

The U.S. Safety Net

An Overview of United States Safety Net Programs

Kirkwood Presbyterian Church

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National Economic Education Delegation



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Outline

- What is the safety net?
- What are the programs in the safety net?
- Effects of Safety Net programs
- UBI – Universal Basic Income



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What is the Safety Net?

- The U.S. safety net is a complex set of programs to aid the poor.



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Overview of Major Safety Net Programs

- **What programs are included in the “safety net”?**
 - **Means-tested** (must have low income to receive)
 - **Federal programs** (often with state partnership in financing & running programs)
 - **Provision** of cash, services or in-kind benefits, tax credits/refunds

- **What programs are not included?**
 - Social Insurance: non-means tested, participants pay in to system
 - Example: Unemployment Insurance, Social Security, Disability Insurance
 - (Though these programs also assist the poor)



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Major Safety Net Programs

- **Medicaid**
- **Supplemental Security Income (SSI)**
- **Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)**
 - (formerly AFDC)
- **Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)**
- **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**
 - (formerly food stamps)
- **School nutrition programs**
- **Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC)**
- **Housing Assistance**
 - Vouchers
 - Rental Assistance
 - Public Housing
- **Head Start**



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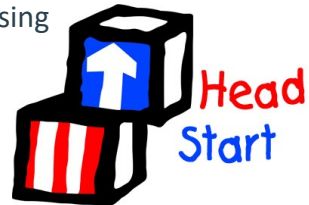
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Major Safety Net Programs

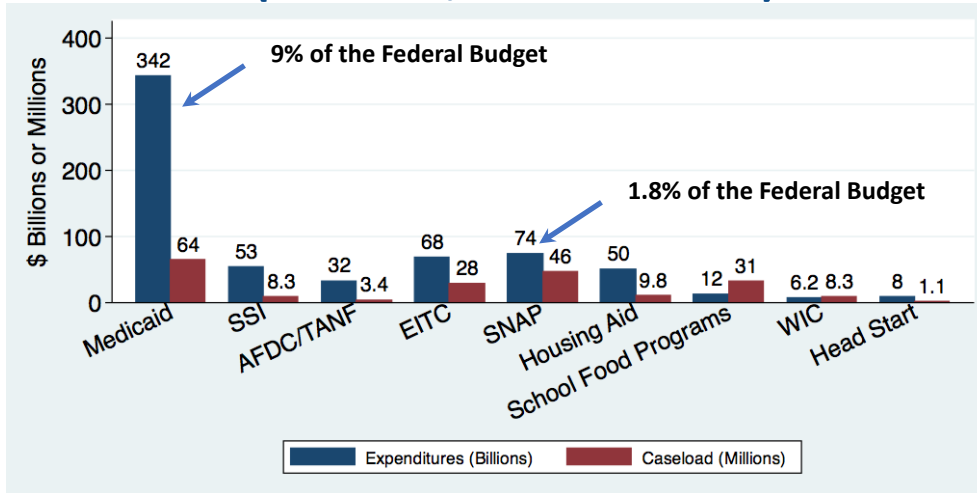
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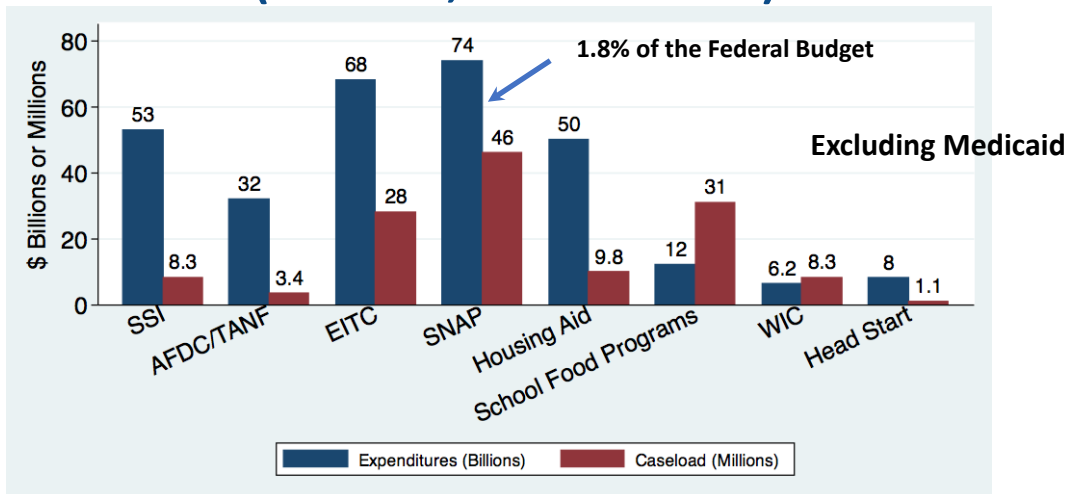


U.S. Safety Net Expenditures (\$ Billions, 2019) and Caseload (Millions, 2014 or 2015)



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U.S. Safety Net Expenditures (\$ Billions, 2019) and Caseload (Millions, 2014 or 2015)



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About Programs in The Safety Net



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MEDICAID & CHIP

• Eligibility

- **Expansion states:** most under age of 65 with incomes < 133% of poverty line
- **Non-expansion states:** children with income < 133% of poverty line; parents up to lower income cutoffs, ~43% of poverty line.
- **CHIP:** children up to 200% of poverty line (46 states)

• Participants

- **74.9 million** people in 2017 on Medicaid (including CHIP)

• Spending

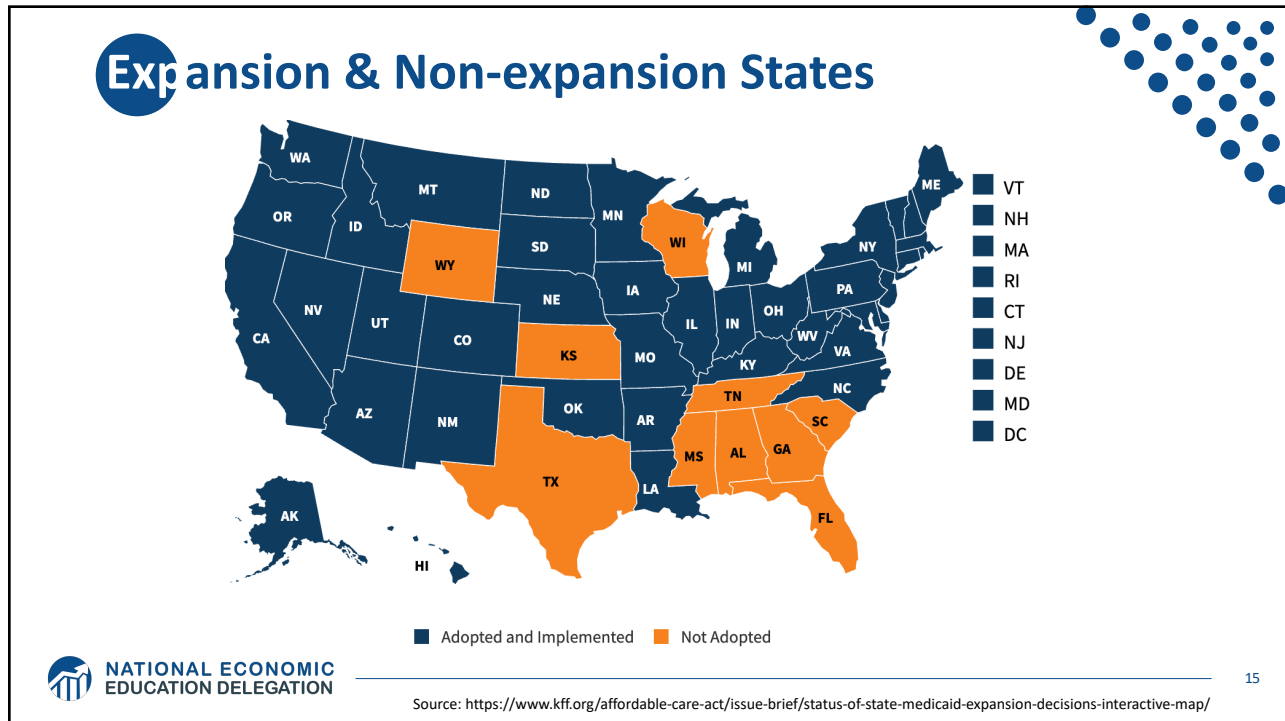
- Total spending in 2016 was **\$565.5 billion** (63% federal)



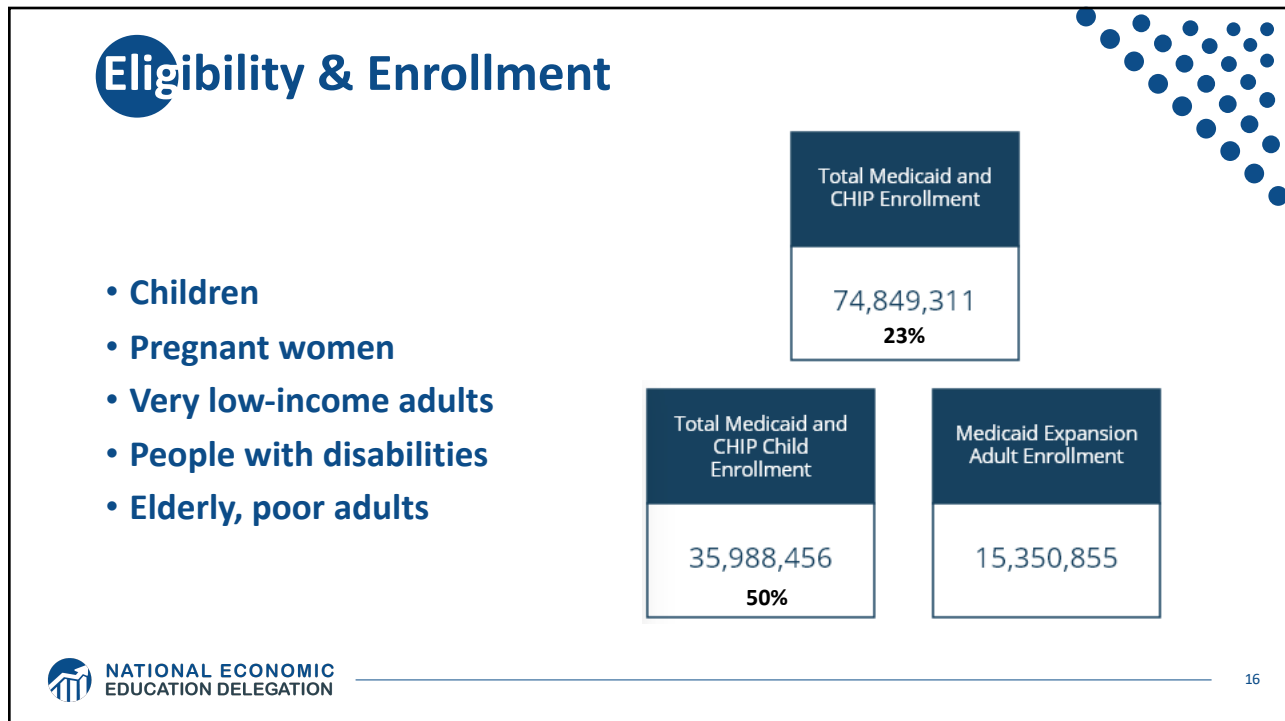
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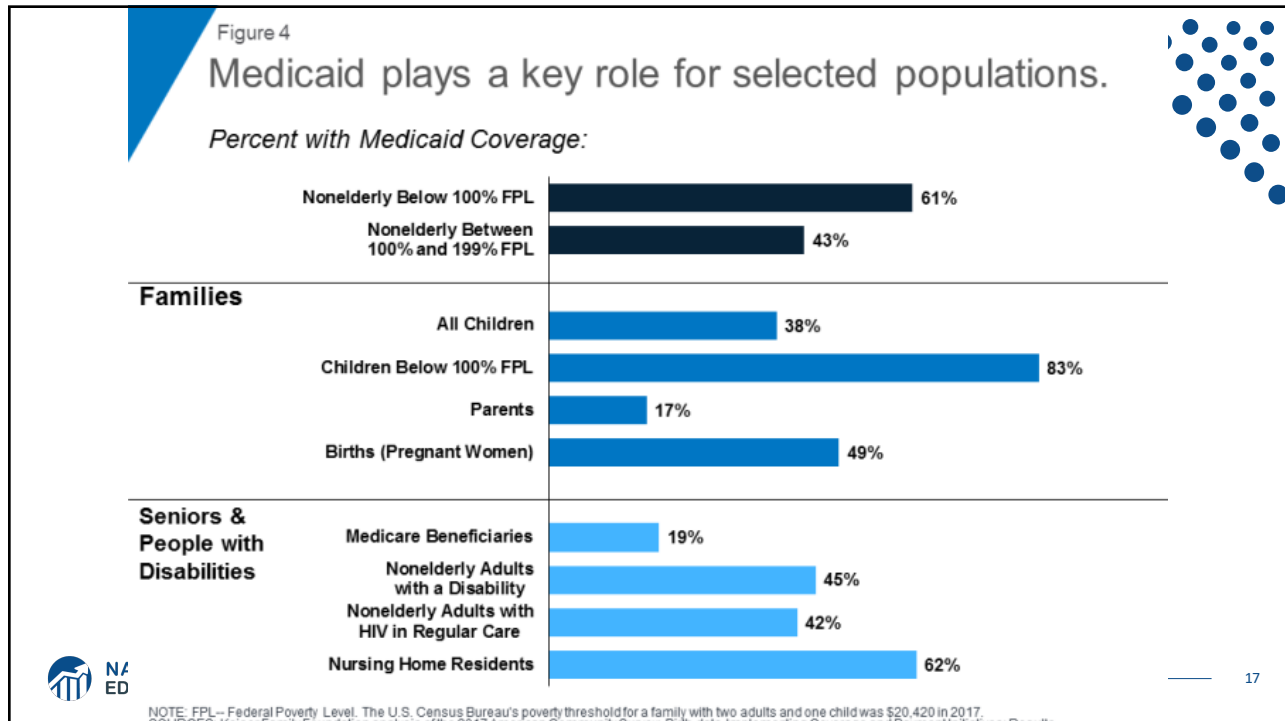
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Supplemental Security Income (SSI)

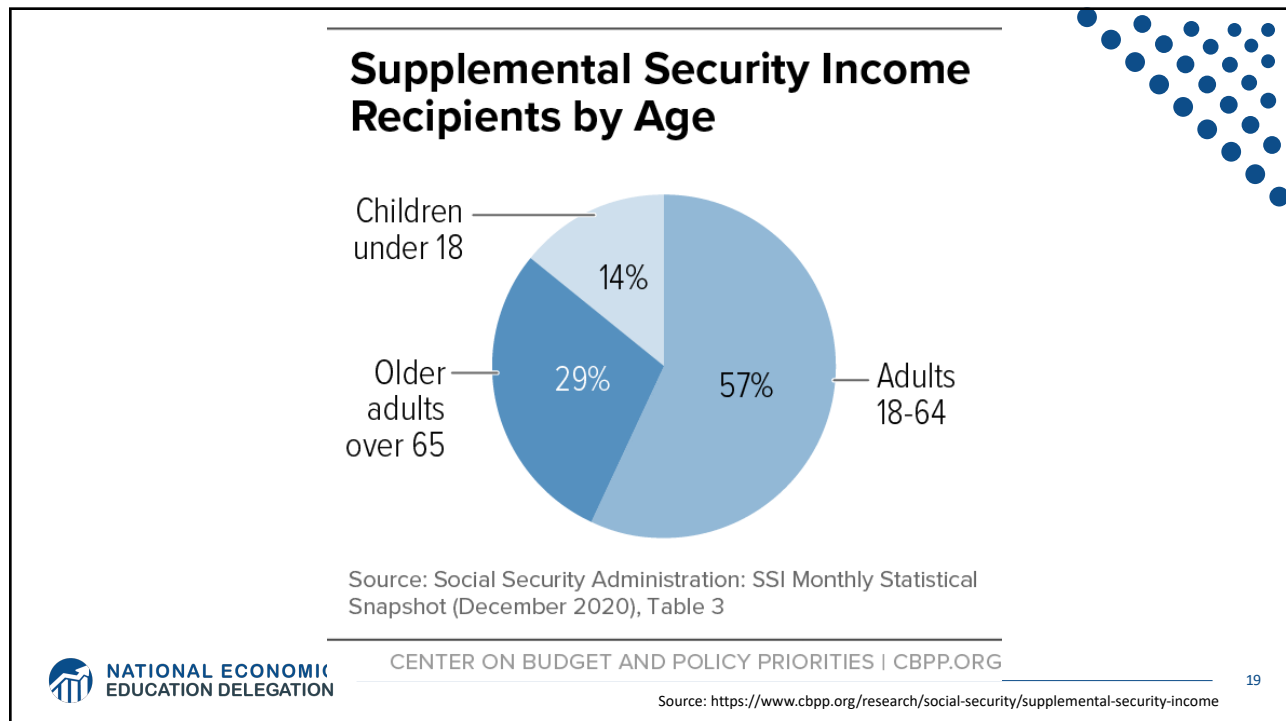
- **Eligibility:** Disabled/blind adults and children with low income; people 65 and older with low income.
- **Participants:** In 2019, **8.1 million** people received SSI.
- **Spending:** Total spending from in 2019 was roughly **\$56 billion**.

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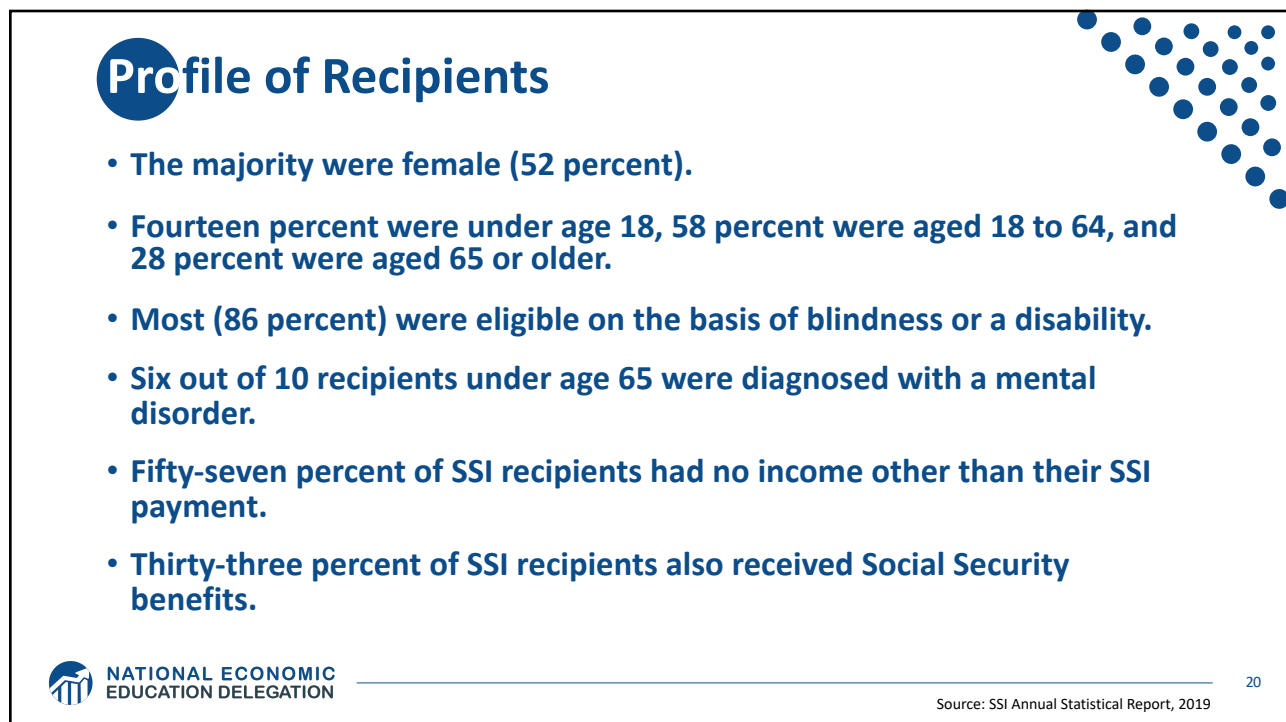
Source: SSI Annual Statistical Report, 2019

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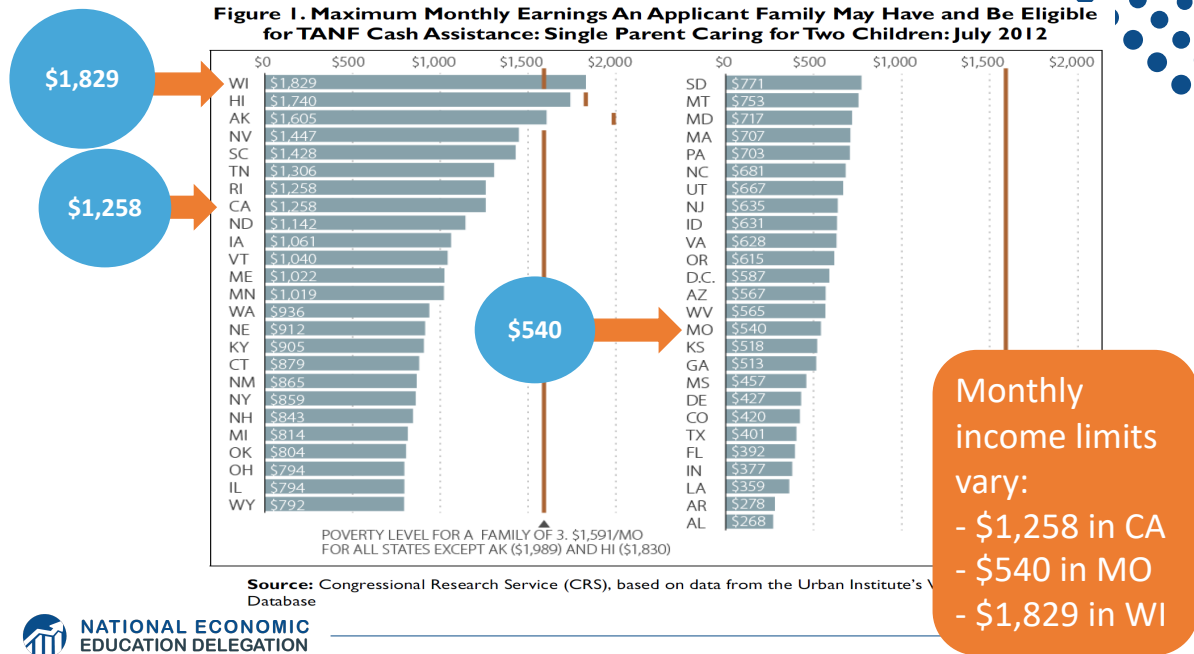
TANF: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Formerly AFDC: Aid to Families with Dependent Children

- **Eligibility:** Poor families with children, primarily single mothers
- **Federal limit of 60 months of lifetime benefits**
 - Some states have shorter limits
 - Work, job search, or training requirements
- **Participants:** In 2017, *2.5 million families*
- **Spending:** In 2017, total spending of **\$31.7 billion** (\$17.3 billion federal)

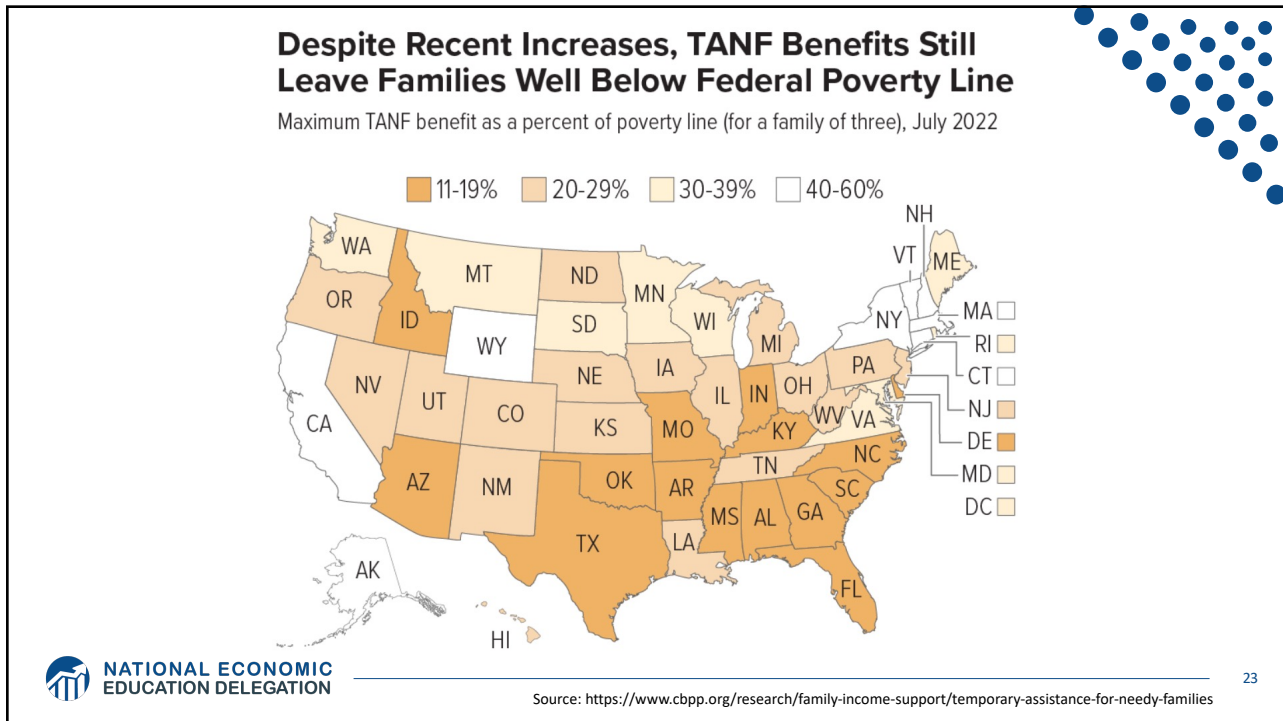


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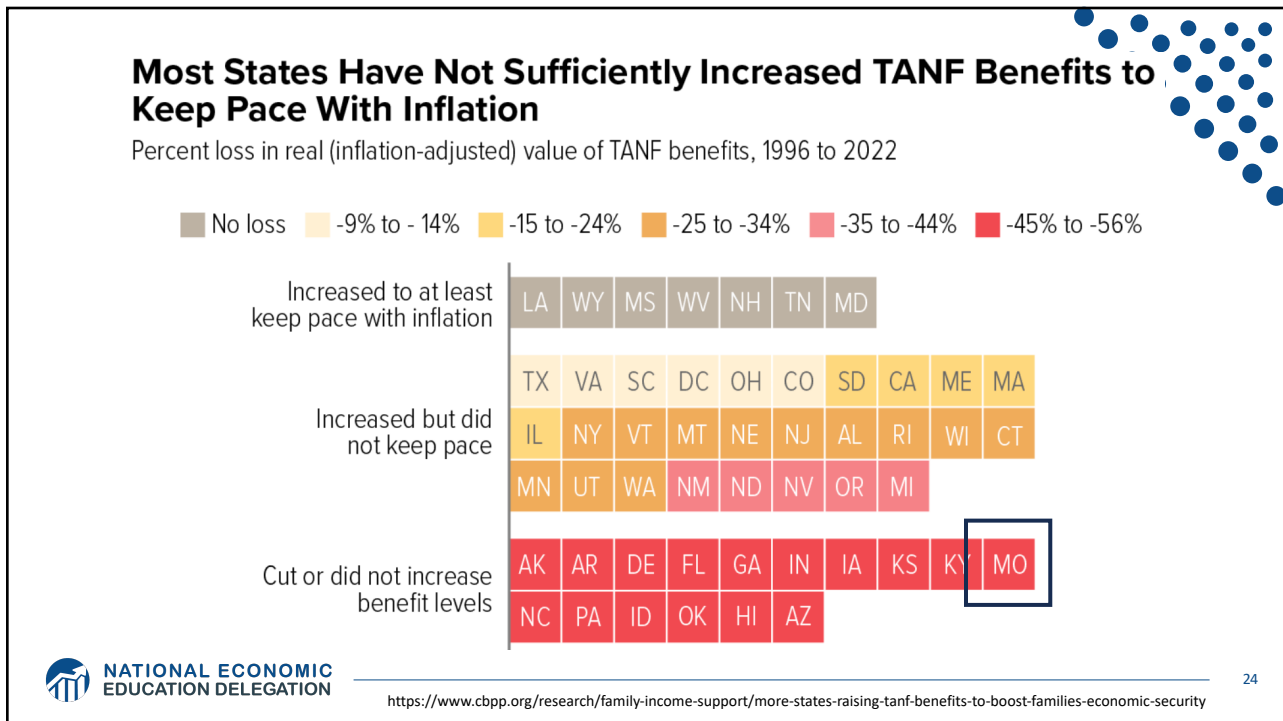
Figure 1. Maximum Monthly Earnings An Applicant Family May Have and Be Eligible for TANF Cash Assistance: Single Parent Caring for Two Children: July 2012



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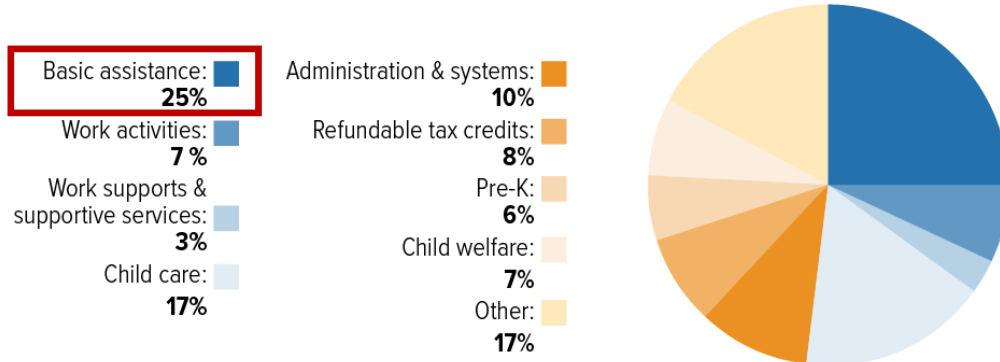


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How States Spent Federal and State TANF Funds in 2015



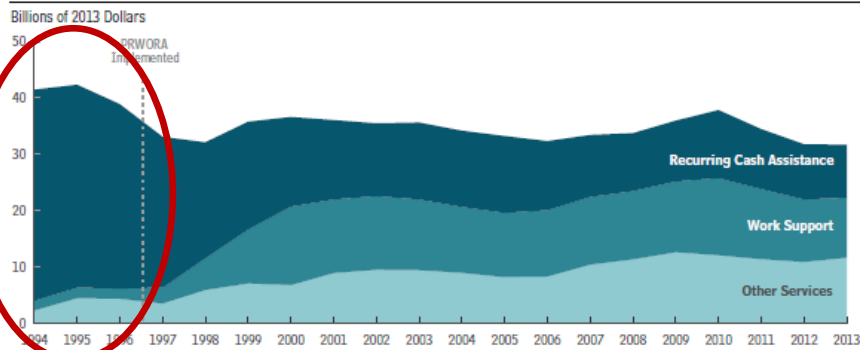
Note: TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

Source: CBPP analysis of Department of Health and Human Services 2015 TANF financial data

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Figure 4.
Spending on TANF and the Programs That Preceded It, by Type of Assistance, 1994 to 2013



Source: Congressional Budget Office based on data from the Department of Health and Human Services.

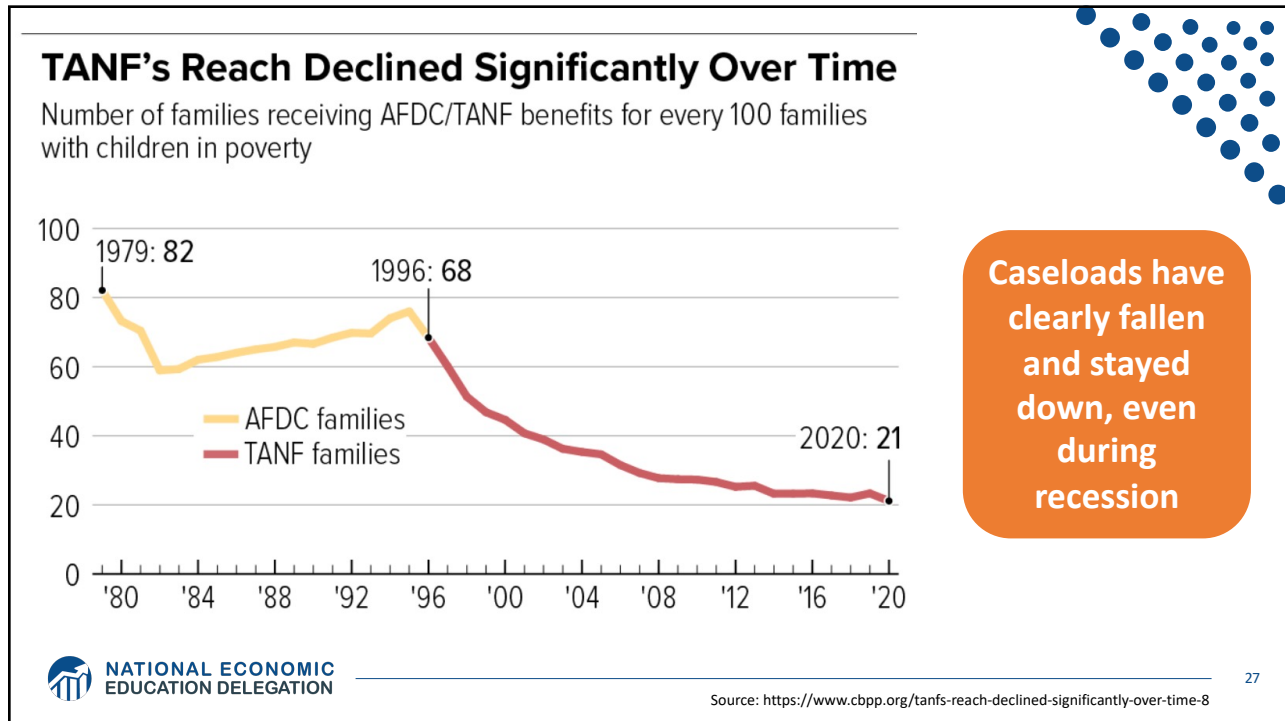
Notes: Before PRWORA, Aid to Families With Dependent Children distributed recurring cash assistance, while the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training program provided work support and the Emergency Assistance program supplied other services for low-income families. Administration and systems costs are distributed proportionally among the three types of assistance.

This figure includes TANF funding that states transferred to the Child Care and Development Block Grant and to the Social Services Block Grant.

Because the available data are limited, the figure does not include three of the smaller federal funding mechanisms for TANF. In every year, those mechanisms have provided less than \$0.3 billion in total.

TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families; PRWORA = Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996.

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EITC: Earned Income Tax Credit

- **Federal tax credit designed for low and mid-income working people**
- **Eligibility-** Working families with children that have annual incomes below \$57,141
 - Small credit for working individuals with no children & low incomes
- **Participants** - In 2019, **26.7 million** working families and individuals received EITC
- **Spending-** In 2019, the cost of EITC was **\$64.5 billion**

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Source: Earned Income Tax Credit Statistics, IRS

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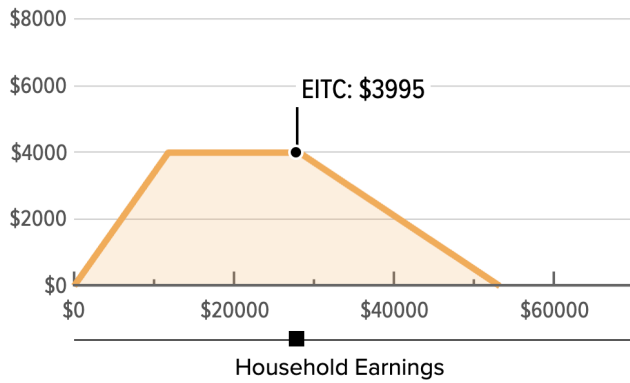
Tax Credit Phases IN and then OUT

Value of Federal Earned Income Tax Credit, 2023

Filing Status:

Number of Children:

Household Earnings:



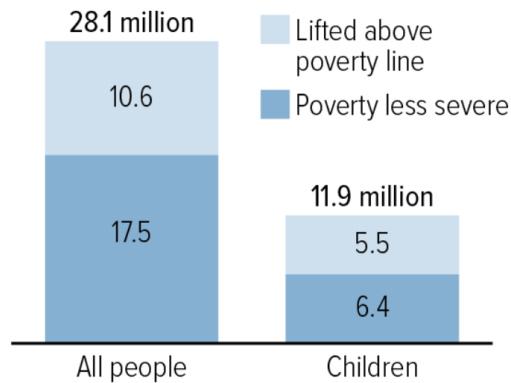
<https://www.cbpp.org/research/policy-basics-the-earned-income-tax-credit>

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Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit Have Powerful Anti-Poverty Impact

Millions whom the EITC and Child Tax Credit lifted above the poverty line or whose poverty was less severe



<https://www.cbpp.org/research/policy-basics-the-earned-income-tax-credit>

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SNAP: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

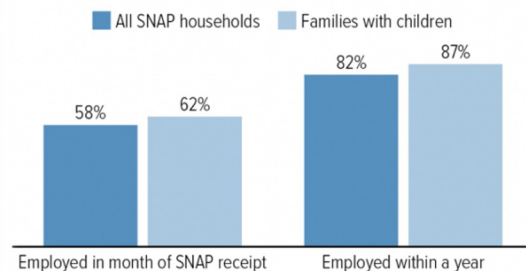
- **Nutrition assistance to low-income individuals and families**
- **Eligibility:** Monthly income no higher than 130% of the poverty level for their household size.
 - Some people who receive SSI are automatically eligible for SNAP, dependent on state laws.
- **Participants:** In 2019, **35.7 million**.
- **Spending:** In 2019, **\$60.4 billion**.



(Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program)

SNAP Households with Working-Age Non-Disabled Adults Have High Work Rates

Work participation during the previous and following year for households that received SNAP in a typical month



Source: CBPP calculations based on 2004 Survey of Income and Program Participation Panel data.

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Most SNAP recipients are employed

School Food Programs

(National School Lunch Program)



- **The school lunch program serves nutritionally balanced low-cost or free lunches to children in school each day.**
- **Eligibility:** Students who attend public and non-profit private schools, as well as residential child-care institutions, are potentially eligible.
- **Participants:** Over **30.4 million** children every day were served by the program in the 2016 year.
- **Spending:** In 2016, the program cost was **\$13.6 billion**.



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WIC (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children)

- **Eligibility:** Low-income women, infants, and children up to the age of 5 who are at nutritional risk.
- **Participants:** During April, 2018, WIC served **7.8 million people**.
 - 4.15 million participants were children,
 - 1.87 million were infants, and
 - 1.82 million were *pregnant* women.
- **Spending:** In 2017, the WIC program cost **\$6.5 billion**.



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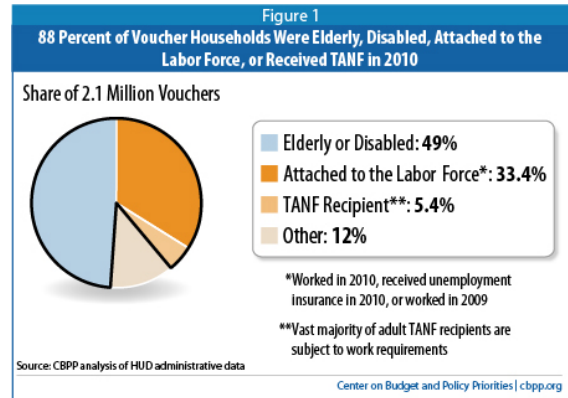
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Housing Aid

Housing Choice Voucher Program (Section 8)

- **Eligibility:** Low-income families, the elderly, and the disabled are eligible to receive the vouchers. Family income must be less than **50% of local median income**.
- **Participants:** Just over **5.3 million individuals**, or 2.2 million low-income families utilize the vouchers.
- **Spending:** During the 2016 year, the amount spent was **\$17.5 billion**.



HEAD START

- **Eligibility:** Primarily low-income children (0-5).
- **Participants:** In 2016, **1.1 million children** were served by the program.
- **Spending:** In the 2016 year, **\$9.16 billion** was spent on Head Start.



Safety Net: A Collection of Separate Programs

- **Different forms of assistance**
 - Medical Assistance
 - Cash Assistance
 - Nutritional Assistance
 - Housing Programs
- **Different eligibility (income & categorical)**
- **Different work rules and limits**
- **Different agencies and funding streams**



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Social Insurance Programs: Not Means-Tested

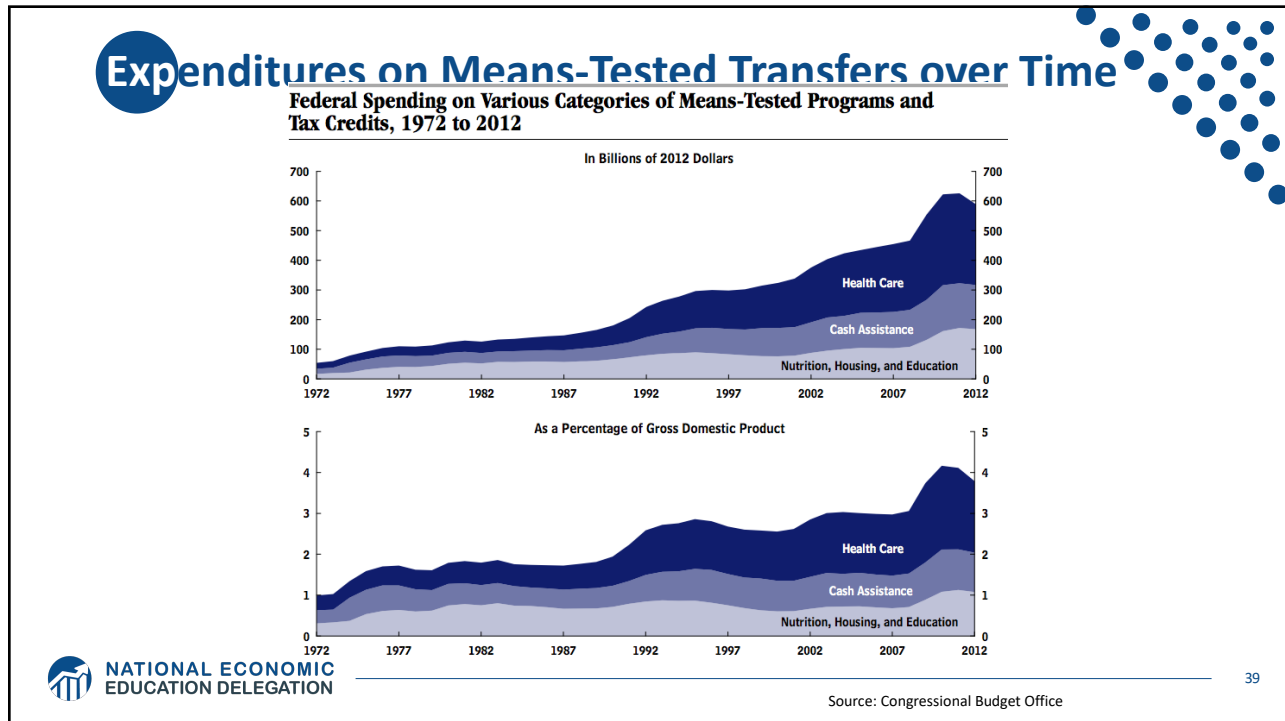
- **Social Security
(Old Age and Survivors Insurance Program)**
- **Medicare**
- **Unemployment Insurance**
- **Disability Insurance**
- **Workers' Compensation**



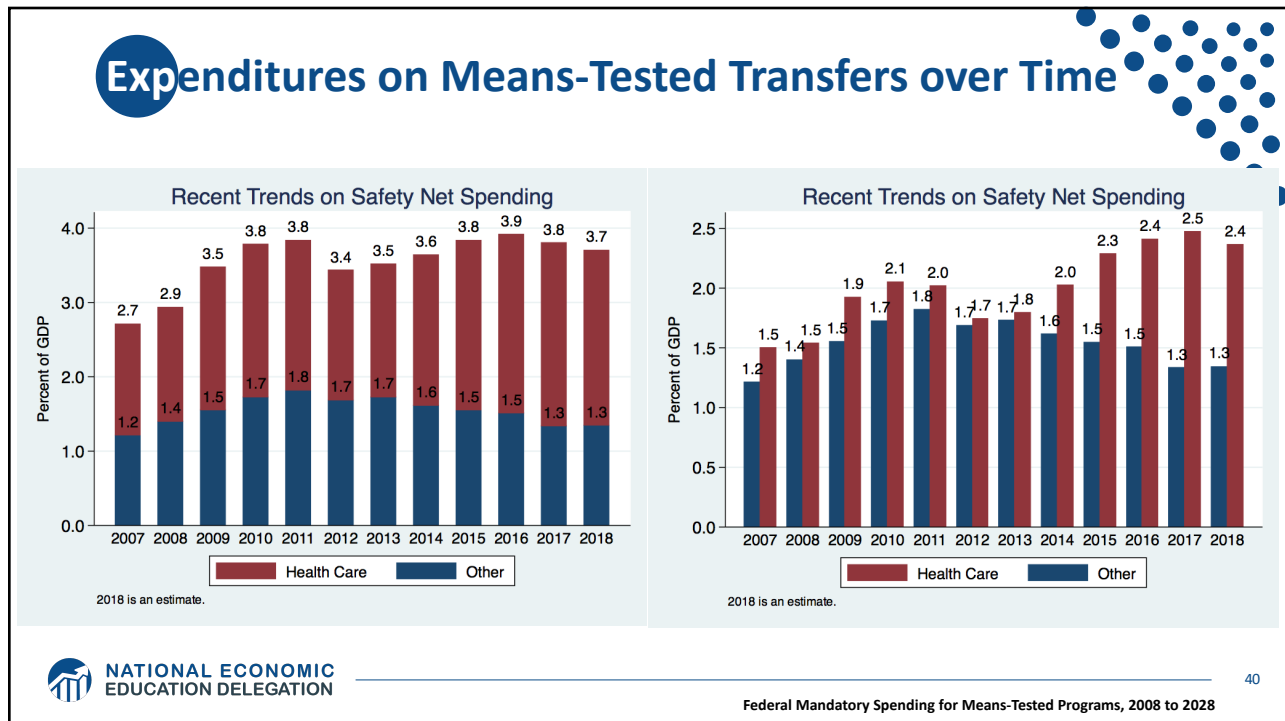
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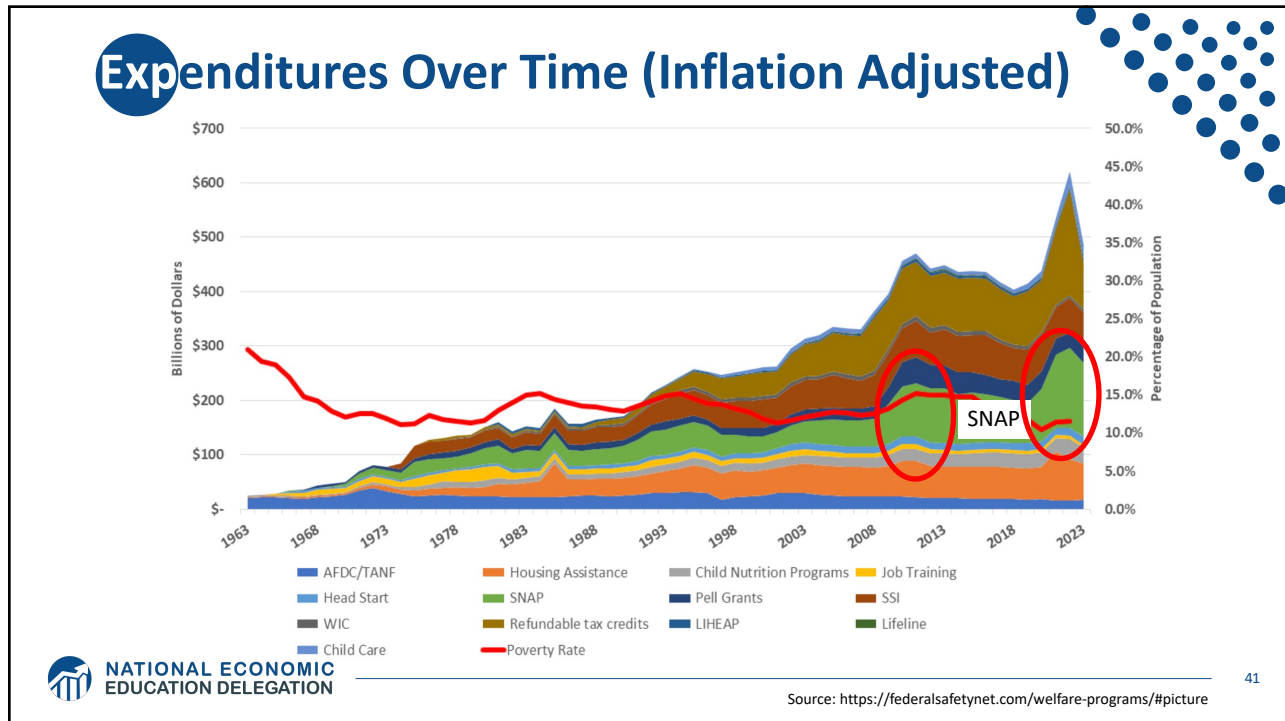
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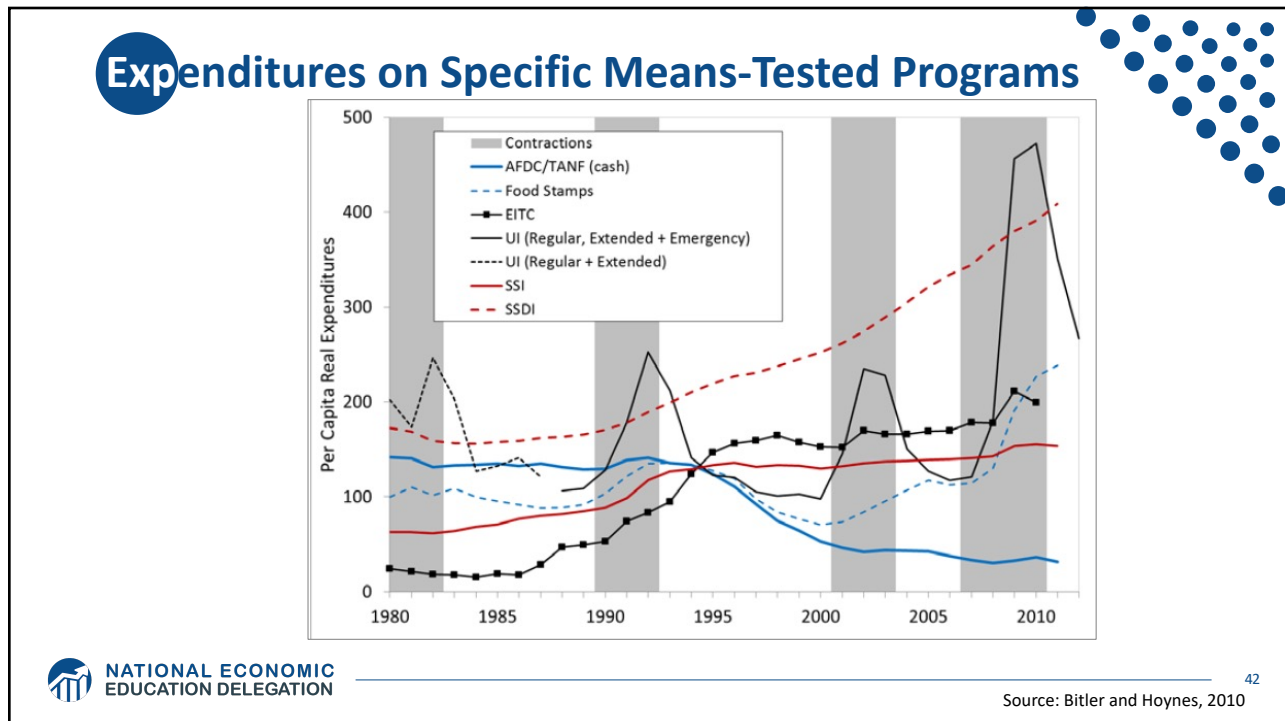
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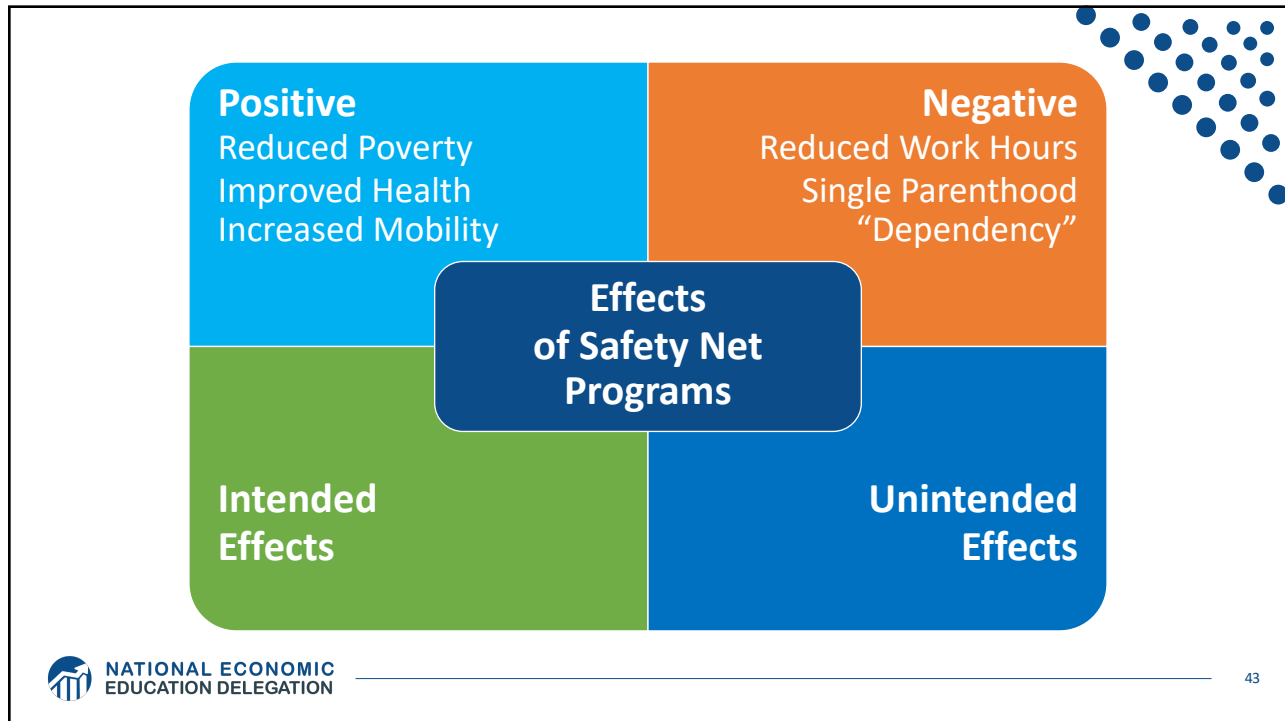
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Challenge: Measuring Effects of Safety Net on Poverty

- **Official Poverty Measures: Includes only cash income**
 - Excludes: SNAP, EITC, Housing Assistance
- **Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM):**
 - Includes in-kind & after tax benefits.
- **SPM is a more inclusive measure of what the safety net does.**

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Table 5a.
Effect of Individual Elements on SPM Rates: 2015
 (Margin of error in percentage points. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps/techdocs/cpsmar16.pdf)

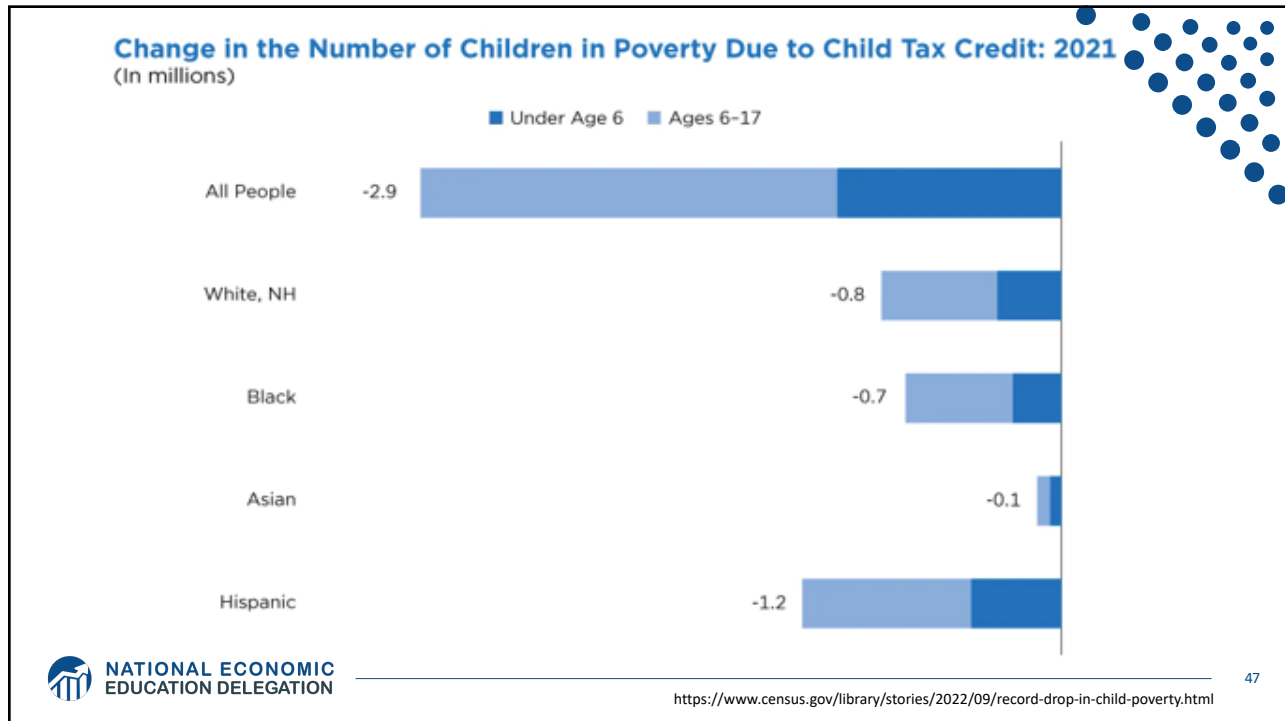
Element	All people		Under 18 years		18 to 64 years		65 years and over	
	Estimate	Margin of error ¹ (±)	Estimate	Margin of error ¹ (±)	Estimate	Margin of error ¹ (±)	Estimate	Margin of error ¹ (±)
All people	14.32	0.28	16.11	0.50	13.80	0.30	13.67	0.50
ADDITIONS								
Social Security	-8.34	0.19	-2.12	0.18	-3.99	0.16	-36.04	0.79
Refundable tax credits	-2.88	0.13	-6.52	0.34	-2.16	0.10	-0.19	0.05
SNAP	-1.44	0.09	-2.70	0.21	-1.13	0.08	-0.77	0.11
SSI	-1.04	0.08	-0.79	0.12	-1.07	0.09	-1.30	0.16
Housing subsidies	-0.80	0.06	-1.16	0.14	-0.61	0.06	-0.99	0.14
Child support received	-0.43	0.05	-1.07	0.13	-0.29	0.04	-0.03	0.02
School lunch	0.40	0.05	-0.96	0.14	-0.27	0.03	-0.03	0.02
TANF/general assistance	-0.21	0.04	-0.47	0.10	-0.15	0.03	-0.02	0.02
Unemployment insurance	0.20	0.03	-0.26	0.06	-0.23	0.04	-0.02	0.01
LIHEAP	-0.08	0.02	-0.10	0.04	-0.06	0.02	-0.10	0.04
Workers' compensation	-0.12	0.03	-0.15	0.07	-0.13	0.03	-0.03	0.02
WIC	-0.12	0.04	-0.29	0.09	-0.08	0.02	Z	Z
SUBTRACTIONS								
Child support paid	0.08	0.02	0.07	0.03	0.10	0.02	0.02	0.02
Federal income tax	0.44	0.05	0.37	0.07	0.54	0.06	0.11	0.05
FICA	1.52	0.10	2.07	0.19	1.58	0.10	0.41	0.09
Work expenses	1.75	0.10	2.44	0.22	1.80	0.10	0.47	0.09
MOOP	3.52	0.14	3.41	0.21	3.05	0.16	5.65	0.30

¹ The margin of error (MOE) is a measure of an estimate's variability. The larger the MOE in relation to the size of the estimate, the less reliable the estimate. The MOE is the estimated 90 percent confidence interval. The MOEs shown in this table are based on standard errors calculated using replicate weights. For more information, see "Standard Errors and Their Use" at www2.census.gov/library/publications/2016/demo/p60-256sa.pdf.
 Z Represents or rounds to zero.
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2016 Annual Social and Economic Supplement.

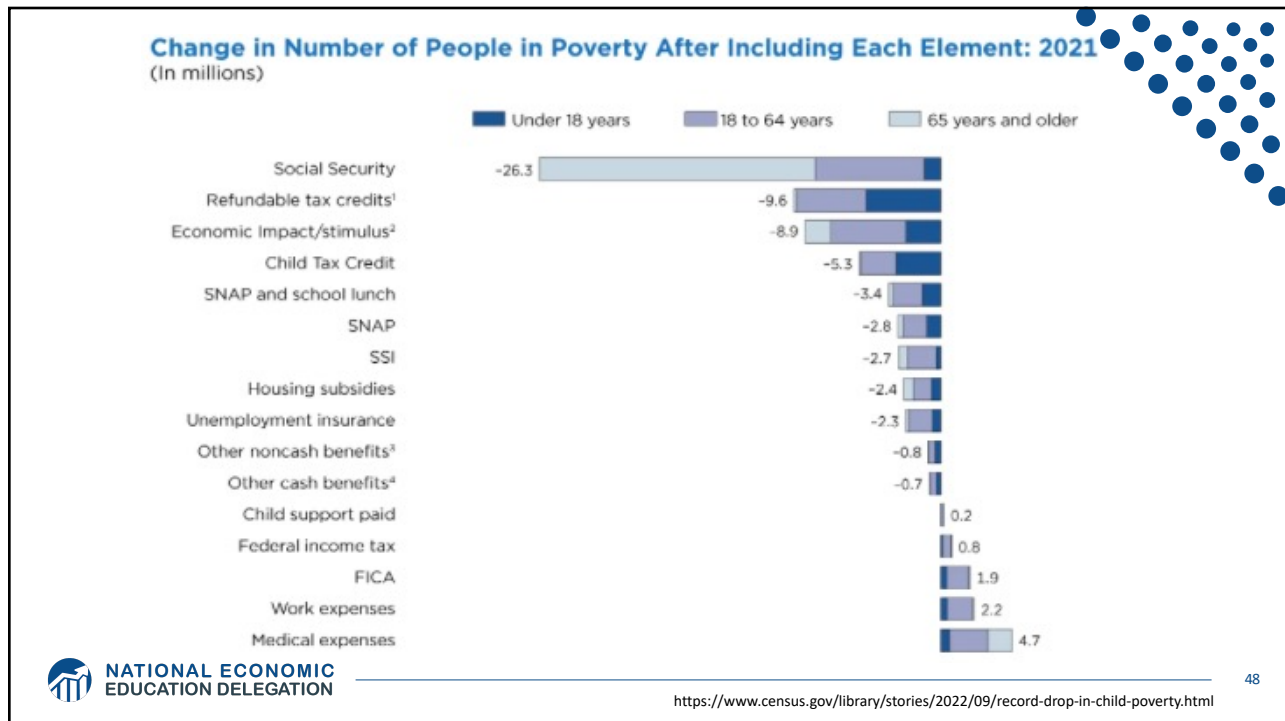
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Child Poverty Fell to Record Low 5.2% in 2021

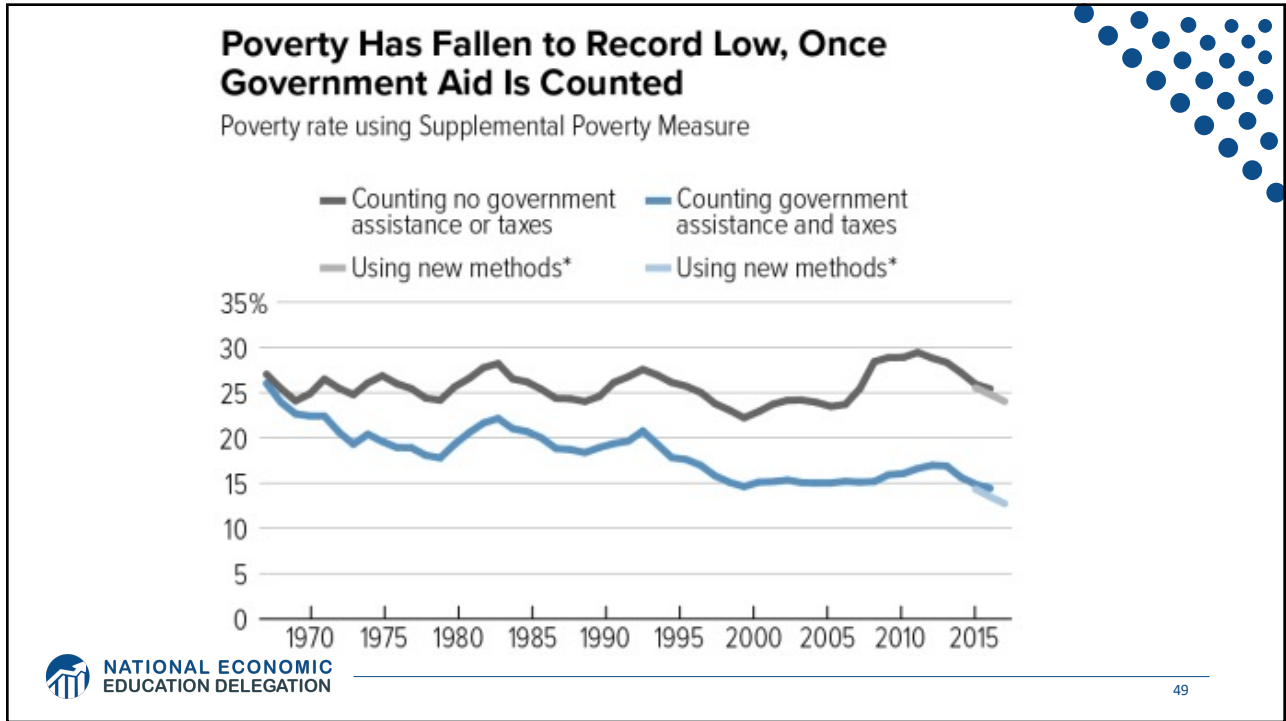
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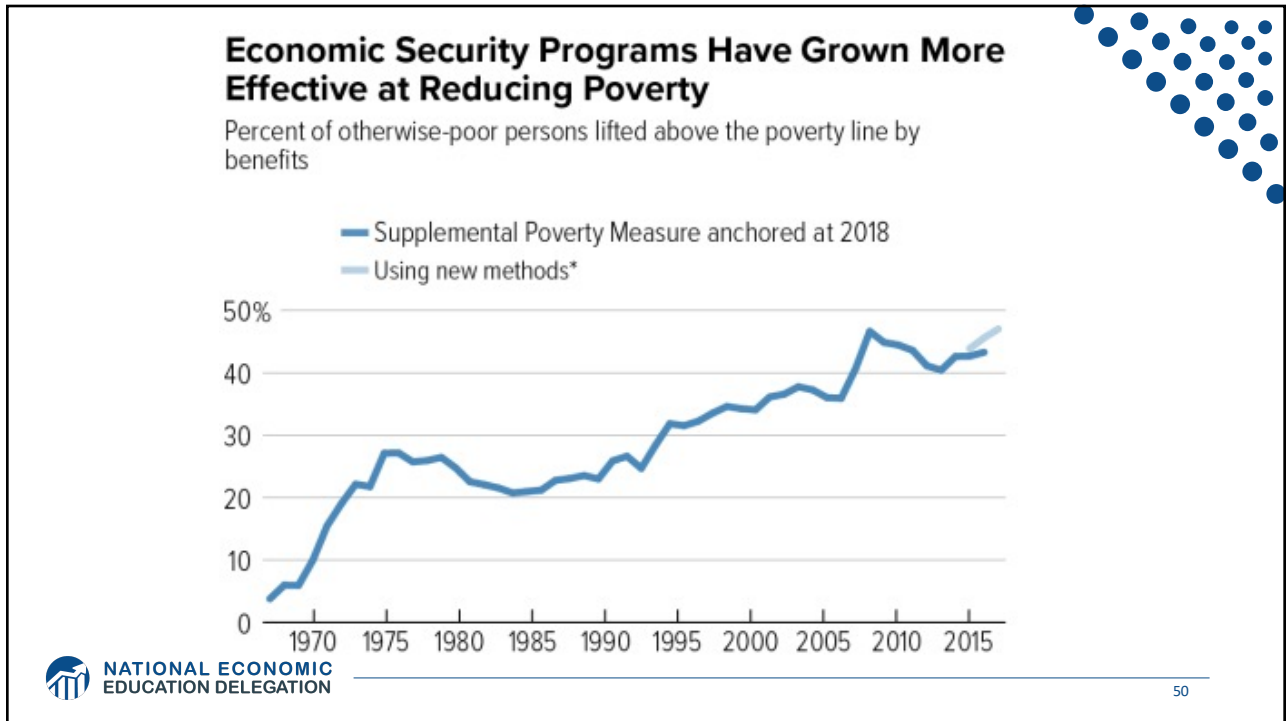
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Total Effects are Complicated

Total Effect of Safety Net = Mechanical Effects of Adding Income/Resources + Changes in Behavior Due to Safety Net


By way of example:

Total Effect of TANF = Cash Benefits + Reduction in Work

Decrease Poverty (pointing to Cash Benefits)

Increase Poverty (pointing to Reduction in Work)

?



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Total Effects are Complicated: EITC

Total Effect of Safety Net = Mechanical Effects of Adding Income/Resources + Changes in Behavior Due to Safety Net

Total Effect of EITC = Cash Benefits + Increase in Work

Decrease Poverty (pointing to Cash Benefits)

Decrease Poverty (pointing to Increase in Work)



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Full Effect of Safety Net: Includes Behavioral Changes

- Focus on work effects of safety net (one of several possible unintended consequences)
- What does economics tell us about safety net programs and work?

The diagram consists of a central blue rounded rectangle divided into two sections. The left section is labeled 'TANF maximum grant' and the right section is labeled 'Grant amount falls with earnings'. An orange arrow points upwards from the left side of the rectangle, labeled 'Provides benefits'. Another orange arrow points downwards from the right side of the rectangle, labeled 'Reduces benefits with earnings'.

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Two Effects of Welfare Payment on Work

Welfare Provides Income

- More income increases consumption
- One form of consumption is leisure
- More income reduces work (by encouraging leisure)

Work Reduces Welfare Payments

- Rising earnings reduce benefit level
- Wage for working is effectively reduced
- Welfare discourages work (due to benefit reduction)

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What evidence do we have?

What does it say?

- **Study of food stamp program (FSP) introduction**

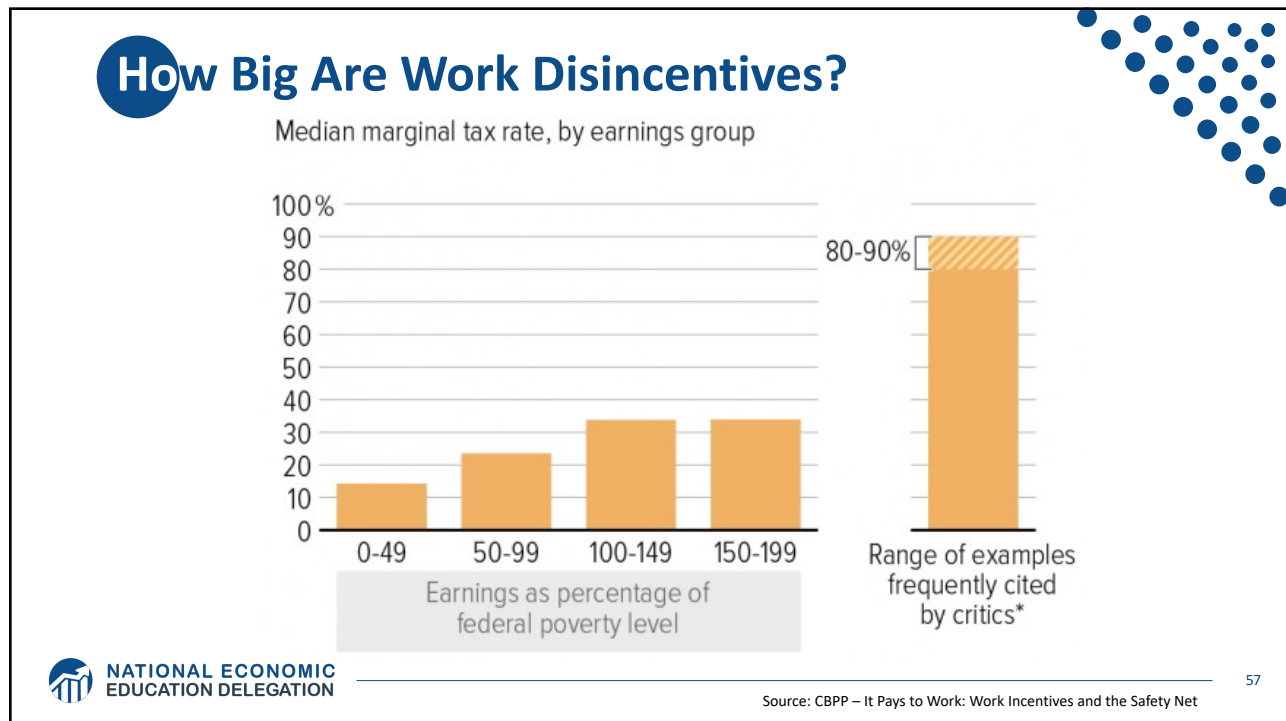
- Work hours per year fall by 183 (20%) among ALL single-parent families in counties introducing FSP (relative to counties that did not)
- About 32% of single parents received food stamps
- Food Stamp Program reduced work for recipients by 571 hours per year



How large are welfare/work disincentives?

- **United States: old-style AFDC/Food Stamp programs reduced work by around 500 hours per year among recipients.**
- **TANF likely has smaller effects on work (designed to encourage/require work).**
- **International evidence suggests fairly small effects of cash assistance on work.**





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Are Negative Work Effects Necessarily Bad?

- **Could be negative:**
 - Consume more leisure
- **Could be positive:**
 - Consume more leisure
 - Perform more non-market economic activity
 - Child care and development
- **It's not a clear cut problem or panacea.**
- **Rewards to work are high, so why might work hours decline?**
 - There are better things to do with their time.

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Alternative to multi-part safety net: Universal Basic Income (UBI)

- UBI is an unconditional cash transfer that is regularly and equally distributed to everyone over 18, regardless of income or need.
- It is a significant departure from U.S.-style welfare system.



Examples of UBI or similar programs:

- **Alaska Permanent Fund:**
 - Alaskan residents have been receiving a percentage of the Alaskan natural extraction revenue.
 - Showed no effect on employment
 - Similar to a small UBI
- **Native American Casinos:**
 - 2010 study showed that some Native American groups received a percentage of revenue from casinos.
 - Showed that recipients didn't decrease hours worked.



Universal Basic Income (UBI)

✓ PROS

- Provides basic income to everyone
- Will help supplement income in face of job loss or low wages
- Less disincentive for work
 - No benefit phase out
 - (based on findings from the Alaskan Permanent Fund where Alaskan residents receive a percent of natural resource extraction profits)



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Universal Basic Income (UBI)

✗ CONS

- Unaffordable: expensive because of universal nature
- Does not address inequality: replaces safety net programs which would provide everyone with transfer incomes, not simply those in need
- Negative Incentives on work possible: people won't be as inclined to join the workforce
- Delays Discussion of Job Creation: may crowd out discussion of job creation or growth for poverty reduction

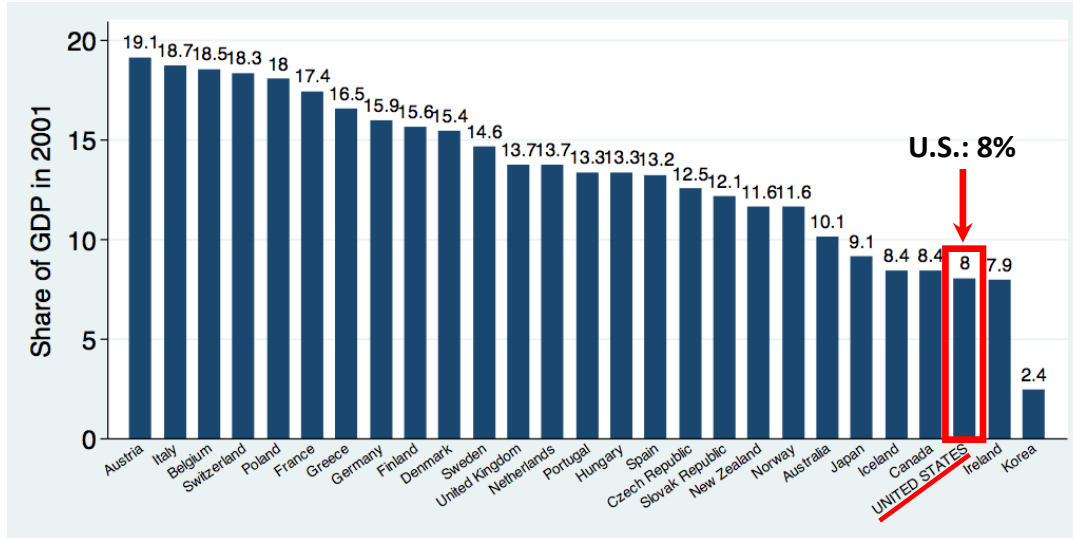


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Summary: U.S. Safety Net

- **The U.S. safety net is a complex set of programs to aid the poor.**
 - Medical, nutrition, education, housing, cash
 - Different benefit amounts, eligibility rules, duration of assistance, administration
- **There are unintended consequences on the labor supply, and possibly on marriage and childbearing as well.**
- **There are substantial direct effects on measured poverty.**

Safety Net Spending Across the OECD



Thank you!

Any Questions?

www.NEEDecon.org

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Contact NEED: info@NEEDecon.org

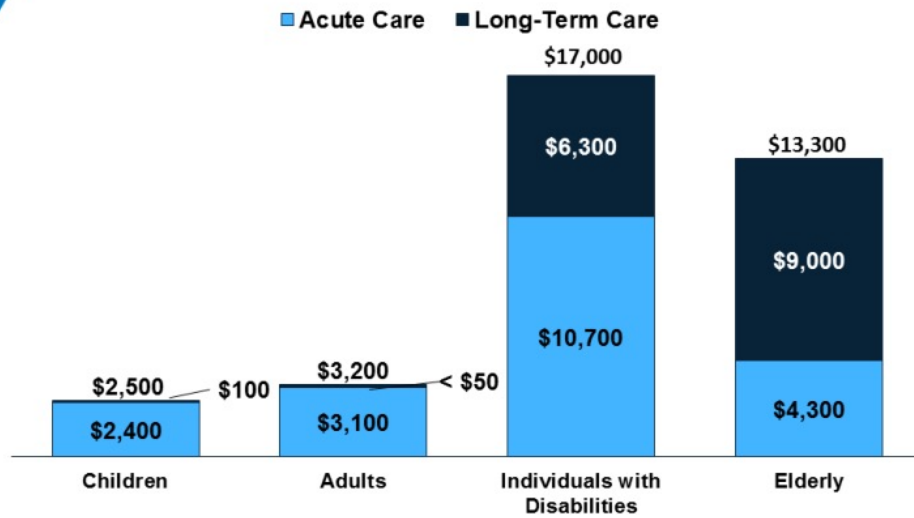
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Become a Friend of NEED: www.NEEDecon.org/friend.php



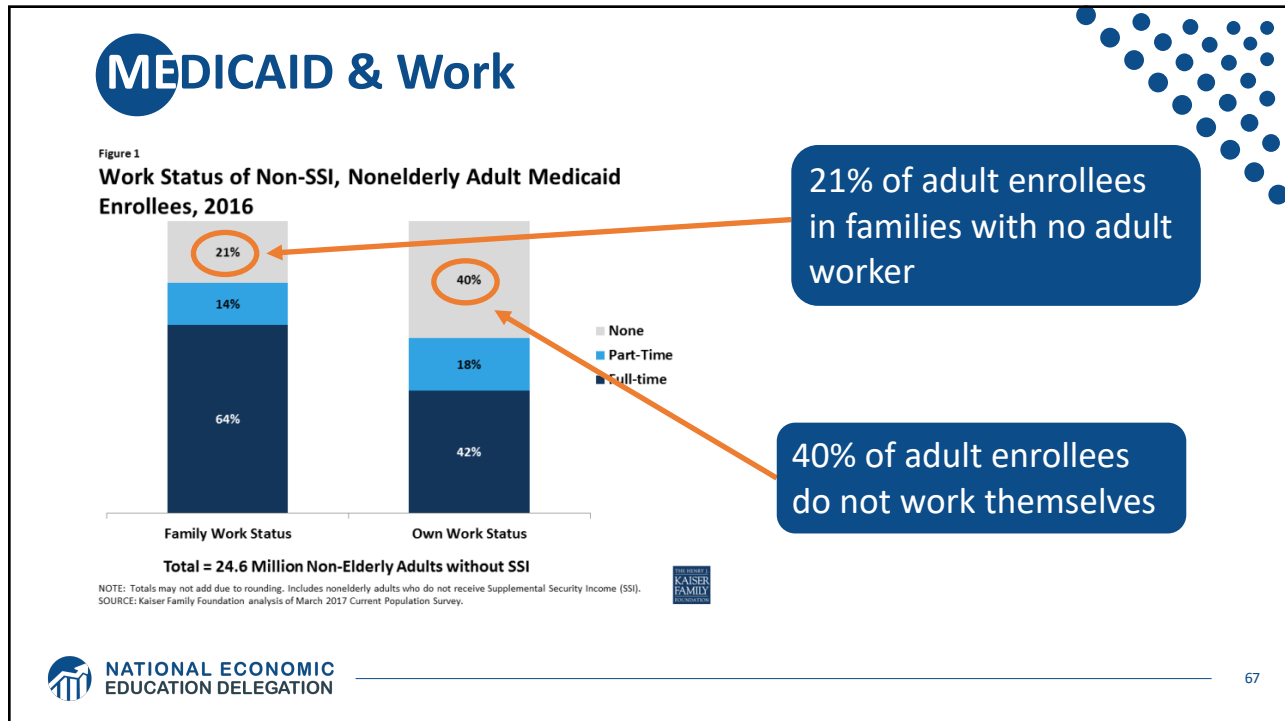
Figure 9

Medicaid per enrollee spending is significantly greater for the elderly and individuals with disabilities compared to children and adults.



NOTE: Rounded to nearest \$100. Spending may not sum to totals due to rounding.
 SOURCE: Kaiser Family Foundation and Urban Institute estimates based on data from FY 2013 MSIS and CMS-64 reports. Due to lack of data, does not include CO, KS, NC, or RI.





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Participation by Racial Category

Racial Category	Participants	Percentage
Whites	4,609,636	58.81%
Blacks/African Americans	1,687,947	21.54%
American Indian/Alaskan Natives	696,174	8.88%
Multiple Race	476,797	6.08%
Asians	296,303	3.78%
Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders	63,639	0.81%
Race Not Reported	7,175	0.09%
Total	7,837,671	99.99%

NATIONAL ECONOMIC EDUCATION DELEGATION

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