

Oregon's Largest Anti-Poverty Program Increasingly Shuts Out Working Families

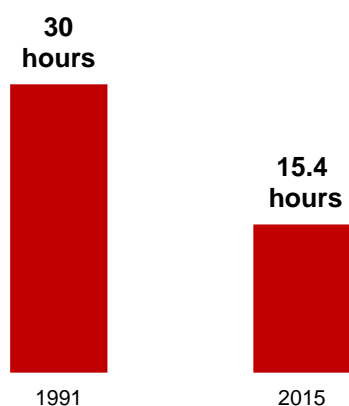
Every year, it gets harder for struggling working families to get temporary assistance from Oregon's primary anti-poverty program for families with children. This has been the case for nearly a quarter of a century, the result of the fact that the Oregon legislature has left frozen the income limit for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program.

TANF assists children in families facing a crisis. It protects children whose parents experience physical, mental health or other barriers to employment. It protects children when domestic violence has broken up a family and left a parent (typically the mother) in need of help getting into the workforce. It is often the last level of protection for children whose parents have lost their jobs. TANF provides time-limited cash assistance to help cover basic needs, while offering employment services leading to a path out of poverty.

Only families who are extremely poor can receive TANF. Today, a single parent of two who works two days a week at minimum wage makes too much to get help. That's because she earns just over \$616 per month (37 percent of the poverty level), the TANF income limit for a family of three.¹ In 1991, when that limit was first put into effect, a parent of two working nearly 30 hours per week at minimum wage could receive assistance.² Earnings as high as the income limit in 1991 still meant the family was quite poor, at 66 percent of the official federal poverty level, but not as poor as today.³

15.4 hours of work per week now bars a family from assistance

(Hours per week at minimum wage that a 3-person family becomes ineligible for Oregon TANF)

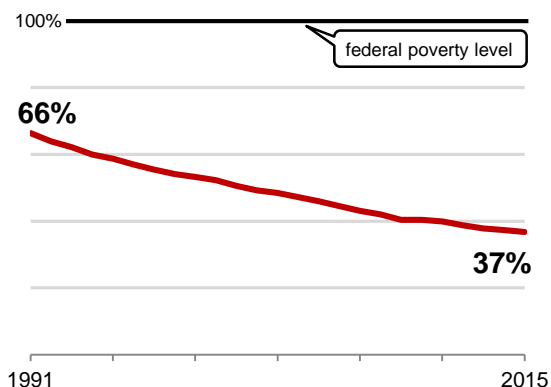


OCPP analysis of information from Oregon Department of Human Services and Oregon Employment Department.

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Families must be poorer in 2015 to qualify for temporary assistance

(Oregon TANF income limit as a share of the federal poverty level for a 3-person family)



OCPP analysis of information from Oregon Department of Human Services and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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Cash assistance and employment services help struggling families with children get back on their feet. To help reduce child poverty, lawmakers should raise the TANF income limit. Oregon will do better when all families are economically secure.

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Endnotes

¹ In 2015, a parent with two children can only work up to 15.37 hours per week at minimum wage and still be eligible for Oregon's TANF program. A parent working 15.4 hours per week at minimum wage (\$9.25 per hour in 2015) would earn on average \$617.28 per month, putting the family above the TANF income limit for a family of three.

² In 1991, a parent with two children could work up to 29.9 hours per week at minimum wage and still be eligible for Oregon's TANF program. That year, a parent working 30 hours per week at Oregon's minimum wage would earn on average \$617.50 per month, putting them above the Oregon TANF income limit for a family of three.

³ In 1991, Oregon's TANF income limit for a family of three (\$616 per month) was 66.4 percent of the federal poverty level at that time.

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