

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 the Rhode Island Works Program (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

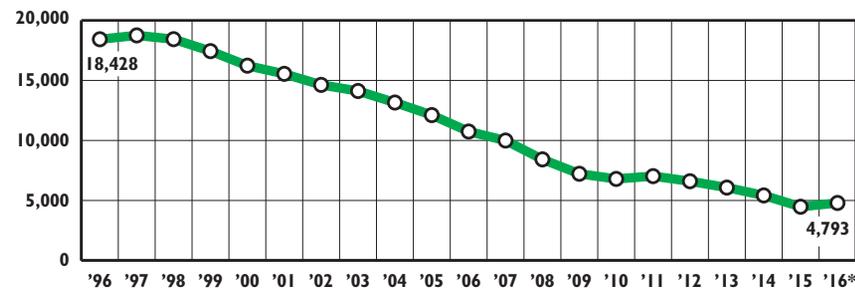
opportunities to seek additional education or training to improve their employability prospects.²

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 2016, the average hourly wage of working parents enrolled in RI Works was \$11.72 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 shared 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, 1996–2016*



Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, InRhodes Database, December 1, 1996–2015 and RI Bridges Database, December 2016. Cases can be child-only or whole families and multiple people can be included in one case. *For 2016, the Rhode Island Department of Human Services provided enrollment for the month of December rather than December 1. Comparisons to earlier years should be made with caution.

◆ Since 1996, when the program began, the Rhode Island cash assistance caseload had been steadily declining. However, between 2015 and 2016, the caseload increased by 7%, from 4,479 to 4,793 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

◆ The 2016 caseload increase may be due to efforts to address systems issues related to the difficult transition to the RI Bridges computer system and/or to the fact that the data represent a full month of enrollment rather a single day.¹²

◆ In December 2016, there were 3,456 adults and 8,960 children under age 18 enrolled in RI Works. Almost three-quarters (72%) of RI Works beneficiaries were children, and 41% of the children enrolled in RI Works were under the age of six.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 2015, 15,981 children in Rhode Island lived in extreme poverty, yet only 8,960 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

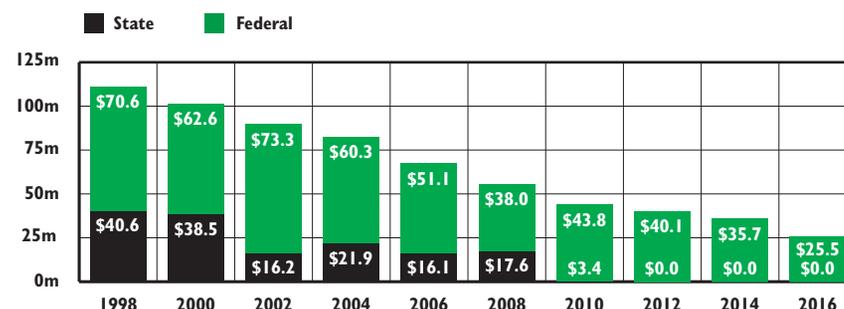
RI Works by Case Type, 2016

	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Child-only cases	1,788	37%
Cases with adults with a work activity	933	19%
Cases with adults exempt from a work activity*	733	15%
Unknown status	1,299	27%
Total RI Works Caseload	4,793	

Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, RI Bridges Database, December 2016.

*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 (224), in third trimester of pregnancy (65), caring for a disabled spouse or child (5), being a victim of domestic violence (14), illness or incapacity (364), or second parent is a non-participant (101). Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Rhode Island Cash Assistance Expenditures, State Fiscal Years 1998-2016



Sources: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, *Family Independence Program 2007 annual report*. (FY 1998-2000); House Fiscal Advisory Staff. (2004-2016). Budget as enacted: Fiscal Years 2005-2017. (FY 2002-2016). Fiscal years 1996-2014 are funds spent and FY 2016 is final budget.

◆ In State Fiscal Year 2016, for the seventh 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 18 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 2016, from \$126.5 million to \$25.5 million.^{22,23}

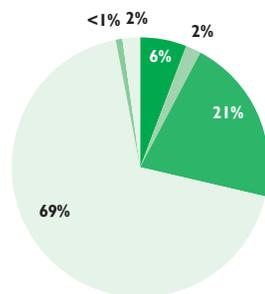
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Activities of Families Enrolled in the RI Works Program, December 2016

By Type of Activity

6% (53)	Employed
2% (22)	Work Experience
21% (192)	Education/Training
69% (647)	Job Search/Job Readiness
<1% (2)	Youth Success
2% (17)	Undetermined

n=933



Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, RI Bridges Database, December 2016. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

◆ As of December 2016, 6% of families with work activities were employed, down from 38% in December 2007. An additional 2% 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 very limited literacy or English-language 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 2016, 21% of families were participating in education or training programs.²⁸

◆ More than two-thirds (69%) of families with a work activity were participating in job search/job readiness 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, 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 2% of families were in an undetermined work activity or in the Youth Success Program, a program for young parents.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 receive mandatory 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 if it is not possible to live at home.³³

◆ In December 2016, there were 143 families with a head of household under the age of 20 enrolled in RI Works, representing 3% of the total caseload.³⁴

Support for Individuals with Disabilities and Their Families

◆ Nationally, more than one-quarter (27%) of cash assistance recipients have a physical, mental, or emotional problem that keeps them from working or limits the type or amount of work they can do, compared to 6% of all low-income single mothers.³⁵

◆ Under RI Works, parents with disabilities may be exempt from work requirements only if they are receiving SSI or SSDI or determined to be 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.³⁶

◆ In December 2016, 650 families (or 14% of the total RI Works caseload) had hardship extensions, 23 for a physical or mental disability, two to care for a disabled family member, four who were unable to work due to a domestic violence situation, and 621 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 2016

CITY/TOWN	# OF CHILDREN UNDER AGE 18	NUMBER RECEIVING CASH ASSISTANCE		% OF CHILDREN RECEIVING CASH ASSISTANCE
		FAMILIES	CHILDREN	
Barrington	4,597	5	7	<1%
Bristol	3,623	22	45	1%
Burrillville	3,576	21	33	1%
Central Falls	5,644	239	459	8%
Charlestown	1,506	6	8	<1%
Coventry	7,770	59	108	1%
Cranston	16,414	202	329	2%
Cumberland	7,535	65	114	2%
East Greenwich	3,436	13	23	1%
East Providence	9,177	121	223	2%
Exeter	1,334	5	11	1%
Foster	986	6	10	1%
Glocester	2,098	7	13	<1%
Hopkinton	1,845	8	14	<1%
Jamestown	1,043	5	10	<1%
Johnston	5,480	68	111	2%
Lincoln	4,751	50	84	2%
Little Compton	654	2	3	<1%
Middletown	3,652	47	82	2%
Narragansett	2,269	7	15	1%
New Shoreham	163	0	0	0%
Newport	4,083	161	297	7%
North Kingstown	6,322	36	75	1%
North Providence	5,514	63	96	2%
North Smithfield	2,456	11	16	1%
Pawtucket	16,575	527	959	6%
Portsmouth	3,996	23	28	1%
Providence	41,634	1,950	3,891	9%
Richmond	1,849	4	5	<1%
Scituate	2,272	5	9	<1%
Smithfield	3,625	15	22	<1%
South Kingstown	5,416	24	41	<1%
Tiverton	2,998	33	62	2%
Warren	1,940	14	18	<1%
Warwick	15,825	224	374	<2%
West Greenwich	1,477	2	1	<1%
West Warwick	5,746	172	292	5%
Westerly	4,787	36	64	1%
Woonsocket	9,888	512	966	10%
Other/Unknown	NA	23	42	NA
Four Core Cities	73,741	3,228	6,275	9%
Remainder of State	150,215	1,542	2,643	2%
Rhode Island	223,956	4,793	8,960	4%

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 2011 and 2015, the unemployment rate for Rhode Islanders without high school diplomas was 14.6%, compared to 10.3% for those with high school degrees and 3.6% 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-three 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 (39%) of those tested in English tested at or below the sixth-grade reading level, while two-thirds (68%) 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 2016. 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 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 (Policy #1400)*. Retrieved February 24, 2017, from www.policy.dhs.ri.gov

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