

Children in Families Receiving Cash Assistance

DEFINITION

Children in families receiving cash assistance is the percentage of children under age 18 who were living in families receiving cash assistance through the Rhode Island Works Program (RI Works). These data measure the number of children and families enrolled in RI Works during the month of December. Children and families who participated in the program at other points in the year but who were not enrolled in that month are not included.

SIGNIFICANCE

The goal of RI Works is to help very low-income families meet their basic needs by providing cash assistance and work supports, including employment services, SNAP benefits, health insurance, and subsidized child care. Children and families qualify for cash assistance based on their income, resources, and the number of people in their families.¹

RI Works cash assistance recipients must participate in an employment plan unless they meet specific criteria for an exemption. This employment plan must take into account the parent's skills, education, and family responsibilities as well as local employment opportunities and should outline a process for helping the parent meet his or her employment goals. Parents should be informed about opportunities to seek additional

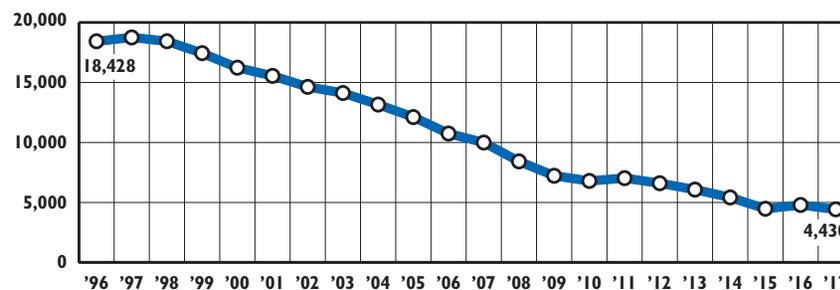
education or training to improve their employability prospects.²

RI Works provides a safety net for some children whose parents are unable to work due to a disability and can function as an unemployment system for parents who do not have sufficient earnings or work experience to qualify for unemployment benefits. RI Works also provides time-limited supplementary cash assistance to very low-income working families.³ In December 2017, the average hourly wage of working parents enrolled in RI Works was \$11.16 per hour.⁴

RI Works connects families to the Office of Child Support Services, which assists families in establishing paternity (when applicable), identifying and locating non-custodial parents, and obtaining child support payments from non-custodial parents.⁵ In Rhode Island, the first \$50 of child support paid on time each month on behalf of a child enrolled in RI Works goes to the custodial parent caring for the child. The balance is kept by the state and federal governments as reimbursement for assistance received through RI Works.^{6,7}

The maximum monthly RI Works benefit for a family of three is \$554 per month.⁸ Families receiving the maximum monthly cash benefit have incomes that are less than one-half the federal poverty level and are living in extreme poverty.⁹

Cash Assistance Caseload, Rhode Island, 1996–2017*



Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, InRhodes Database, December 1, 1996–2015 and RI Bridges Database, December 2016 and 2017. Cases can be child-only or whole families and multiple people can be included in one case.

*The Rhode Island Department of Human Services changed the method for calculating the caseload data starting in the 2012 Factbook. This change is reflected in 2010–2017 caseload data. Comparisons to earlier years should be made with caution. Starting in 2016, caseload data are for the month of December and not for a point in time, December 1.

- ◆ Since 1996, when the program began, the Rhode Island cash assistance caseload has declined steadily. Between 1996 and 2017, the Rhode Island cash assistance caseload decreased by 76% from 18,428 cases to 4,430 families.¹⁰
- ◆ The RI Works caseload declined due to policies implemented in 2008, when the program changed from the Family Independence Program (FIP) to RI Works. These policies included new time limits (a 48-month lifetime limit for benefits and a periodic time limit that limits assistance to no more than 24 months of assistance in any 60-month period), closing child-only cases when parents reach their time limit, and limiting eligibility for legal permanent residents to those who have had that status for five years.¹¹
- ◆ In December 2017, there were 2,943 adults and 7,593 children under age 18 enrolled in RI Works. Almost three-quarters (72%) of RI Works beneficiaries were children, and 43% of the children enrolled in RI Works were under the age of six.¹²
- ◆ In December 2017, 55% of RI Works cases were single-parent families, 41% were child-only cases, and 4% were two-parent families.¹³
- ◆ High unemployment rates for adults with limited education, coupled with shorter time limits for cash assistance, leaves many families with children experiencing deep poverty, hardship, and homelessness. In 2016, 15,755 children in Rhode Island lived in extreme poverty, yet only 8,960 children received cash assistance in December 2016.^{14,15}

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RI Works Policies

Work Requirements

◆ Single-parent families must participate in a work activity for a minimum of 20 hours per week if they have a child under age six and a minimum of 30 hours per week if their youngest child is age six or older. For two-parent families, one or both parents must participate in work activities for an individual or combined total of 35 hours per week.¹⁶

Time Limits

◆ The lifetime limit for RI Works is 48 months. Families also are limited to no more than 24 months of cash assistance in a 60-month period. All cash assistance issued in Rhode Island or any other state since May 1, 1997 counts toward the lifetime limit, while assistance received since July 1, 2008 counts toward the 24-month periodic time limit.¹⁷

Hardship Extensions

◆ Families can apply for hardship extensions that allow them to continue receiving cash assistance after reaching the time limit if the parent has a documented significant disability, is caring for a significantly disabled family member, is unable to pursue employment due to domestic violence, is homeless, or is unable to work because of “a critical other condition or circumstance.” While parents must submit requests for hardship extensions (initially for six months, and then for three-month extensions), there is no limit on the total time a family can receive a hardship extension.^{18,19}

Child-Only Cases

◆ Child-only cases are those that receive assistance for only the children in the family because the child’s parent is ineligible. Child-only cases include children living with a non-parent or a parent who is disabled and receiving Supplemental Security Income.²⁰

Sanctions

◆ If a parent misses a required appointment, refuses or quits a job, or in some other way fails to comply with an employment plan and is not able to establish “good cause” (e.g., lack of child care, illness, a family crisis or other allowed circumstance), the family’s cash benefit is reduced. If benefits are reduced for a total of three months (consecutive or not) due to non-compliance, the family’s case is closed and the entire family loses the RI Works benefit. Benefits can be restored in the month after the parent reapplies and comes into compliance.²¹

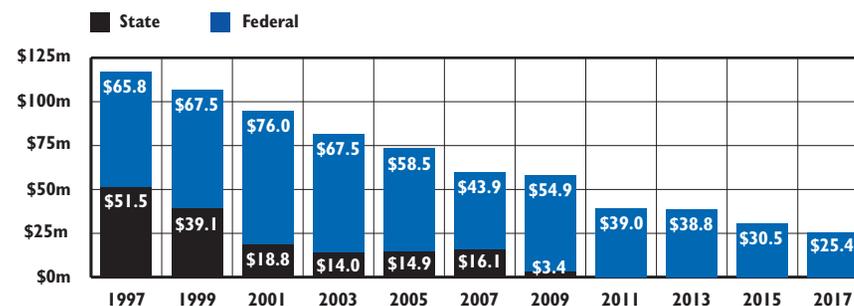
RI Works by Case Type, 2017

	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Child-only cases	1,807	41%
Cases with adults with a work activity	1,397	32%
Cases with adults exempt from a work activity*	885	20%
Unknown status	341	8%
Total RI Works Caseload	4,430	

Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, RI Bridges Database, 2017.

*RI Works regulations require that all parents and caretaker relatives included in the cash assistance grant participate in a work activity unless they receive a temporary exemption. Exemptions from work activities include: youngest child under age one (188), in third trimester of pregnancy (88), caring for a disabled spouse or child (4), being a victim of domestic violence (9), illness or incapacity (495), or second parent is a non-participant (82). Nineteen parents had multiple reasons for exemptions. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Rhode Island Cash Assistance Expenditures, State Fiscal Years 1997-2017



Sources: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, *Family Independence Program 2007 annual report*. (FY 1996-2001); House Fiscal Advisory Staff. (2004-2017). Budget as enacted: Fiscal Years 2005-2018. (FY 2001-2017). Fiscal years 1996-2016 are funds spent and FY 2017 is final budget.

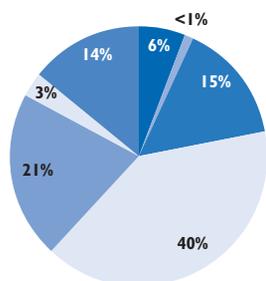
◆ In State Fiscal Year 2017, for the eighth year in a row, no state general revenue was allocated for cash assistance. State general revenue spending for cash assistance has decreased steadily over the past 20 years. The cash assistance program is now entirely supported by federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant funds. The total expenditures for cash assistance in Rhode Island (federal and state) decreased by 80% between 1996 (when the program began) and 2017, from \$126.5 million to \$25.4 million.^{22,23}

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Activities of Families Enrolled in the RI Works Program, December 2017

By Type of Activity

6% (89)	Employed
<1% (6)	Work Experience
15% (215)	Education/Training
40% (557)	Job Search
21% (290)	Job Readiness
3% (42)	Youth Success
14% (198)	Multiple Activities



n = 1,397

Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, RI Bridges Database, December 2017. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

◆ As of December 2017, 6% of families with work activities were employed, down from 28% in December 2008. Less than 1% were in unpaid work experience.^{24,25} Work experience can help parents gain new skills, knowledge, and work habits to improve their employability.²⁶

◆ Parents with limited training and skills can participate in basic education and work skills programs. Parents also can receive up to one year of vocational education as part of their 48-month lifetime limit.²⁷ As of December 2017, 15% of families were participating in education or training programs.²⁸

◆ More than one-third (40%) of families with a work activity were participating in job search activities, including job search and job skills development programs delivered in partnership with the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training, primarily through their netWORKri one-stop career center locations. Another 21% were participating in job readiness activities, including vocational rehabilitation services delivered by the Office of Rehabilitation Services, mental health and substance abuse treatment, and housing and homelessness services needed to address barriers to employment.^{29,30}

◆ An additional 3% of families were in the Youth Success Program, a program for young parents, and 14% of families were in multiple activities.³¹

Support for Young Parents

◆ A child is nine times more likely to grow up in poverty if that child's mother gave birth as a teen, the parents were unmarried when the child was born, and the mother did not receive a high school diploma or GED.³²

◆ RI Works provides additional support to young parents. Parents who are under age 20 and do not have a high school diploma or GED are required to receive parenting skills training and are supported in completing their high school education while enrolled in RI Works. In addition, pregnant or parenting teens under age 18 are required to live with their parent, legal guardian, or adult relative or in an adult-supervised setting.³³

◆ In December 2017, there were 104 families with a head of household under the age of 20 enrolled in RI Works, representing 2% of the total caseload.³⁴

Support for Individuals with Disabilities and Their Families

◆ Nationally, 10% of adult cash assistance recipients have a severe disability and require help with self-care or routine activities, and a much larger percentage (about 40%) have an emotional, cognitive, sensory, or cognitive disability that may be a barrier to employment.³⁵

◆ Under RI Works, parents with disabilities may be exempt from work requirements only if they are receiving or are eligible for SSI or SSDI. Other parents with disabilities are referred to the Office of Rehabilitation Services for further assessment, vocational rehabilitation services, and help applying for SSI, or to substance abuse or mental health treatment, as appropriate.³⁶

◆ As of December 2017, 582 families (or 13% of the total RI Works caseload) had hardship extensions, 18 for a physical or mental disability, three who were unable to work due to a domestic violence situation, one due to homelessness, and 560 because of economic hardship or another critical condition or circumstance.³⁷ Nationally, many families leave cash assistance not because they find work, but because they reach their time limit or are sanctioned. These families often have barriers to employment, such as a mental or physical impairment, or a child with a disability.³⁸

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Table 11. Children in Families Receiving Cash Assistance (RI Works), Rhode Island, December 2017

CITY/TOWN	# OF CHILDREN UNDER AGE 18	NUMBER RECEIVING CASH ASSISTANCE		% OF CHILDREN RECEIVING CASH ASSISTANCE
		FAMILIES	CHILDREN	
Barrington	4,597	5	6	<1%
Bristol	3,623	30	63	2%
Burrillville	3,576	17	26	1%
Central Falls	5,644	248	453	8%
Charlestown	1,506	4	4	<1%
Coventry	7,770	39	51	1%
Cranston	16,414	198	290	2%
Cumberland	7,535	46	79	1%
East Greenwich	3,436	14	20	1%
East Providence	9,177	104	160	2%
Exeter	1,334	3	6	<1%
Foster	986	3	3	<1%
Glocester	2,098	6	12	1%
Hopkinton	1,845	8	13	1%
Jamestown	1,043	5	10	1%
Johnston	5,480	81	144	3%
Lincoln	4,751	49	87	2%
Little Compton	654	5	5	1%
Middletown	3,652	34	62	2%
Narragansett	2,269	8	11	<1%
New Shoreham	163	0	0	0%
Newport	4,083	144	266	7%
North Kingstown	6,322	46	88	1%
North Providence	5,514	68	117	2%
North Smithfield	2,456	8	11	<1%
Pawtucket	16,575	419	707	4%
Portsmouth	3,996	15	20	1%
Providence	41,634	1,862	3,371	8%
Richmond	1,849	6	7	<1%
Scituate	2,272	7	10	<1%
Smithfield	3,625	15	19	1%
South Kingstown	5,416	27	46	1%
Tiverton	2,998	33	44	1%
Warren	1,940	18	24	1%
Warwick	15,825	173	247	2%
West Greenwich	1,477	2	3	<1%
West Warwick	5,746	127	191	3%
Westerly	4,787	27	39	1%
Woonsocket	9,888	513	849	9%
Other/Unknown	NA	13	29	NA
Four Core Cities	73,741	3,042	5,380	7%
Remainder of State	150,215	1,375	2,184	1%
Rhode Island	223,956	4,430	7,593	3%

Education and Training Supporting Employment

◆ An estimated 150,000 working-age adults (ages 16 or older) in Rhode Island are not enrolled in school and have no high school diploma or have limited English-language skills. Many face both of these obstacles to success in the labor market.³⁹

◆ By 2020, 71% of jobs in Rhode Island will require post-secondary education beyond high school.⁴⁰ Between 2012 and 2016, the unemployment rate for Rhode Islanders without high school diplomas was 13%, compared to 10% for those with high school degrees and 3% for those with a bachelor's degree or higher.⁴¹

◆ Parents enrolled in RI Works face significant barriers to success in the labor market. Thirty percent of parents enrolled in RI Works report not finishing high school.⁴² Among a recently tested group of parents receiving cash assistance, more than one-third (38%) of those tested in English tested at or below the sixth-grade reading level, while almost two-thirds (62%) of native Spanish speakers enrolled in RI Works tested at or below the sixth-grade reading level on a Spanish-language version of the test.⁴³

◆ Research comparing mandatory job-search-first and mandatory education-or-training-first programs has found that the most effective approach is a mixed strategy where beneficiaries are encouraged to look for and take full-time jobs that pay above the minimum wage, offer benefits, have the potential for advancement, and also are offered high-quality, work-focused, and short-term education or training to improve their employability.⁴⁴ States should explore how to meet their work participation rate while offering beneficiaries a chance to improve job skills and long-term work preparedness.⁴⁵

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Human Services, RI Bridges Database, December 2017. The Rhode Island Department of Human Services changed the method for calculating the caseload and persons receiving cash assistance starting in the 2012 Factbook. Comparisons to data presented in previous Factbooks should be made with caution.

The denominator is the total number of children under age 18 from U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2010, Summary File 1.

Communities may have more families than children receiving cash assistance because a pregnant woman without children is eligible if she is in the final trimester of her pregnancy.

Core cities are Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.

References

^{1,2,3,5,8,16,17,18,20,21,26,30,33,36} Rhode Island Department of Human Services. (2016). *Rhode Island Department of Human Services code of rules: RI Works program (Sections 1400 through 1436)*. Retrieved February 13, 2018, from www.dhs.ri.gov

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