippi's TANF program)	Millsaps College, Center for Applied Research	Local	Survey	Eight counties in Mississippi
Preliminary Outcomes for 1996 Fourth Quarter AFDC Leavers: Revised Interim Report	Missouri Department of Social Services and University of Missouri, Department of Economics	State	Administrative	Missouri
Missouri Leavers Project: Three Chapter Report	Midwest Research Institute	State	Survey	Missouri
After Welfare: A Study of Work and Benefit Use in New York State After Case Closing, December 1999	State University of New York, Rockefeller Institute of Government	State	Administrative	New York
Employment and Return to Public Assistance Among Single Female-Headed Families Leaving AFDC in Third Quarter 1996, Cuyahoga County, Ohio	Case Western Reserve University, Center on Urban Poverty and Social Change, and Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation	Local	Administrative	Cuyahoga County, Ohio
How Are They Managing? A Six-Month Retrospective of Cuyahoga County Families Leaving Welfare: Fourth Quarter 1998 and First Quarter 1999	Case Western Reserve University, Center on Urban Poverty and Social Change	Local	Survey	Cuyahoga County, Ohio
Survey of Former Family Independence Program Clients: Cases Closed During April Through September 1998	South Carolina Department of Social Services	State	Survey	South Carolina
Texas Families in Transition: The Impacts of Welfare Reform Changes in Texas: Early Findings	Texas Department of Human Services	State	Survey	Texas
The Virginia Closed Case Study: Experiences of Virginia Families One Year After Leaving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families	Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and Mathematica Policy Research	State	Administrative and survey	Virginia
Experiences of Virginia Time Limit Families in the Six Months After Case Closure: Results for Early Cohort: Final Report, November 1999	Mathematica Policy Research	Local	Administrative and survey	Virginia districts 2,6,7, and 9

(Continued From Previous Page)

Study title	Principal investigator	Scope	Data source	Location
A Study of Washington State TANF Leavers and TANF Recipients: Findings From the April-June 1999 Telephone Survey: Final Report	Washington Department of Social and Health Services, Economic Services Administration, Office of Planning and Research	State	Administrative and survey	Washington
A Study of Washington State TANF Departures and Welfare Reform: TANF Exit Study April 1999	Washington Department of Social and Health Services, Economic Services Administration, Management Reports and Data Analysis	State	Administrative	Washington
Before and After TANF: The Economic Well-Being of Women Leaving Welfare	University of Wisconsin-Madison, Institute for Research on Poverty	State	Administrative	Wisconsin
Wisconsin Works (W-2): First Quarter 1998 Leavers Study: Preliminary Process Report	Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development	State	Survey	Wisconsin
Connecticut's Post-Time-Limit Tracking Study: Six-Month Survey Results	Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation	Local	Survey	Department of Social Services offices in Bridgeport, Hartford, Manchester, New Haven, Norwich, and Waterbury, Connecticut
CalWORKS Leavers Survey: A Statewide Telephone Survey of Former CalWORKS Recipients	California Department of Social Services	State	Survey	California
Metropolitan and community-based data				
The Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study	Princeton University and Columbia University	Local	Adminstrative and survey	Austin, Texas; Baltimore, Maryland; Detroit, Michigan; Newark, New Jersey; Oakland, California; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Richmond, Virginia
Los Angeles Families and Neighborhood Survey (LA FANS)	RAND	Local	Survey	Los Angeles neighborhoods
Welfare Children and Families: A Three City Study	Brandeis University, University of Chicago, University of Illinois, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, University of Texas at Austin, Johns Hopkins University, Pennsylvania State University, and Harvard University	Local	Survey	Boston, Massachusetts; San Antonio, Texas; and Chicago, Illinois

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Study title	Principal investigator	Scope	Data source	Location
Growing Up in Poverty Project: Remember the Children: Mothers Balance Work and Child Care Under Welfare Reform	University of California-Berkeley and Yale University	Local	Survey	San Francisco and Santa Clara, California; Tampa, Florida; and New Haven, Connecticut
Big Cities and Welfare Reform: Early Implementation and Ethnographic Findings From the Project on Devolution and Urban Change	Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation	Local	Administrative and survey	One county each in Ohio, California, Florida, and Pennsylvania
Impact of Welfare Reform on Families	University of Wisconsin-Madison, Institute for Research on Poverty	Local	Survey	Milwaukee, Wisconsin
National Institute of Child Health and Development Study of Early Child Care	National Institute of Child Health and Development	Local	Ethnographic and survey	In or near Little Rock, Arkansas; Morganton, North Carolina; Seattle, Washington; Madison, Wisconsin; Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Boston, Massachusetts; Lawrence, Kansas; Irvine, California; and Charlottesville, Virginia
Other welfare reform data				
Work First New Jersey (WFNJ) Evaluation: How WFNJ Clients Are Faring Under Welfare Reform: An Early Look	Mathematica Policy Research	State	Administrative and survey	New Jersey
Barriers to the Employment of Welfare Recipients	University of Michigan, School of Social Work	Local	Survey	One urban Michigan county
Florida's Project Independence: Benefits, Costs, and Two-Year Impacts of Florida's JOBS Program	Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation	Local	Administrative and survey	Nine counties in Florida

[a]This document is an evaluation design plan.

[b]We were unable to obtain a copy of either the report or a design plan.

[c]This information was missing from the documents we reviewed.

Table 7: Other Studies Examined

Study or project title	Principal investigator or author
What Has Welfare Accomplished? Impacts on Welfare Participation, Employment, Income, Poverty, and Family Structure	Robert F. Schoeni and Rebecca M. Blank, National Bureau of Economic Research
National Study of Child Care for Low-Income Families	Abt Associates
Children and Welfare Reform: A Guide to Evaluating the Effects of State Welfare Policies on Children	Child Trends
Patterns and Growth of Child Care Voucher Use by Families Connected to Cash Assistance in Illinois and Maryland	National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia University
National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being	Research Triangle Institute
The Role of Intermediaries in Linking TANF Recipients With Jobs	Mathematica Policy Research
Rural Welfare-to-Work Strategies: Research Synthesis	Macro International
Mecklenburg County Linked Database	Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services, South Carolina
South Carolina Child Link	South Carolina Department of Social Services
Policy Evaluation of the Overall Effects of Welfare Reform on SSA Programs	The Lewin Group
Temporary Assistance for Low-Wage Workers: Evolving Relationships Among Work, Welfare, and Unemployment Insurance	National Governors' Association
Welfare Time Limits: An Interim Report Card	Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation
Parenting Behavior in a Sample of Young Mothers in Poverty: Results of the New Chance Observational Study	Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation
Approaches to Evaluating Welfare Reform: Lessons From Five State Demonstrations	Mathematica Policy Research
Expanding Health Insurance Coverage for Low-Income People: Experiments in Five States	Mathematica Policy Research
Helping Young People in High-Poverty Communities: Lessons From Youth Fair Chance	Mathematica Policy Research

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Study or project title	Principal investigator or author
Working Out of Poverty: Employment Retention and Career Advancement for Welfare Recipients	National Governors' Association
Welfare Reform in California: State and County Implementation of CALWORKS in the First Year	RAND
Welfare Reform in California: Results of the 1998 All-County Implementation Study	RAND
State Capacity Study Field Research Report Form 1997	State University of New York, The Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government
Building Bridges: States Respond to Substance Abuse and Welfare Reform	National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, Columbia University
Big Cities Confront the New Politics of Child and Family Policy	Columbia University School of Social Work
A Description and Assessment of State Approaches to Diversion Programs and Activities Under Welfare Reform	Center for Health Policy Research, George Washington University
Diversion as a Work-Oriented Welfare Reform Strategy and Its Effect on Access to Medicaid: An Examination of Experiences of Five Local Communities	Center for Health Policy Research, George Washington University
An Unfair Head Start: California Families Face Gaps in Preschool and Child Care Availability	Berkeley-Stanford Pace Center, Yale University, and California Child Care Resource and Referral Network
The Infant Health and Development Program: Interim Summary	IHDP Research Group
National Impact Evaluation of the Comprehensive Child Development Program: Final Report	Abt Associates
Illegal Aliens: Extent of Welfare Benefits Received on Behalf of U.S. Citizen Children	U.S. General Accounting Office
Implementing Welfare Reform Requirements for Teenage Parents: Lessons From Experience in Four States	Mathematica Policy Research
Medicaid Managed Care: Does It Increase Primary Care Services in Underserved Areas?	Mathematica Policy Research
New Immigrant Survey	RAND
Welfare Reform Project	Ohio University and Joyce Foundation
Study of the Employment Patterns of Young Women and the Implications for Welfare Mothers	The Urban Institute

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Study or project title	Principal investigator or author
Alameda County CalWORKS Needs Assessment: A Look at Potential Health-Related Barriers to Self-Sufficiency	Public Health Institute
The Study of Families Formerly Receiving Aid to Families With Dependent Children, Interim Report: 1999 Survey	Midwest Research Institute
New Mexico TANF Longitudinal Study Results of First-Year Follow-up Surveys: Final Report	Maximus
Welfare Reform After Two Years: Technical Report on Former Welfare Recipients in Pennsylvania	Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare
Indiana Welfare Reform Evaluation: Identifying and Serving the Most Dependent Cases	Abt Associates
A Study of Washington State TANF Leavers and TANF Recipients: Welfare Reform and Findings From Administrative Data: Final Report	Washington Department of Social and Health Services
Post-Exit Earnings and Benefit Receipt Among Those Who Left AFDC in Wisconsin	University of Wisconsin-Madison, Institute for Research on Poverty
Evaluation of the Arizona EMPOWER Welfare Reform Demonstration: Process Study, Interim Report	Abt Associates
Work and Welfare: Iowa Families Tell Their Stories	Mathematica Policy Research
Process Evaluation of Achieving Change for Texans: Welfare Reform Waiver Evaluation, First Interim Report	Texas Department of Human Services
Will Welfare Reform Influence Marriage and Fertility? Early Evidence From the ABC Demonstration	Abt Associates
The Next Generation: The Effects of Welfare Reform and Employment Policies on Children and Families	Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation
The Effect of Welfare on Marriage and Fertility	Robert Moffitt in *Welfare, the Family, and Reproductive Behavior: Research Perspectives*
New Research Findings on the Effects of the Earned Income Tax Credit	Center on Budget and Policy Priorities
When Low-Income Mothers Go to Work: Implications for Children	Child Trends
Work, Earnings, and Well-Being After Welfare: What Do We Know?	University of Wisconsin-Madison, Institute for Research on Poverty

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Study or project title	Principal investigator or author
Monitoring the Impact of Welfare Reform on Women's Health	Johns Hopkins University Women's and Children's Health Policy Center
Monitoring the Impact of Welfare Reform on Immigrant Women, Infants, and Children: Access to Health Care, Health-Seeking Behaviors, and Health Outcomes	New York City Department of Health, Bureau of Maternity Services and Family Planning
Building an Employment-Focused Welfare System: Work First and Other Work-Oriented Strategies in Five States	The Urban Institute
Welfare Waivers and Non-Marital Child Bearing	Ann Horvath and H. Elizabeth Peters, Cornell University
Marriage and Economic Incentives: Evidence From a Welfare Experiment	Wei-Yin Hu, University of California at Los Angeles
Welfare Benefits and Female Headship in the United States	Robert Moffitt in *American Economic Review*, Vol. 90, No. 2 (2000), pp. 373-77.

Note: These studies were examined for data and were found to include (1) data that could not be used to answer our research questions, (2) data that represented a secondary analysis, or (3) data that duplicated what was found in other studies reviewed.

Scope and Type of Analyses for Which Waiver and Demonstration Data Can Be Used

Study or project title	Descriptive analyses	Analyses of effect
Statewide sample		
Indiana Welfare Reform Evaluation: Program Implementation and Economic Impacts After Two Years • Administrative • Survey		X
Iowa's Limited Benefit Plan • Administrative	X	
Second Assignments to Iowa's Limited Benefit Plan • Administrative • Survey • Case study	X	
Year Three Progress Report: Customer Characteristics and Employment Patterns • Administrative	X	
Montana FAIM Evaluation: Evaluation Design • Administrative • Survey	X	
A Proposal to Complete the Evaluation of Employment First, Nebraska's Welfare Reform Program • Survey	X	
Evaluation of Welfare Reform in New Hampshire: Mid-Evaluation Summary Report • Administrative • Surveys (2)	X	
Evaluation of the North Carolina Work First Program: Initial Analysis of Administrative Data • Administrative	X	
An Overview and Synthesis of the Project on State-Level Child Outcomes • Survey		X
A Final Report on the Impact of New Jersey's Family Development Program: Results From a Pre-Post Analysis of AFDC Case Heads From 1990 to 1996 • Administrative		X
Ohio Works First Evaluation Plan • Administrative • Survey		X
Local sample		
Evaluation of Arizona EMPOWER Welfare Reform Demonstration: Impact Study, Interim Report • Administrative • Survey		X
Jobs First: Implementation and Early Impacts of Connecticut's Welfare Reform Initiative • Administrative • Survey		X

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Study or project title	Descriptive analyses	Analyses of effect
The Family Transition Program: Implementation and Three-Year Impact of Florida's Initial Time-Limited Welfare Program • Administrative • Survey		X
Iowa's Family Investment Program: Impacts During the First 3-½ Years of Welfare Reform • Administrative		X
Iowa's Limited Benefit Plan • Survey • Case study	X	
Reforming Welfare and Rewarding Work: Final Report on the Minnesota Family Investment Program • Administrative • Surveys (2)		X
Achieving Change for Texans Evaluation: Net Impacts Through December 1997 • Administrative		X
Recipients of the Texas One-Time Benefit Payment: An Interim Report • Survey	X	
Forty-Two-Month Impacts of Vermont's Welfare Restructuring Project • Administrative • Survey		X
Wisconsin Self-Sufficiency First/Pay for Performance Program: Results and Lessons From a Social Experiment • Administrative		X
Interim Report for the Enhancement to the Process and Impact Analysis of the Youth Employment and Training Initiative • Administrative • Survey		X
Evaluation of North Dakota's Training, Education, Employment, and Management Program: Final Report • Administrative	X	
Early Impacts of the Virginia Independence Program: Final Report • Administrative		X
Final Impact Report: The Evaluation of "To Strengthen Michigan Families" • Administrative		X
A Final Report on the Impact of New Jersey's Family Development Program • Administrative		X
Struggle to Sustain Employment: The Effectiveness of the Post-Employment Services Demonstration • Administrative • Survey		X
National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies: Evaluating Alternative Welfare-to-Work Approaches: Two-Year Impacts for Eleven Programs • Administrative • Survey		X

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Study or project title	Descriptive analyses	Analyses of effect
National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies: Impacts on Young Children and Their Families Two Years After Enrollment: Findings From the Child Outcomes Study • Survey		X
New Hope for People With Low Incomes: Two-Year Results of a Program to Reduce Poverty and Reform Welfare • Administrative		X
The New York State Child Assistance Program: Five-Year Impacts, Costs, and Benefits • Administrative		X
Building Opportunities, Enforcing Obligations: Implementation & Interim Impacts of Parents' Fair Share • Administrative		X
Teenage Parent Demonstration • Administrative • Survey		X
Blueprints for Violence Prevention: Prenatal and Infancy Home Visitation by Nurses • Administrative • Survey		X
New Chance: Final Report on a Comprehensive Program for Young Mothers in Poverty and Their Children • Survey		X
The National Evaluation of the Welfare-to-Work Grants Program • Survey		X
An Overview and Synthesis of the Project on State-Level Child Outcomes • Survey		X

Comments From the Department of Health and Human Services

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
Office of the Assistant Secretary, Suite 600
370 L'Enfant Promenade, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20447

Janaury 29, 2001

Ms. Cynthia M. Fagnoni
Managing Director
Education, Workforce, and Income Security Issues
U.S. General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Ms. Fagnoni:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the General Accounting Office draft report entitled: Welfare Reform: Data Available to Assess TANF's Progress (GAO-01-298). Our comments, which include those from the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, are enclosed.

This report should prove very useful in helping Congress and other interested parties get a better framework and understanding of the opportunities and limitations of using available data to inform decisions regarding reauthorization of the TANF program. If you have any questions regarding our comments, please contact Karl Koerper from the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation at (202) 401-4535.

Sincerely,

Diann Dawson
Acting Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary
for Children and Families

Enclosure

GAO Contacts and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contacts

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Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to those named above, the following individuals made important contributions to this report: Patrick DiBattista designed the data collection instrument used to assess the 187 data sets reviewed, oversaw data collection, and designed and conducted the analysis of the data's strengths and weaknesses; Andrea Sykes played a major role in data collection and developed the analysis of the data's availability to address TANF's goals; Stephen Langley III also played a major role in data collection, provided consultation on multivariate analysis issues, and prepared the report's methodology appendix; James Wright provided guidance on study design and measurement; and Gale Harris, Kathryn Larin, and Heather McCallum provided consultation on TANF policy and implementation issues.

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