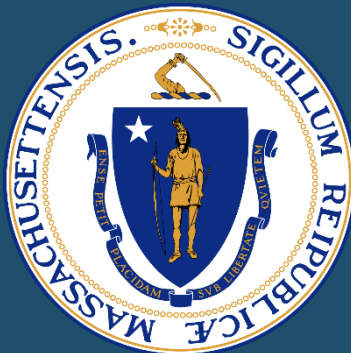


Charles D. Baker
Governor

Karyn Polito
Lieutenant Governor



Marylou Sudders
Secretary

Amy Kershaw
Commissioner

Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children Consolidated Report

March 2022



**DEPARTMENT OF TRANSITIONAL ASSISTANCE
TRANSITIONAL AID TO FAMILIES WITH DEPENDENT CHILDREN
CONSOLIDATED REPORT**

MARCH 2022

OVERVIEW

The Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) submits this report on the status of the Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) program, as required by sections 2(B) and 5 of Chapter 18 and section 3C(d) of Chapter 118 of the Massachusetts General Laws. This report covers program updates through calendar year 2021.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSITIONAL ASSISTANCE MISSION

DTA's mission is to assist and empower low-income individuals and families to meet their basic needs, improve their quality of life, and achieve long-term economic self-sufficiency. DTA offers a comprehensive system of programs and supports to help individuals and families achieve greater economic mobility, including food and nutritional assistance, economic assistance, and employment supports. Currently, DTA serves one out of every eight people in the Commonwealth including working families, children, elders, and people with disabilities.

TAFDC PROGRAM OVERVIEW

TAFDC is a state and federally funded program that provides cash assistance and employment supports to families with children and pregnant women, with little or no income or assets. TAFDC is operated under the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant.

In recent years, DTA has emphasized removing barriers to economic mobility and helping families find paths to success. Through policy innovations, the Department has continued to reduce barriers, enhance the Department's employment support programming, and explore new approaches to meaningfully engage with families who receive TAFDC benefits.

AGENCY OPERATIONAL UPDATE

In response to the public health emergency, DTA quickly expanded and improved its online and telephonic access points through DTACONnect.com, the DTA Connect mobile app, and the DTA Assistance Line, which has enabled families with phone or internet access to conduct virtually all of their business with the agency without having to visit an office. Most notably, early in the pandemic the Department developed telephonic and online application options for TAFDC. Prior to the pandemic, the only way to apply for TAFDC, with limited exceptions, was to visit a local office. Now, families can call or visit the DTA Connect web application to apply for TAFDC and the entire process can be completed remotely.

The key technology upgrades to streamline client experience and benefit processing include:

- Telephonic signature to increase processing times of applications and reevaluations;
- Proactive text messaging and emailing to provide up-to-date case information for applicants and clients; and
- New self-service features on the DTA Assistance Line in up to 6 languages.

DTA continues to leverage these technological enhancements to maintain a high level of customer service for families and to promote economic stability as families look to recover from the economic impacts of the pandemic.

In June 2021, DTA reopened its local offices throughout the Commonwealth for in-person services following an extended closure in response to the COVID-19 public health emergency. In each office visitors can use self-service tools, including DTA Connect-enabled kiosks, to apply for benefits, update case information, and access or submit documents and verifications.

Additionally, DTA staff and interpreters are available at each office to provide people with a high-level of customer service during their visit, guide them through available self-service options and the DTA Connect platform or connect them with caseworkers on DTA's Assistance Line for more in-depth support. Once families know how to use this technology, they are able to conduct all of their business with the agency 24/7 from their home.

While DTA offices are open across the state for in-person services, the vast majority of DTA clients are continuing to choose to do business with the Department through its enhanced online and telephonic platforms. In the first four months of DTA's office reopening, in person visits are down approximately 85% from the same time period pre-covid.

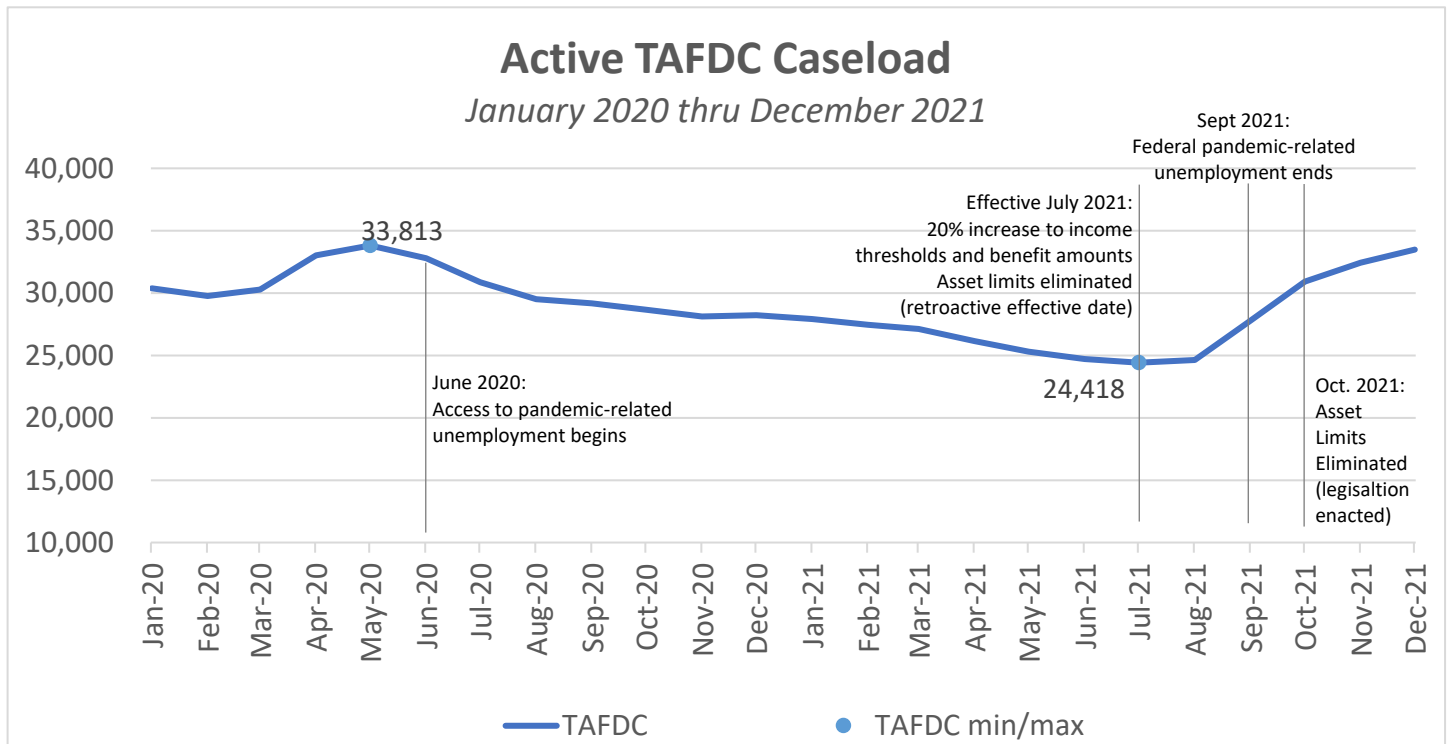
CASELOAD & BENEFITS INFORMATION

Throughout the last year, the Department's TAFDC caseload fluctuated in response to shifting state and federal policies and pandemic-related supports. Following the expiration of federal pandemic-related unemployment assistance in September 2021, DTA processed a dramatic increase in TAFDC applications. In addition, TAFDC was impacted by recent state-level legislative changes that expanded eligibility for the program, including a 20% increase to the program's income thresholds and monthly grant amounts. See **Table 1** for current program payment and eligibility levels. In September 2021, the Legislature also enacted legislation to eliminate the program's asset limit retroactively to July 2021. Implemented in October 2021, this policy change has also contributed to an expansion of the program's eligibility threshold and caseload.

TABLE I TAFDC PAYMENT & ELIGIBILITY LEVELS		
Household size	Public or subsidized housing	Private housing
1	\$466	\$506
2	\$589	\$629
3	\$712	\$753
4	\$829	\$869
5	\$950	\$990
6	\$1,075	\$1,115
7	\$1,196	\$1,236
8	\$1,316	\$1,356
9	\$1,436	\$1,476
10	\$1,558	\$1,598
Each additional household member	+\$126	+\$126

Figure 1 below depicts the TAFDC caseload over time. As of December 2021, the TAFDC caseload was 33,492 households, 12% over the program's pre-pandemic caseload and 37% more than the pandemic low level. In 2021, the average time a family remained on benefits increased by 1 month, from 36 to 37 months.

Figure 1. Active TAFDC Caseload by Month (January 2020 thru December 2021)



Data labels represent the program's maximum and minimum caseloads in this period. Maximum points are reflected above the program's line and minimums are below.

TAFDC WORK PROGRAM

TAFDC recipients are required to participate in work-related activities as a condition of eligibility, unless specifically exempted. DTA provides employment services for TAFDC clients through the Employment Services Program (ESP). The primary goals of DTA's employment programs are to assist TAFDC clients to prepare for and connect with career pathways and resolve barriers for sustained employment. DTA case managers connect TAFDC clients to employment and training programs by referring them to appropriate activities based on their skill level and economic mobility goals.

In FY21, DTA launched a rebrand of its employment services programs now known as the [DTA Pathways to Work Program](#). Most recently, in October 2021, DTA launched the next phase in the redesign of the TAFDC work program and Department's employment and training programming. This phase includes the roll out of streamlined processes, simplified policies, and new tools and strategies for DTA staff to engage with families. The goal of the program redesign is to provide access to meaningful, tailored career pathways for families by offering participants more time and resources to invest in training, education, job readiness activities, and economic mobility goals. Career pathway programs, when combined with supportive services, make it easier for clients with higher barriers to employment to earn industry-recognized credentials necessary for higher wage jobs; to provide opportunities for more flexible education and training; and to attain market identifiable skills that can transfer into work opportunities that provide for asset retention and economic independence.

Participants in work-related activities, including TAFDC Pathways programs and paid employment, are eligible to receive child care and transportation supports. Any TAFDC family who needs child care for employment or to participate in a work activity program is eligible for a referral from DTA.

State law requires TAFDC recipients who meet certain criteria to be exempted from the work program requirement, including if:

- Their youngest child is less than two
- They have a verified disability
- They are in their 33rd week or third trimester of pregnancy
- They are a teen parent attending school full time
- They are over age sixty, or
- They are caring for a disabled household member.

Clients who are exempt from the work program are still encouraged to participate in employment and training programs, though they do not experience negative consequences if they are not able to participate.

Non-parental relative caregivers, such as grandparents or other extended family members, have the option to receive TAFDC assistance for the children in their care. In this situation, the relative caregiver is not considered a recipient of assistance and the work program rules are not applicable.

PANDEMIC ECONOMIC RECOVERY WORKFORCE ENGAGEMENT

As the Commonwealth focuses on reopening the economy and addressing the persistent economic impacts from the pandemic, particularly those affecting communities of color, the Department is committed to supporting the state's economic recovery and meaningful participation in the workforce for all DTA clients, including those with significant barriers to employment.

DTA's economic assistance case workers and employment specialists are engaging with Pathways to Work-eligible families through new goal-setting and coaching strategies designed to connect participants with opportunities that best match individual career and family goals, and support client's progress as they position themselves to succeed in the Commonwealth's post-pandemic economy.

DTA also remains a key partner in both the state's implementation of the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and the Governor's Learn to Earn Initiative, focused on addressing "cliff effects" for families receiving public assistance.