

What is TANF?

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) is a cash assistance program for families with children under the age of 18 (or under the age of 19 if the child is in high school) who need financial assistance. Adults and parents who apply for TANF benefits are required to fulfill certain work requirements in order to receive the cash assistance.

Am I eligible for TANF benefits?

In order to be eligible for TANF, you need to have a minor child in your household and meet certain income guidelines and resource limits. If you do not have a child but are pregnant, you may be eligible for TANF before the baby is born. You can view the general eligibility standards online at <http://dphhs.mt.gov/hcsd/TANF.aspx>, but the only way to be sure if you are eligible for TANF benefits is to apply.

Where can I get a TANF application?

There are four ways to apply:

1. In person at your local Office of Public Assistance. To find your local Office of Public Assistance, call 1-888-706-1535 or visit <http://dphhs.mt.gov/hcsd/OfficeofPublicAssistance.aspx>. If you cannot go to the Office of Public Assistance, you may have another person, called an authorized representative, apply on your behalf.

2. By mail. You can call 1-888-706-1535 and ask that an application be mailed to you. Or you can download and print an application from the Internet at <http://dphhs.mt.gov/Portals/85/hcsd/documents/hcs250.pdf>. You should take or mail the completed application to your local Office of Public Assistance as soon as possible.
3. Online at apply.mt.gov.
4. Over the phone by calling the Montana Public Assistance Helpline at 1-888-706-1535.

Do I have to work while I am receiving TANF benefits?

Yes. If you receive TANF benefits, you are required to participate in the Work Readiness Component (WoRC) program. The WoRC program is a job training and employment program.

What does the WoRC program require?

You will need to negotiate an Employability Plan with your WoRC case manager to establish your WoRC specific requirements. Usually the WoRC program requires you to do at least 132 hours per month of WoRC approved activities for each adult. If you are a single parent household, you are required to do at least 108 hours a month of WoRC approved activities.

Every case is different. The only way to know your WoRC requirements is to

check your Employability Plan and to talk to your WoRC case manager. Tell your case manager if you need transportation or child care to do your WoRC approved activities. You may be able to get help with transportation or child care if you need them to do your WoRC approved activities.

Be sure to let your case manager know if you have a documented disability or impairment that prevents you from working. This may affect your participation in the WoRC program.

Are there exemptions to WoRC participation?

No. The only parents in a TANF household who are not required to participate in the WoRC program are teens who do not live on their own and are attending school full-time.

What counts as an acceptable WoRC activity?

You do not have to have paid employment in order to satisfy the WoRC requirements. You can also meet your required hours by participating in work experience, job searching (for a limited time), vocational education and training, job skills training, community service, and in some cases, getting a high school diploma. You should always check your Employability Plan and talk to your WoRC case manager to make sure your activities meet the WoRC requirements.

Is there a time limit on TANF benefits?

Yes. You cannot receive more than 60 months of TANF benefits as an adult in your lifetime. The months do not have to be consecutive. You may be eligible for an extension of the time limit if you:

- Have a physical/mental illness or incapacity (Temporary or Permanent);
- Have a physical/mental illness or incapacity because of domestic violence;
- Are needed in the home full time as the primary caretaker for a household member who is suffering from a physical/mental illness or incapacity;
- Are dealing with a current domestic violence situation.

Are there penalties if I don't follow my WoRC program plan?

Yes. If you do not follow your Employability Plan, you may be sanctioned. If you do not fulfill your work requirements, you will be subject to the following sanctions:

- For a first sanction, your monthly benefit will be reduced by the amount equal to one person's share of the payment.
- For second and subsequent sanctions, a one month ineligibility period is imposed on the household and the case is closed.

If you negotiate a new Employability Plan during the sanction period, your benefits will start again after your sanction period is over.

How do I get more help?

Montana Legal Services Association (MLSA) provides free civil legal help to low-income people. Contact us to see if you qualify:

- Apply anytime online at mtlsa.org;
- Call our Helpline at 1-800-666-6899 (Helpline hours are limited).

What help can I find at MLSA?

- Legal advice and representation;
- Referrals to volunteer attorneys and other providers;
- Self-help clinics and materials.

www.MontanaLawHelp.org

Need legal information or forms? Visit www.MontanaLawHelp.org.

Can't find what you want? Use LiveHelp. Click on the LiveHelp picture and get help finding the information you need.

www.MTLSA.org

Find copies of all our brochures online. They are all available for free download!

This pamphlet is meant to give basic legal information, not legal advice about your problem. The law changes often and each case is different. We recommend you talk to an attorney about your legal problem.

Montana Legal Services Association

Public Benefits:

Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF)



Providing, protecting, and enhancing access to justice.

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