

Aid to Families with Dependent Children

The Baseline



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Table of Contents

List of Exhibits	v
Introduction	
1 A Brief History of the AFDC Program	3
2 Trends in the AFDC Caseload since 1962	13
National trends	
AFDC Basic Program	
AFDC Unemployed Parent Program	
State Caseloads in Selected Years	
AFDC Basic Program Caseload	
AFDC Unemployed Parent Program Caseload	
AFDC Cases with No Adult Recipients	
Number of Recipients	
Average Number of Recipients	
Number of Children and Rates of Receipt	
AFDC Cases Receiving Food Stamps	
Peaks in AFDC Cases and Recipients by State	
3 Family and Household Characteristics	45
Number of Recipients per Case	
Trends in Family Size	
Number of Adults	
Number of Children	
Age of Children	
Age of Female Adults	
Race of Parent	
Race of Children	
Citizenship Status of Adults	
4 Federal and State Expenditures for AFDC	61
Rates of Federal Matching	
Total Federal and State Expenditures, 1970 – 1996	
Expenditures for Benefits and Administrative Costs	
Expenditures for Benefits in AFDC Basic Program	
Expenditures for Benefits in Unemployed Parent Program	
Expenditures for Benefits by State in Real and Constant Dollars	

5	Eligibility, Benefits and Disposable Income <ul style="list-style-type: none"> AFDC Need Standard Average Monthly Benefit Average Monthly Payments by State, 1996 AFDC Maximum Benefits by State, Selected Years AFDC Payments Compared to Poverty Levels Income Eligibility Levels Limitations on Earnings Benefit Levels Historically by State Receipt of Food Stamps Historically Combined Benefit Levels Historically Housing Arrangements Effects of Earnings on Benefit Levels Effects of Child Support Payments on Benefit Levels 	71
6	Welfare Spell Dynamics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Length of Current Spells of AFDC Receipt Length of Completed Spells of AFDC Receipt <ul style="list-style-type: none"> From Annual Data From Monthly Data Recipient Characteristics Events Associated with Start of AFDC Receipt Events Associated with End of AFDC Receipt Exiting and Returning to AFDC 	107
	Appendix A: The Food Stamp Program	125

Exhibits

Table Number	Tables and Figure Titles	Page
Chapter 2 Caseload Trends		
Table 2.1	Trends in Total AFDC Enrollments, 1962 – 1996	15
Table 2.2	Caseload Trends in the AFDC-Basic Program, 1962 – 1996	16
Table 2.3	Caseload Trends in the AFDC Unemployed Parent Program, 1962 – 1996	17
Figure 2.1	Monthly Number of AFDC Families Receiving Assistance	18
Figure 2.2	Monthly Number of Persons Receiving Assistance and Reciprocity Rate	19
Figure 2.3	Distribution of AFDC Caseload by State in 1996	21
Table 2.4	Total AFDC Caseload by State, Selected Fiscal Years 1965 – 1996	22
Table 2.5	AFDC Basic Caseload by State, Selected Fiscal Years 1965 – 1996	24
Table 2.6	AFDC Unemployed Parent Caseload by State, Selected Fiscal Years 1965 – 1996	26
Table 2.7	AFDC Cases With No Adult Recipients by State, Selected Fiscal Years 1985 – 1996	29
Table 2.8	Total AFDC Recipients by State, Selected Fiscal Years 1965 – 1996	30
Table 2.9	AFDC Reciprocity Rates by State, Selected Fiscal Years 1965 – 1996	32
Table 2.10	Total AFDC Child Recipients by State, Selected Fiscal Years 1965 – 1996	34
Table 2.11	AFDC Child Reciprocity Rates by State, Selected Fiscal Years 1965 – 1996	36
Table 2.12	Distribution of Food Stamp Households with Children and with AFDC by State, 1995	38
Table 2.13	Distribution of AFDC Food Stamp Households, Recipients and Benefits by State, 1995	39
Figure 2.4	Peak AFDC Caseload by State, October 1989 – August 1996	41
Table 2.14	Peak AFDC Caseload by State, October 1989 to August 1996	42
Table 2.15	Peak Number of AFDC Recipients by State, October 1989 to August 1996	43
Chapter 3 Family and Household Characteristic		
Table 3.1	Average Number of AFDC Recipients per Case, 1962 – 1996	46
Table 3.2	Number of Members per AFDC Family by Proportion of Families, Selected Years, 1967 – 1996	49
Figure 3.1	Size of AFDC Assistance Units, Selected Years, 1967 – 1996	49
Table 3.3	Number of Adults per AFDC Family by Proportion of All Families, Selected Years	

Exhibits

Table Number	Tables and Figure Titles	Page
	1967 – 1996	51

Exhibits

Table Number	Tables and Figure Titles	Page
-----------------	--------------------------	------

Exhibits

Table Number	Tables and Figure Titles	Page
Figure 3.2	Average Number of Children per Family for Families with Related Children Under 18 by Living Arrangement, 1960 – 1996	52
Table 3.4	Number of Children per AFDC Family by Proportion of All Families, Selected Years, 1967 – 1996	53
Table 3.5	Trends in Ages of AFDC Child Recipients, 1967 – 1996	54
Table 3.6	Trends in Age of Youngest Child in the AFDC Family, 1983 – 1996	55
Table 3.7	Trends in Ages of Adult Female Recipients, 1985 – 1996	56
Table 3.8	Distribution of AFDC Families by Race of Parent, 1983 – 1996	57
Table 3.9	Distribution of AFDC Children by Race, 1983 – 1996	58
Table 3.10	Citizenship Status of Adult AFDC Recipients, 1983 – 1996	59
<hr/>		
Chapter 4	Federal and State Expenditures	
Table 4.1	Federal Medical Assistance Matching Percentages by State, Selected Fiscal Years 1984 – 1997	62
Table 4.2	Trends in Federal AFDC Expenditures, 1962 – 1996	64
Table 4.3	Total, Federal, and State AFDC Expenditures, 1970 – 1996	65
Table 4.4	Federal and State Net Benefit Expenditures Under the Single Parent and Unemployed Parent Programs in Current and Constant Dollars, 1970 – 1996	67
Table 4.5	Total AFDC Benefit Expenditures by State, Selected Years, 1978 – 1996	69
Table 4.6	Total AFDC Benefit Expenditures by State in Constant Dollars, Selected Years, 1978 – 1996	70
<hr/>		
Chapter 5	Federal and State Expenditures	
Table 5.1	AFDC Need Standard for a Three-Person Family by State, Selected Years	72
Figure 5.1	Average Monthly AFDC Benefit by Family and Recipient in Current and Constant Dollars, 1970 – 1996	73
Table 5.2	Trends in Average Monthly AFDC Benefit Payments, 1962 – 1996	75
Table 5.3	AFDC-Basic Program Recipients and Amounts of Payments, Fiscal Year 1996	76
Table 5.4	AFDC Unemployment Parent Program Recipients and Amounts of Payments, Fiscal Year 1996	77
Table 5.5	AFDC Maximum Benefit for a Three-Person Family by State for Selected Dates	78

Exhibits

Table Number	Tables and Figure Titles	Page
Table 5.6	AFDC Maximum Benefit in Constant 1996 Dollars for a Three-Person Family by State for Selected Dates	79
Table 5.7	Maximum AFDC Benefit by Family Size and by State, July 1996	80
Figure 5.2	AFDC Children and Related Children in Poverty, 1960 – 1996	81
Table 5.8	AFDC Maximum Benefit for a Two-Person Family as a Percentage of Poverty by State for Selected Dates	83
Table 5.9	AFDC Maximum Benefit for a Three-Person Family as a Percentage of Poverty by State for Selected Dates	84
Table 5.10	AFDC Maximum Benefit for a Four-Person Family as a Percentage of Poverty by State for Selected Dates	85
Table 5.11	Gross Income Limit, Need Standard, Maximum Monthly Benefits for a One-Parent Family of Three Persons by State, July 1996	87
Table 5.12	Income Levels at Which AFDC Eligibility Ends for a Family of Three	89
Table 5.13	Annual AFDC Benefit Levels by State for a Mother and Two Children with No Earnings, Selected Years, 1972 – 1996	91
Table 5.14	States Changing Monthly AFDC Benefit Levels, Selected Years, 1987 – 1996	92
Table 5.15	Number and Percent of AFDC Families Receiving Food Stamps, Selected Years, 1967 – 1996	93
Table 5.16	Percentage Change in the Value of AFDC and Food Stamp Benefit Levels for a Mother and Two Children With No Earnings, Selected Years, 1972 – 1996	94
Table 5.17	Annual AFDC and Food Stamp Benefit Levels by State for a Mother and Two Children with No Earnings, Selected Years, 1972 – 1996	95
Table 5.18	Housing Arrangements of AFDC Families, By Type of Shelter, 1984 – 1996	96
Table 5.19	AFDC Families with Earnings, Selected Years, 1967 – 1996	97
Table 5.20	Earnings of Adult Female AFDC Recipients, Selected Years, 1967 – 1996	98
Table 5.21	Average Disposable Income at Various Wage Levels for a Mother and Two Children Without Child Care Expenses: Selected Years, 1972 – 1996	100
Table 5.22	Composition of Average Disposable Income at Various Wage Levels for a Mother and Two Children Without Child Care Expenses: 1972, 1980, and 1996	102
Table 5.23	Average Disposable Income minus Child Care Expenses at Various Wage Levels for a Mother and Two Children: Selected Years, 1972 – 1996	103

Exhibits

Table Number	Tables and Figure Titles	Page
Table 5.24	Percentage of AFDC Families Affected by \$50 Child Support Pass Through, Selected Years, 1985 – 1996	104
Table 5.25	Net Increase in Disposable Income from Various Levels of Child Support Payments for a Mother and Two Children at Various Wage Levels, 1996	105
Table 5.26	Marginal Tax and Benefit Reduction Rates for a Mother and Two Children for Various Wage Levels and Various Levels of Child Support Payments, 1996	106
<hr/>		
Chapter 6	Welfare Spell Dynamics	
Table 6.1	Cumulative Distribution of AFDC Spell Lengths by Months since Case Opened, Selected Years, 1967 – 1996	109
Figure 6.1	Cumulative Distribution of AFDC Spell Lengths, 1983 – 1996	110
Table 6.2	Distribution of AFDC Spell Lengths by Months Since Case Opened, Selected Years, 1967 – 1996	111
Table 6.3	Distribution of Estimated Time on AFDC Based on Annual Data	112
Table 6.4	Distribution of Estimated Time on AFDC Based on Monthly Data	113
Figure 6.2	Proportion of Families by Length of AFDC Receipt	114
Table 6.5	How Selected Characteristics Affect Expected Total Time on Welfare for a Beginning Cohort of Recipients	116
Table 6.6	Proportion of Recipients with Given Characteristic at Start of First AFDC Spell	117
Table 6.7	Events Associated with AFDC Spell Beginnings	119
Table 6.8	Events Associated with AFDC Spell Endings	120
Table 6.9	Events Associated with Endings of AFDC Spells in Annual and Monthly Data Sources	121
Table 6.10	Cumulative Proportion of Women Leaving AFDC by Duration of Time on AFDC and Type of Exit	122
Table 6.11	Cumulative Proportion of Women Returning to AFDC by Duration of Time Off AFDC and Type of Exit	123
<hr/>		
Appendix A	The Food Stamp Program	
Table 7.1	Trends in Food Stamp Participation, 1970 – 1996	127
Figure 7.1	Number of Persons Living in Poverty, Unemployed and Receiving Food Stamps and	

Exhibits

Table Number	Tables and Figure Titles	Page
	AFDC, 1959 – 1996	128
Table 7.2	Trends in Food Stamp Expenditures, 1970 – 1997	129
Figure 7.2	Characteristics of Food Stamp Recipients	130
Table 7.3	Characteristics of Food Stamp Households, Selected Fiscal Years, 1980 – 1996	131
Table 7.4	Value of Food Stamps Issued by State, Selected Fiscal Years, 1978 – 1996	132
Table 7.5	Number of Food Stamp Recipients by State, Selected Fiscal Years, 1977 – 1996	133
Table 7.6	Food Stamp Recipency Rates by State, Selected Fiscal Years, 1977 – 1996	134
Table 7.7	Child Recipients of Food Stamps by State, Selected Fiscal Years, 1989 – 1995	135
Table 7.8	Food Stamp Child Recipency Rates by State, Selected Fiscal Years, 1989 – 1995	137
Table 7.9	Families Receiving AFDC Assistance by Size, Number of Adults, Age of Mother, and Average Benefit	138
Table 7.10	Persons Receiving AFDC Assistance by Age	139
Table 7.11	AFDC Households, Recipients and Average Benefits by State	140
Table 7.12	Families Receiving AFDC Assistance by Source of Income	141
Table 7.13	Households Receiving AFDC Assistance by Number of Food Stamp Participants Not in the AFDC Case	142
Table 7.14	Households Receiving AFDC Assistance by Source of Income of Food Stamp Program Participants Not in the AFDC Case	143
Table 7.15	Relationship to the AFDC Family Head of Food Stamp Program Participants in the AFDC Household But Not in the AFDC Case	144
Table 7.16	Food Stamp Program Households With Children and With AFDC by State	145
Table 7.17	Distribution of Food Stamp Households with Children and with AFDC Assistance	147
Table 7.18	Distribution of Food Stamp Program Households with Children and with AFDC By Income	148

Introduction

The term “welfare” has long been identified with the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program. While the AFDC program was an important component of the safety net for low-income families with children, there was a near universal consensus that the program contained serious flaws. In August 1996, Congress passed and President Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). This bill replaced the Federal statute that governed the AFDC program with a block grant which states can use to provide cash and services to low-income families with children, largely free of federal requirements on state program rules. The purpose of this report is to provide information on the AFDC program as it existed under prior law.

This volume includes an historical overview of the program and statistical information on program characteristics, thus providing a snapshot of the AFDC program as it existed prior to enactment of PRWORA.

Section 1 briefly traces the historical origins and evolution of the program over the past sixty years. The remaining sections provide detailed national and state data since the mid 1960s.

Section 2 traces the trends in the caseload for the basic AFDC program and the Unemployed Parent component.

Section 3 provides some descriptive statistics regarding the family and household characteristics.

Section 4 examines the level of Federal and State spending on the program.

Section 5 discusses the eligibility thresholds and the AFDC benefit levels.

Section 6 reviews the research on the length of stays on AFDC and the factors associated with entering and leaving the program.

An appendix describes the Food Stamp Program and provides data from the Food Stamp Quality Control system that are relevant to describing the characteristics of the AFDC caseload up to the end of 1996.