

Pilot Profile: New York State

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Data Collaborative Pilot Initiative is a component of the TANF Data Innovation project. The 30-month pilot offered technical assistance and training to support cross-disciplinary teams of staff at eight state and county TANF programs in the routine use of TANF and other administrative data to inform policy and practice.

NEW YORK STATE (NYS) CASH ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS.

In New York there is effectively no time limit on the receipt of public assistance benefits. In addition to the TANF program, New York's Temporary Assistance (TA) program, administered by the state Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA), provides a state and locally funded Safety Net Assistance (SNA) program for people who are not eligible for federal TANF benefits or for people who have reached the federal TANF time limit. So while the cost burden is shifted when a client reaches the federal time limit—primarily to local districts—from a client perspective, the change from TANF to SNA has no real implications.



The pilot team at OTDA included staff from three bureaus: Employment and Advancement Services; Temporary Assistance; and Data Management and Analysis—a mix of individuals with TANF policy, program, research, database design, and analytics expertise.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS. The pilot team at the OTDA sought to understand three questions for an entry cohort of TA participants: (1) the characteristics associated with a TA participant's leaving or returning to receive public assistance, (2) subgroups who are more likely to leave or return, and (3) factors that are likely to be associated with long-term receipt of TA benefits. The team plans to use this information to predict, at the time a TA case is opened, how long a participant will use the benefits. In this way, OTDA hopes to help districts identify early on those individuals who may become long-term TA participants. The agency aims to develop a tool to help staff members make decisions about how to serve participants who may need more services, generate evidence about the impact of interventions, and help with staffing decisions.

- Regional differences and many personal characteristics were also good predictors of the timing of leaving, returning, or both.
- The model performed well in predicting individuals whose chance of becoming long-term participants was low, but it underestimated when predicting for those with a high chance of becoming long-term participants. More powerful predictors may be needed to further improve the performance of the model.



We appreciate how the TDC pilot is emphasizing the fact that using data to create actionable evidence requires a team that includes both analytic and program staff.



New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance

Looking ahead, the team will refine the model by identifying and removing sources of bias (that is, whether the model avoided predictions that correlate with protected characteristics including race, gender, age, citizenship, and disability status) and by engaging a working group of local district TA staff members to review the model and explore how OTDA and the districts might use the model’s results fairly to improve program decisions. To that end, the team has established an expert working group of local staff members to discuss the model and its ethical use.

This profile was based primarily on reports and presentations produced by the pilot team at New York’s Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance. For more information, contact Britany Orlebeke, Director, Bureau of Data Management and Analysis (Britany.Orlebeke@otda.ny.gov). The TANF Data Innovation (TDI) Project Team—which includes MDRC (lead), Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, the Coleridge Initiative, and Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy at the University of Pennsylvania—provided technical assistance and training. Johanna Walter of MDRC was the New York TDC pilot coach. MDRC edited this document and it was designed by Public Strategies.

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