



NCDHHS



Work First Family Assistance

North Carolina's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, called Work First (WF), is based on the premise that parents have a responsibility to support themselves and their children.

The Work First program promotes a strengths-based, family-centered practice approach and shares in the mission of the NC Department of Health and Human Services, in collaboration with its partners, to protect the health and safety of all North Carolinians and provide essential human services.

Work First provides parents with short-term training and other services to help them become employed and move toward self-sufficiency. Families in which grandparents and relatives are caring for their relative children and legal guardians can receive services and support that prevent children from unnecessarily entering the foster care system.

Work First emphasizes three strategies: Diversion, Work and Retention.

Diversion

Diversion keeps families off Work First by helping them cope with unexpected emergencies or setbacks.

Under Work First, qualifying families may receive assistance through Benefit Diversion, Emergency Assistance, Work First services for low-income families whose income is below or at 200 percent of the federal poverty level, employment services for non-custodial parents and other supportive services, if applicable.

Work

Work First aims to shorten the length of time families receive assistance by making work mandatory and limiting how long a family can receive cash assistance. To receive Work First Family Assistance parents must sign a Mutual Responsibility Agreement (MRA)/Outcome Plan.

After moving into the work components of the program families can continue receiving benefits for up to 24 months. In most cases families who have reached the 24-month limit cannot receive Work First Family Assistance for another three years. Federal law sets a 60-month cumulative lifetime limit for receiving these benefits.

Retention

Work First can help families stay off public assistance and encourage them to save by helping to make sure they are better off working than on welfare.

The change from Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) to Work First in 1996 encompassed an increase in resource limits to ease the burden on low-income families. The North Carolina General Assembly raised income eligibility limits for families who receive subsidized child care to help families stay employed.

Counties also provide services such as transportation, child care, financial counseling, short-term training and child and family enrichment services to families whose income is at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level.

Families leaving WFFA for work may receive a job bonus payment for up to three months.

How to Apply

If you would like to apply in person, please apply at your [local Department of Social Services \(/divisions/social-services/local-dss-directory\)](#).

If you are ready to apply, would like to apply online, or check the status of your application, please visit the [ePASS \(https://epass.nc.gov/\)](https://epass.nc.gov/) website.

Learn More

[About Work First \(/divisions/social-services/work-first-family-assistance/about-work-first\)](#)

[Frequently Asked Questions About Electronic Benefit Issuance \(/wf-faq-electronic-benefit-issuance-11-2019/download\)](#)

[Work First Benefit Diversion \(/divisions/social-services/work-first-family-assistance/work-first-benefit-diversion\)](#)

[Work First Eligibility and Income Requirements \(/divisions/social-services/work-first-family-assistance/work-first-eligibility-and-income\)](#)

[Work First Emergency Assistance \(/divisions/social-services/work-first-family-assistance/work-first-emergency-assistance\)](#)

[Work First Substance Use/Mental Health Initiative \(/divisions/social-services/work-first-family-assistance/work-first-substance-use-mental-health\)](#)