



Coordinating Prevention and Re-Housing Initiatives: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Programs

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 will provide communities with \$1.5 billion for the Homeless Prevention and Re-Housing Fund (HPRP) that can be used for homelessness prevention, shelter diversion, and rapid re-housing. Local planners can improve the effectiveness of their local efforts by coordinating with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) agencies.

TANF agencies will also receive funds under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act: \$5 billion has been allocated for the TANF Emergency Contingency Funds. These funds can be used to reimburse states for increased expenses they incur to serve more families during the recession. States may receive reimbursements of up to 80 percent for increased spending to provide families with:

- homeless prevention and short-term rental assistance (up to four months);
- cash assistance; and
- subsidized employment, including transitional jobs.

The total amount that a state can receive in contingency funds over the course of 2009 and 2010 is capped at 50 percent of one year's annual TANF allocation.

Coordination between organizations implementing HPRP prevention and re-housing programs and TANF agencies has many benefits. TANF agencies serve many low-income families who are at high risk of becoming homeless. Coordination can facilitate the identification of families at risk of becoming homeless, when their housing crises may be easier to resolve. Coordination can allow both programs' new resources to be used efficiently and improve overall performance. For example, while TANF agencies may have resources for short-term rental assistance, they may lack staff to provide housing counseling, landlord negotiation, or home-based case management that should be available through prevention and re-housing programs. In turn, the short-term rental assistance and prevention resources available to families under the TANF program may allow the HPRP prevention and re-housing programs to focus their resources on complementary, as opposed to competing, efforts.

TANF agencies also provide an array of cash assistance and work supports that can help improve the work skills and ability of parents to achieve greater economic self-sufficiency beyond what HPRP prevention and re-housing programs can offer. This income and work support may be critical to ensuring that families will be able to retain their housing over the long-term.

A focus of coordination should be on ensuring that the full array of TANF resources – homelessness prevention and short-term rental assistance, cash assistance, and work supports and skill development – is available and appropriate for families experiencing a housing crisis. This may require re-assessing existing eligibility standards and spending caps for the provision of short-term assistance. It might also include examining and resolving rules that have made it difficult for families to apply for, or maintain, cash assistance.

There is concern that despite the dire economic circumstances of low-income families, states may not take full advantage of the available resources. Homeless advocates and concerned policymakers should engage in aggressive advocacy to promote the full use of these resources to benefit families at risk of homelessness.