

## A TANF MISERY INDEX

In economics, the sum of the unemployment and inflation rates is sometimes used as a “misery index” that summarizes in a single number how well or badly the economy is performing. In TANF, the sum of the percent of poor families (or children) *not* receiving TANF, and the percent gap between TANF benefits and the poverty level, can be used as a misery index that summarizes in a single number how well or badly TANF is performing in alleviating family poverty.

This TANF misery index has a minimum value of zero – all poor families receive benefits and benefit levels at least equal the poverty level – and a maximum value of two hundred – no poor families receive benefits. The higher the misery index, the worse TANF is performing in alleviating family poverty, the lower the index, the better TANF is performing in alleviating family poverty.

<b>Table 1. NATIONAL TANF MISERY INDEX 1996 - 2011</b>			
	<b>A.</b>	<b>B.</b>	<b>C.</b>
	<b>Percent of Poor Families Not Receiving TANF</b>	<b>Percent Gap Between TANF Benefit and Poverty Level</b>	<b>Misery Index (A+B)</b>
<b>1996</b>	28	65	93
<b>1997</b>	36	66	102
<b>1998</b>	46	66	112
<b>1999</b>	51	66	117
<b>2000</b>	53	68	121
<b>2001</b>	57	69	126
<b>2002</b>	59	69	128
<b>2003</b>	62	69	131
<b>2004</b>	63	70	133
<b>2005</b>	64	70	134
<b>2006</b>	67	71	138
<b>2007</b>	70	72	142
<b>2008</b>	72	71	143
<b>2009</b>	72	72	144
<b>2010</b>	73	72	145
<b>2011</b>	73	72	145

Table 1 shows the national TANF misery index from TANF's enactment in 1996 to 2011, the most recent year for which poverty counts are now available.<sup>1</sup> Column A shows the percent of poor families *not* receiving TANF, approximated based on the difference between the annual count of the number of poor families with children below age 18, and the average monthly number of TANF recipient families.<sup>2</sup> Column B shows the percent gap between the official monthly poverty guideline for a family of 3 and the median state TANF benefit for a family of 3 with no income. Column C shows the annual misery index, the sum of the figures in Columns A and B.

The TANF misery index has increased substantially since TANF's enactment to replace AFDC in 1996,<sup>3</sup> rising from 93 in 1996 to 145 in 2011. The misery index increased in every year except 2011 when it was the same as in 2010.

Most of the growth in the misery index has been due to an increase in the percent of poor families not receiving TANF, which almost tripled from 28% in 1996 to 73% in 2011. The TANF enrollment rate is now far below the enrollment rate in SNAP, formerly known as Food Stamps. Four times as many families with children received SNAP as received TANF (1.91 million monthly) in FY 2010, the most recent year for which SNAP household type data are available.

While the gap between benefits and the poverty line has increased under TANF, the gap was already quite large in 1996 at 65%, increasing to 72% in 2011. In 2011, the monthly \$429 median state benefit for a family of 3 with no income was but 28% of the monthly \$1,544 poverty line for a family of 3. Although the SNAP benefit is intended to cover only food needs, while the TANF benefit is supposedly intended to cover all basic needs except health care, in 2011 the \$526 SNAP benefit for a family of 3 with no income exceeded the TANF benefit for a family of 3 with no income in three-quarters of the states.

Appendix Table A shows the TANF misery index in each state in 2011.<sup>4</sup> Column A shows the percent of poor *children* not receiving TANF, approximated based on the difference between the

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<sup>1</sup> Data sources for Table 1: TANF caseload data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services caseload reports, available at [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/resource-library/search?area=2377&topic\[2351\]=2351&type\[3084\]=3084](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/resource-library/search?area=2377&topic[2351]=2351&type[3084]=3084); poverty data from the U.S. Census Bureau Historical Poverty Tables, available at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/data/historical/families.html>; TANF benefit level data from the Urban Institute's Welfare Rules Database at <http://anfdata.urban.org/wrd/tables.cfm>.

<sup>2</sup> Ideally, the percent of poor families not receiving TANF should be calculated by comparing the average *monthly* poverty count with the average monthly number of recipient families. However, only annual poverty counts are available.

<sup>3</sup> AFDC is the acronym for Aid to Families with Dependent Children

<sup>4</sup> Data sources for Appendix Table A: TANF caseload data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services caseload reports, available at [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/resource-library/search?area=2377&topic\[2351\]=2351&type\[3084\]=3084](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/resource-library/search?area=2377&topic[2351]=2351&type[3084]=3084); poverty count data from the U.S. Census Bureau state poverty data, available at [http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpstables/032012/pov/POV46\\_001\\_100125.htm](http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpstables/032012/pov/POV46_001_100125.htm); and benefit level data from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities report authored by Ife Finch and Liz Schott, *TANF Benefits Fell*

annual count of poor children in the state, and the average monthly number of TANF recipient children in the state.<sup>5</sup> Column B shows the percent gap between the official monthly poverty guideline for a family of 3 and the state TANF benefit for a family of 3 with no income. Column C shows the annual misery index, the sum of the figures in Columns A and B.

In 2011, the state misery index ranged from a high of 180 (Arkansas) to a low of 109 (California). The median state misery index was 156.

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*Further In 2011 And Are Worth Much Less Than In 1996 In Most States*, available at <http://www.cbpp.org/files/11-21-11pov.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> See footnote 2.

APPENDIX

<b>Appendix Table A. STATE TANF MISERY INDEX, 2011</b>			
	<b>A.</b>	<b>B.</b>	<b>C.</b>
	<b>Percent Of Poor Children Not Receiving TANF</b>	<b>Percent Gap Between Benefits and Poverty Level</b>	<b>Misery Index (A+B)</b>
Alabama	85	86	171
Alaska	78	52	130
Arizona	93	82	175
Arkansas	93	87	180
California	50	59	109
Colorado	88	70	158
Connecticut	81	56	137
Delaware	79	78	157
DC	54	72	126
Florida	91	80	171
Georgia	95	82	177
Hawaii	60	66	126
Idaho	97	80	177
Illinois	88	72	160
Indiana	88	81	169
Iowa	64	72	136
Kansas	84	72	156
Kentucky	79	83	162
Louisiana	94	84	178
Maine	47	69	116
Maryland	72	63	135
Massachusetts	62	60	122
Michigan	78	68	146
Minnesota	77	66	143
Mississippi	90	89	179
Missouri	81	81	162
Montana	89	67	156
Nebraska	78	76	154
Nevada	85	75	160
New Hampshire	62	56	118
New Jersey	84	73	157
New Mexico	78	75	153
New York	71	51	122
North Carolina	93	82	175
North Dakota	82	69	151
Ohio	73	72	145
Oklahoma	92	81	173
Oregon	68	67	135
Pennsylvania	75	73	148
Rhode Island	74	64	138
South Carolina	90	86	176
South Dakota	87	64	151
Tennessee	68	88	156
Texas	95	83	178
Utah	92	68	160
Vermont	76	59	135
Virginia	80	75	155
Washington	69	69	138
West Virginia	83	78	161
Wisconsin	83	56	139
Wyoming	97	63	160