

RECIPIENTS WITH BARRIERS: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question: Are welfare recipients now harder to serve than before reform?

Answer: No. The proportion of TANF cases that face severe barriers to employment has not significantly increased relative to the more than 50 percent reduction caseloads since 1994.

- Welfare caseloads have always contained large proportions of families with characteristics that would classify them as hard-to-serve. Evidence available on personal and family characteristics indicates only modest changes in the composition of the adult caseload as the number of families on TANF has rapidly decreased.
- A key indicator of hard-to-serve clients is if they are long-term recipients. Research by the Urban Institute in Washington, D.C. comparing TANF caseloads between 1997 and 1999 found the proportion of new entrants, cyclers (those receiving TANF intermittently), and long-termers (on continuously since before 1997) remained remarkably stable:
 - 26% were new entrants in both 1997 and 1999;
 - 47% were long-termers in both 1997 and 1999.
- TANF recipients did not report significantly more “barriers” to working in 1999 than they did in 1997.
- Research also shows increased employment among recipients who have barriers. Employment rose between 1997 and 1999 for those reporting:
 - 1 barrier from 22% to 33%;
 - 2 or more barriers from 5% to 20%.
- Some States have experienced such large caseload declines (over 90% in Wisconsin) that many of those left on the rolls do face considerable challenges. But even in those States, new young families are constantly coming on to the rolls and make up a significant proportion of cases served.

Source: White House, Domestic Policy Council, April 2002