

Aligning the state and federal clocks that count time on TANF

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Reinvestment Project

Figuring out how much time a person has spent in TANF has been difficult in Oregon. The state and federal time limits for TANF are both 60 months in a person's lifetime but each counts months in the program differently.

Starting April 1, 2016, the way months are counted will be aligned, simplifying the process and reducing confusion for staff and TANF participants. This will allow us to spend less time figuring out how many months participants have left on TANF and more time helping participants find work long before they reach the 60-month limit.

Currently, the difference between the state and federal counts is in the application of hardship exemptions. For the federal time limit, hardship extensions are applied only after the participant reaches 60 months. For the state time limit, hardship exemptions can be applied any time a family experiences a hardship. For Oregon participants, this means the state clock stops counting months on TANF whenever a family experiences a hardship and once the hardship ends, the clock resumes counting. This approach means program participants reach the federal time limit first and then continue in the program until reaching the state limit. It also means staff and participants are trying to keep track of two counts.

On April 1, 2016, Oregon will align with the federal clock to create one consistent way to count time on TANF.

Two additional changes go into effect April 1, 2016: A shift from hardship "exemptions" to "extensions," and the addition of two "temporary continuation" options for extending a participant past the time limit.

The simplification in the way we count time on TANF was included in the state legislation authorizing the TANF Reinvestment Project to respond to findings in a 2014 Oregon Secretary of State audit.

TANF Time Limit Fast Facts

- 60 month (5 year) limit
- Lifetime limit
- Applies to
 - Both adults in two-parent families
 - Single, adult parents
 - Teen parent heads-of-household
- Does not apply to children on the case
- Time spent on TANF in other states counts toward the Oregon limit
- Time spent on TANF in Oregon counts toward the limit in other states

TANF Time Limit Changes Effective April 1, 2016

- *Alignment of the state and federal clocks that count time on TANF:* Accrual methodologies aligned; computer system coding that allows staff to "stop the clock" for participants will be removed.
- *Shifting from hardship "exemptions" to hardship "extensions:"* The reasons why cases may be extended past the time limit will be known as hardship "extensions."
- *Temporary continuation:* Two new codes will allow extensions past the time limit in family crisis situations or when a participant needs to finish a JOBS Plus contract.