

Unworkable & Unwise

CONDITIONING ACCESS TO PROGRAMS THAT ENSURE A BASIC FOUNDATION FOR FAMILIES ON WORK REQUIREMENTS

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Work requirements will weaken foundational programs by taking benefits away from people who do not meet them, while being ineffective at reducing poverty.
- Work requirements are costly to administer, counterproductive, and inequitable, as they disproportionately affect people and groups who already face systemic oppression and other barriers.
- Instead of conditioning program participation on meeting stringent work requirements, policymakers should take more promising steps to ensure a foundation for individuals and families, strengthen family stability, and support workers.

In recent years, the Trump Administration, Members of Congress, governors, and state legislatures have put forward, and implemented, new and harsh proposals to take away health care, food, and housing assistance from people who do not meet a “work requirement.” The programs targeted—Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and housing assistance—are lifelines for individuals and families during times without sufficient work or earnings (see Figure 1).

- Medicaid acts as the backstop for over 76 million low-income Americans who may not otherwise have affordable coverage. Millions of Americans nationwide [could lose](#) their Medicaid benefits if they are unable to comply with work requirements.
- One in eight Americans rely on SNAP to purchase food.
- Fewer than 1 in 30 people receive housing assistance, and 88 percent of the recipients of rental assistance were elderly or had a disability in 2010.

These new work rules are part of a [broader strategy](#) of gatekeeping, shrinking, and undermining the system of supports for struggling individuals and families. Because these proposals reflect misunderstandings of these programs and participants, they are or will be harmful to the well-being of people with low incomes.

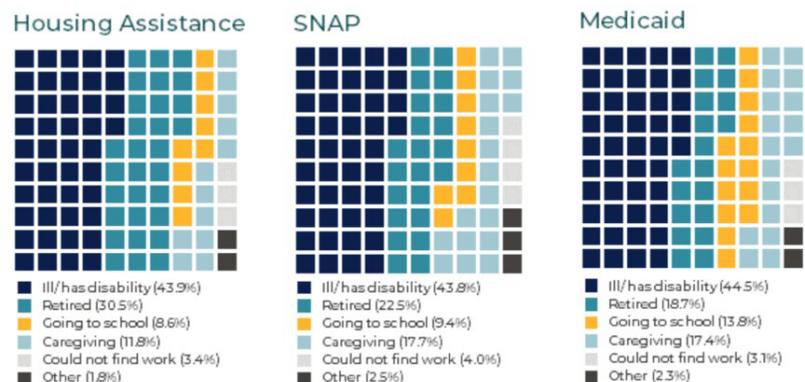
TAKING ASSISTANCE AWAY FROM PARTICIPANTS WHO DO NOT MEET WORK REQUIREMENTS IS ILL-INFORMED

Weakening foundational programs by taking benefits away from people who do not meet harsh work requirements ignores the realities of today’s low-wage labor market. Work requirements fail to consider that:

- The majority of working-age participants without a work-limiting disability generally work.
- Systemic barriers—such as limited economic and social resources and discrimination—often stand between people and quality, stable, and secure employment.
- Medicaid, SNAP, and housing assistance already support and enable work, and improve labor market outcomes for the next generation.

Figure 1. Some Medicaid, SNAP, & housing assistance participants are not engaged in formal employment due to caregiving, school, retirement, or sickness or disability

Main reported reason for not working among Medicaid, SNAP, & HUD-assisted housing participants, 2017



Note: Sample includes people 18 years of age and older. Source: Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality using the Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC), 2017.

TAKING ASSISTANCE AWAY FROM PARTICIPANTS WHO DO NOT MEET WORK REQUIREMENTS IS INEFFECTIVE

Instituting work requirements can lead to many negative outcomes for all involved:

- Research shows that work requirements are generally ineffective at achieving poverty reduction through greater employment and [earnings](#).
- Work requirements do not lead to more work. Instead, they lead to more people losing coverage or benefits and will deepen or increase [poverty](#). Arkansas' Medicaid work requirement caused over 18,000 enrollees to [lose](#) Medicaid coverage in 2018 (22 percent of those subject to work rules). There is no [evidence](#) that these participants gained private coverage.
- They compound existing challenges with an already overburdened, underfunded [workforce system](#).
- States are ill-equipped to effectively administer work rules and fail to communicate key documentation and reporting processes with participants.

REVOKING ACCESS TO WORK-SUPPORTING PROGRAMS DUE TO RIGID & IMPRACTICAL WORK REQUIREMENTS IS INEFFICIENT

Burdensome red tape means work requirements are costly to administer and time-intensive for all involved:

- Program administrators will spend more time implementing these requirements rather than supporting the health, housing, and income support needs of participants.
- The burden of proof for exemptions and compliance falls on already-struggling people, including people with disabilities who lack Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits and people with substantial economic disadvantages.
- They undermine the countercyclical effectiveness of economic security programs in countering recessions and may hurt state and local economies, particularly those that are already struggling.

POLICIES TO TAKE BENEFITS AWAY FROM RECIPIENTS WHO DO NOT MEET A WORK REQUIREMENT ARE INEQUITABLE

The burden of work rules disproportionately falls on low-income individuals, their families, and their communities. Work rules will increase social and economic inequities by concentrating harms on the most vulnerable and disadvantaged, including:

- [People of color](#);
- People with [disabilities or chronic health conditions](#) (including behavioral health conditions and veterans);
- Women;
- Older adults;
- LGBTQ individuals;
- Low-income caregivers and their families;
- Former foster youth;
- Victim-survivors of domestic violence and intimate partner violence (DV/IPV); and
- People with [criminal justice \(CJ\) system involvement](#).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Instead of work requirements, policymakers should:

- **Ensure a foundation for individuals and families** by ensuring access to and strengthening programs, such as SNAP, Medicaid, housing assistance, and the Temporary Access for Needy Families (TANF) program, and raising the minimum wage.
- **Strengthen family stability**, including by modernizing Unemployment Insurance (UI) and establishing a Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA); establishing fair and predictable schedules as well as paid leave; and reforming the CJ system.
- **Support workers**, including by investing in job preparation and creation through proven training and education, and subsidized and public employment programs; expanding child care assistance; and boosting the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).



This document is a summary adaptation of "[Unworkable & Unwise: Conditioning Access to Programs that Ensure a Basic Foundation for Families on Work Requirements](#)" by Kali Grant, Funke Aderonmu, Sophie Khan, Kaustubh Chahande, Casey Goldvale, Indivar Dutta-Gupta, Aileen Carr, and Doug Stieger, Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality, January 2019.