

Kansas Legal Services

A non-profit law firm and community education organization helping low and moderate income people in Kansas



www.kansaslegalservices.org

Kansas Appleseed: You may have heard some myths about public assistance

Myths and misconceptions about public assistance in Kansas and what living in poverty actually means in Kansas.

Public assistance includes government benefits provided to individuals and families living at or near the federal poverty level.

SNAP

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program is federally funded to provide low income individuals and households with access to healthy foods and a nutritionally adequate diet.

Source: USDA Food and Nutrition Services, 6/1/2016.

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>

TANF

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families is federally funded to provide extremely low income families with limited cash assistance.

Source: Family Equality Council, 2016.

http://www.familyequality.org/get_informed/advocacy/after_doma/tanf/

Do people spend their SNAP/TANF assistance on 'luxury' items?

In 2014, Kansas spent \$40,000 drug testing 2,783 TANF applicants. Only 11 applicants tested positive for drug use. The maximum assistance amount each of those individuals would have been receiving in cash assistance would have been \$267 per month, meaning this investigation only saved the state \$35,244. The state lost money on these investigations.

Do people sell their benefits for drugs? I've heard many assistance

recipients are drug users.

Recipients are not able to use their SNAP funds on alcohol, tobacco, non-food items, vitamins, or prepared foods.

TANF recipients are not able to use funds on a large variety of things.

Are people receiving assistance lazy?

68% of food insecure households in Kansas have one or more full-time workers.

SNAP participants who are not working are only exempt from work requirements due either to age, disability, or other specific reasons.

Able-bodied adults without dependents, those age 18-49, must meet work requirements to qualify for SNAP, working at least 80 hours per month and, if he or she does not meet the work requirements, the individual is only eligible for up to 3 months of assistance

Do public assistance programs provide enough money for people to live on?

The average combined SNAP and TANF benefit per individual was \$112 per month, or \$247 per household in Kansas in 2014.

Welfare recipients still live at or below the federal poverty level.

- In July 2015, every state's TANF benefits for a family of 3 with no other cash income was below 50% of the federal poverty level (FPL), with most states being below 30% – that's a yearly income of \$6,027.
- In Kansas, the maximum TANF benefits a person can receive puts him or her at 20-30% FPL.
- 83% of families receiving TANF in Kansas consistently receive SNAP benefits and, with these benefits combined, still live at 55% FPL. In a family of 3, that is \$10,045 per year.

Are tax dollars are going to waste?

Every \$1 provided by SNAP generates \$1.70 of economic activity in Kansas

SNAP benefits contributed about \$374 million into the Kansas economy in 2015.

I've heard the number of public assistance recipients in Kansas is decreasing because fewer Kansans are living in poverty – is that true?

TANF enrollment has decreased by more than 23,000 individuals, mostly children, since Governor Brownback took office in 2011, yet the poverty rate has continued to rise in Kansas,

and more and more children are receiving free and reduced price meals in the state. This indicates that while TANF enrollment is decreasing, Kansas families are still struggling.

- TANF enrollment fell by 54% between 2011 and 2014 and the number of low-income parents – mostly single mothers – dropped by 27%, but more than 50% of children qualify for free or subsidized meals, meaning they live in a household with an income below 130% FPL or between 131-185% for reduced price meals.

Prepared by Kansas Appleseed, <https://www.kansasappleseed.org/>

Sources

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