

WorkFirst Wage Progression and Returns Report: through first-quarter 2022

Introduction

RCW 74.08A.411 mandates a quarterly report on performance measures for WorkFirst clients twelve months, twenty-four months and thirty-six months after leaving the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program for at least one quarter. Performance measures reported under this requirement are:

1. Changes in earnings and in hourly wages.
2. Percentage of returns to TANF.

Statutory requirement

RCW 74.08A.411 requires the Department of Social and Health Services to report WorkFirst outcome measures to the Legislature as follows:

The department shall continue to implement WorkFirst program improvements that are designed to achieve progress against outcome measures specified in RCW 74.08A.410. Outcome data regarding job retention and wage progression shall be reported quarterly to appropriate fiscal and policy committees of the legislature for families who leave assistance, measured after twelve months, twenty-four months and thirty-six months. The department shall also report the percent of families who have returned to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families after twelve months, twenty-four months and thirty-six months. The department shall make every effort to maximize vocational training, as allowed by federal and state requirements. [2009 c 85 § 3.]

Performance report

WorkFirst exiters

Beginning with the October 2011 WorkFirst performance report, an exiter is defined as having been off TANF all three months of a quarter, compared to the previous definition that required only one month off TANF. The three-month requirement more clearly identifies true exiters by minimizing instances where a client cycles off TANF for a single month due to circumstances such as late reporting or one-time changes to monthly income. Information on TANF receipt is obtained from the Office of Financial Management's AFARRAYS file.

This quarterly WorkFirst performance report provides follow-up data for three groups (cohorts) of TANF exiters. The report uses first-quarter 2022 unemployment insurance wage data (covered employment wages) to provide updates for clients who exited TANF in first-quarter 2019, first-quarter 2020, and first-quarter 2021 (Figure 1). Covered employment wage data is available with a six-month lag, reflecting employer reporting requirements and data processing time.

For purposes of this report, exiters are defined as TANF clients who:

- Received a TANF grant at least one month during October, November, or December (fourth quarter) and
- Did not receive a TANF grant at any time during January, February, or March of the following quarter (first quarter).

Figure 1. WorkFirst performance report: TANF cohorts

Washington state, fourth-quarter 2018 through first-quarter 2021

Source: Employment Security Department/LMEA; Washington State Office of Financial Management, AFARRAYS file

Received TANF at least once during:	No TANF all three months (exit quarter)	Cohort name
October - November - December 2018	January - February - March 2019	2019 Q1
October - November - December 2019	January - February - March 2020	2020 Q1
October - November - December 2020	January - February - March 2021	2021 Q1

Median quarterly earnings and percentage increase in earnings

Figure 2 shows inflation-adjusted median quarterly earnings for exiters. Earnings progressions are shown in Figure 3. Earnings progression is measured as change in total quarterly earnings over one, two or three years. Earnings are a more accurate reflection of true progression than are hourly wages because quarterly earnings reflect both an individual’s hourly wage and any changes between part- and full-time work.

Not all TANF exiters will have reported earnings in the exit and follow-up quarters. These individuals may not have worked during the quarter or may have worked in a job not covered by unemployment insurance. Exiters who had missing or no earnings are excluded from the calculations. All earnings prior to 2020 are adjusted to real dollars using the 2020 annual average CPI-W as a base year.

Figure 2. Median quarterly earnings for adult TANF exiters (2021 CPI-W dollars)

Washington state, first-quarter 2019 through first-quarter 2021

Source: Employment Security Department/LMEA, Unemployment Insurance Data Warehouse Wage Tables; Washington State Office of Financial Management, AFARRAYS file

TANF cohort	Number exiting TANF in cohort Q1	Quarter of exit	After 12 Months	After 24 Months	After 36 Months
2019 Q1	5,367 ¹	\$4,891	\$5,831	\$6,172	\$6,774
		n = 2,493 ²	n = 2,441	n = 2,055	n = 2,198
2020 Q1	5,608	\$5,271	\$6,132	\$6,500	n/a ³
		n = 2,690	n = 2,189	n = 2,321	n/a
2021 Q1	4,706	\$5,228	\$6,080	n/a	n/a
		n = 1,845	n = 1,992	n/a	n/a

¹The first-quarter 2019 TANF cohort is defined as those on TANF at least one month during fourth-quarter 2019 and off TANF all three months of first-quarter 2020

²The number of TANF exiters who had earnings from covered employment during the quarter is shown as "n."

³Information not yet available is shown as "n/a."

Figure 3. Percentage change in quarterly earnings for adult TANF exiters¹

Washington state, first-quarter 2019 through first-quarter 2021

Source: Employment Security Department/LMEA, Unemployment Insurance Data Warehouse Wage Tables; Washington State Office of Financial Management, AFARRAYS file

TANF cohort	Change in earnings after 12 months	Change in earnings after 24 months	Change in earnings after 36 months	Latest quarter compared to exit quarter
2019 Q1	19.2%	5.8%	9.8%	38.5%
2020 Q1	16.3%	6.0%	n/a ²	23.3%
2021 Q1	16.3%	n/a	n/a	16.3%

¹Compares a given *Figure 2* quarter to the previous quarter.

²Information not yet available is shown as "n/a."

Median hourly wage rates

The hourly wage rate was obtained by dividing quarterly earnings by hours worked in the quarter. While employers report both quarterly earnings and hours worked to the unemployment insurance program, the hours data are incomplete or, in some cases, inaccurate. Records with missing hours were deleted from the calculations. Hourly wage rates greater than \$50 per hour or less than \$5 per hour were dropped, since these rates most likely reflected employer reporting errors. *Figure 4* displays inflation-adjusted, median hourly wage rates for TANF exiters.

Figure 4. Median hourly earnings for adult TANF exiters (2021 CPI-W dollars)

Washington state, first-quarter 2019 through first-quarter 2021

Source: Employment Security Department/LMEA, Unemployment Insurance Data Warehouse Wage Tables; Washington State Office of Financial Management, AFARRAYS file

TANF cohort	Quarter of exit	After 12 months	After 24 months	After 36 months
2019 Q1	\$15.36	\$16.98	\$18.27	\$19.22
	n = 2,450 ¹	n = 2,391	n = 1,971	n = 2,134
2020 Q1	\$16.44	\$17.89	\$18.87	n/a ²
	n = 2,644	n = 2,112	n = 2,254	n/a
2021 Q1	\$17.34	\$18.51	n/a	n/a
	n = 1,767	n = 1,937	n/a	n/a

¹The number of TANF exiters for whom an hourly wage rate could be calculated (both earnings and hours worked were present in the quarterly covered employment data) is shown as “n.”

²Information not yet available is shown as “n/a.”

WorkFirst return rate

Figure 5 shows the return rate for exiters 12, 24 and 36 months after leaving WorkFirst.

Figure 5. Number and percentage of adult TANF exiters returning to TANF¹

Washington state, first-quarter 2019 through first-quarter 2022

Source: Washington State Office of Financial Management, AFARRAYS file

TANF cohort	Number with no TANF in cohort quarter	12 months later			24 months later			36 months later		
		Returned to TANF during:	Number on TANF	Percent of cohort ²	Returned to TANF during:	Number on TANF	Percent of cohort	Returned to TANF during:	Number on TANF	Percent of cohort
2019 Q1	5,367	2020 Q1	612	11.4%	2021 Q1	748	13.9%	2022 Q1	681	12.7%
2020 Q1	5,608	2021 Q1	822	14.7%	2022 Q1	804	14.3%	n/a ³	n/a	n/a
2021 Q1	4,706	2022 Q1	786	16.7%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

¹If the client returned to TANF for at least one month during the follow-up 12, 24 or 36 month quarter, it is counted as a return.

²The number returning to TANF is expressed as a percentage of those with no TANF in the cohort quarter.

³Information not yet available is shown as “n/a.”