

TANF was established in 1996 to replace the AFDC program. This federal public assistance cash support program was designed to provide monthly cash benefits for poor families. In order to be eligible, a family must fall below an income level set by each state. Primarily designed for families with incapacity, death, or the continued absence of a parent, the program also covers some two-parent families. Although the federal government provides some funding and general administrative guidelines, states must also contribute and are responsible for the development and administration of the TANF program. Eligible families can receive benefits up to two years at a time for a maximum of five years. Adults must be involved in efforts to achieve employment while receiving benefits.

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is an income-tested federal program that provides cash assistance for an elderly person or for a person with a disability whose income is below the poverty line.

Some states offer cash assistance to single able-bodied men and women under 65 years of age who are poor. These state public assistance programs are typically referred to as general assistance or general relief.

In-Kind Benefit Programs

In 1965, the Social Security Act was expanded to include federal medical insurance under the Medicare program. Medicare provides health coverage for individuals who are eligible to receive OASDI benefits. Basic coverage includes the costs of inpatient hospital services and related services after a patient leaves the hospital. Participants can choose to pay for supplementary coverage, which helps pay for physician services, diagnostic tests, and other specified medical care. As with OASDI, workers contribute a percentage of wages (1.45% on all wages), and the employer matches that amount.

Any person who completes military service is eligible to receive medical care through Department of Veterans Affairs' health facilities. A veteran is eligible for veterans' health services throughout his or her lifetime.

As part of the 1965 expansion of the Social Security Act, federal medical assistance for people in poverty was created under the Medicaid program. The states receive federal matching funds to cover the cost of medical care for low-income individuals. Although Medicaid is a federal program, states have a significant role in developing and administering it. Medicaid is typically available to TANF and SSI recipients and covers physician, hospital, laboratory, home health, and skilled nursing care. Medicaid payments are made directly to the provider of services. Each state designs and administers its program in keeping with federal standards (see Box 2.3).

Box 2.3 What Do You Think?

Given the growth in social welfare needs in this country, do you think that there are currently enough

social services to help people have high-quality lives? Why?

The federal SNAP (formerly known as the Food Stamp Program) helps low-income individuals and households purchase food. Although different forms of food aid have been provided by the government since the Great Depression, the current program was enacted in 1964 and renamed in 2008. It provides coupons or credit through a card redeemable for groceries at retail stores. The use of coupons or cards allows recipients discretion in choosing what food items to buy, but they may not be used to purchase alcoholic beverages, tobacco, paper goods, toiletries, or ready-to-eat foods.

There are two major types of in-kind government support to help low-income people with housing: public housing and Section 8 housing. Public housing properties are residential units in federally built complexes administered by local authorities. Eligible poor families or elderly persons pay minimal rent for such apartments. Section 8 housing involves government vouchers given to low-income families to supplement their rent. Privately owned apartments are officially designated by local housing authorities as Section 8 residences and are available to voucher recipients. Although the mandate for housing aid comes from federal public policy, administration is often local. In recent years, some localities have contracted with private agencies to oversee the day-to-day operations of housing properties.

The Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) is a federal program that provides nutrition and health assistance to low-income pregnant and new mothers, infants, and children up to the age of five years. The program includes vouchers that can be redeemed for nutritious foods such as milk and eggs and for educational programs. Children from low-income families can receive breakfasts or lunches at participating schools through the School Breakfast Program (SBP) and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP).

As you expand your social work experience, you will encounter numerous other programs. In addition to federal, state, tribal, and local public efforts, there are private nonprofit and for-profit programs. There are social welfare services that cover numerous concerns, including assistance for victims of violence, efforts to promote literacy, programs that feed and house people who are homeless, programs to subsidize the cost of medications, and other efforts to help people and communities improve the quality of life. Social workers are leaders in these efforts and therefore need to understand the constellation of social welfare programs and their historical evolution.



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The History of the Social Work Profession LO5

People helping other people in need is not a new concept. For thousands of years, friends have helped bring in the harvest and care for farm animals or have watched other people's children. But paying people a salary to help others in need is relatively new. Although professions such as medicine date back thousands of years, and social welfare policies have been publicly enacted since the colonial period (the 1600s), the profession of social work is relatively young—dating back a little over 120 years ago to the Progressive Era in the late 1800s.