



Highlights of [GAO-04-878](#), a report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on Human Resources, Committee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The nation's social welfare system has been transformed into a system emphasizing work and personal responsibility, primarily through the creation of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant. The Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program has expanded policies to help recipients improve self-sufficiency. Given that SSA data indicate an overlap in the populations served by TANF and SSI, and the changes in both programs, this report examines (1) the extent that TANF recipients with impairments are encouraged to apply for SSI and what is known about how SSI caseload growth has been affected by such TANF cases, (2) the extent that work requirements are imposed on TANF recipients applying for SSI, and the range of services provided to such recipients, and (3) the extent that interactions exist between the SSI and TANF programs to assist individuals capable of working to obtain employment.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that SSA, in a new demonstration project, work with TANF officials to identify recipients with impairments capable of working and coordinate services to help them improve self-sufficiency. GAO also recommends that HHS use its Web site as a clearinghouse for information regarding opportunities for TANF agencies to work with SSA. Both SSA and HHS generally agreed with our recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-878.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Cindy M. Fagnoni (202) 512-7215 fagnonic@gao.gov.

TANF AND SSI

Opportunities Exist to Help People with Impairments Become More Self-Sufficient

What GAO Found

In our nationwide survey of county TANF offices, we found that nearly all offices reported that they refer recipients with impairments to SSI, but the level of encouragement to apply for SSI varies. While almost all of the county TANF offices stated that they advise such recipients with impairments to apply for SSI, 74 percent also follow up to ensure the application process is complete, and 61 percent assist recipients in completing the application. Because TANF offices are referring individuals with impairments to SSI, these referrals will have some effect on the SSI caseload. However, due to data limitations, the magnitude of the effect these referrals have on SSI caseload growth is uncertain. While SSA can identify whether SSI recipients have income from other sources, it cannot easily determine whether this income comes from TANF or some other assistance based on need. In addition, past research has not found conclusive evidence regarding the impact that TANF referrals have on SSI caseload growth.

Estimates from our survey found that although some TANF offices impose work requirements on individuals with impairments, about 86 percent of all offices reported that they either sometimes or always exempt adult TANF recipients awaiting SSI determinations from the work requirements. One key reason for not imposing work requirements on these recipients is the existence of state and county TANF policies and practices that allow such exemptions. Nevertheless, county TANF offices, for the most part, are willing to offer noncash services, such as transportation and job training, to adult recipients with impairments who have applied for SSI. However, many recipients do not use these services. This low utilization may be related to exempting individuals from the work requirement, but it may also be due to the recipients' fear of jeopardizing their SSI applications. Another reason for the low utilization of services is that many services are not necessarily available; budgetary constraints have limited the services that some TANF offices are able to offer recipients with impairments.

Many county TANF offices' interactions with SSA include either having a contact at SSA to discuss cases or following up with SSA regarding applications for SSI. Interactions that help individuals with impairments increase their self-sufficiency are even more limited. In all the states we visited, we found that such interactions generally existed between TANF agencies and other agencies (such as the Departments of Labor or Education). In addition, 95 percent of county TANF offices reported that their interactions with SSA could be improved. State and county TANF officials feel they have to take the lead in developing and maintaining the interaction with SSA. One SSA headquarters official stated that SSA has no formal policy regarding outreach to TANF offices but would consider a partnership provided there is some benefit for SSA. Still, about 27 percent of county TANF offices reported that they were discouraged in their attempts to establish a relationship with SSA because staff at the local SSA field office told them that they did not have the time or the interest.