



# *Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, Fall 2022* **Contemporary Economic Policy**

University of Nevada, Reno  
October, 2022

Host: Jon Haveman, Ph.D.  
National Economic Education Delegation

1



## **Available** NEED Topics Include:

- US Economy
- Healthcare Economics
- Climate Change
- Economic Inequality
- Economic Mobility
- Trade and Globalization
- Minimum Wages
- Immigration Economics
- Housing Policy
- Federal Budgets
- Federal Debt
- Black-White Wealth Gap
- Autonomous Vehicles
- US Social Policy

2

## Course Outline

- **Contemporary Economic Policy**

- **October 31:** US Safety net
- November 14: Economic Inequality
- December 5: Climate Change Economics



3

## Submitting Questions

- **Please submit questions of clarification in the chat.**
  - I will try to handle them as they come up.
- **We will do a verbal Q&A once the material has been presented.**
- **Slides will be available from the NEED website tomorrow ([https://needelegation.org/delivered\\_presentations.php](https://needelegation.org/delivered_presentations.php))**



4

# The U.S. Safety Net

## An Overview of United States Safety Net Programs

OLLI – University of Nevada, Reno

October 31, 2022

Jon D. Haveman, Ph.D.

*National Economic Education Delegation*



5

5

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- **This slide deck was authored by:**

- Ann Stevens, University of Texas – Austin
- Natalie Sweet, University of California – Davis

- **This slide deck was reviewed by:**

- Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach, Northwestern University
- Ron Haskins, Brookings Institution

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6

6

# Outline

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



7

# What is the Safety Net?

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



8

## 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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9

9

## 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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10

10

# Major Safety Net Programs

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  - Rental Assistance
  - Public Housing
- **Headstart**

# Major Safety Net Programs

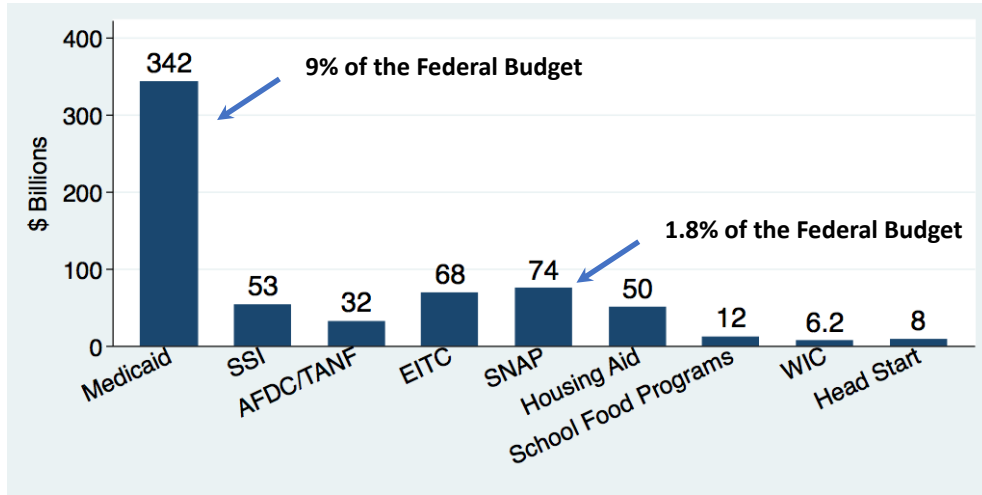
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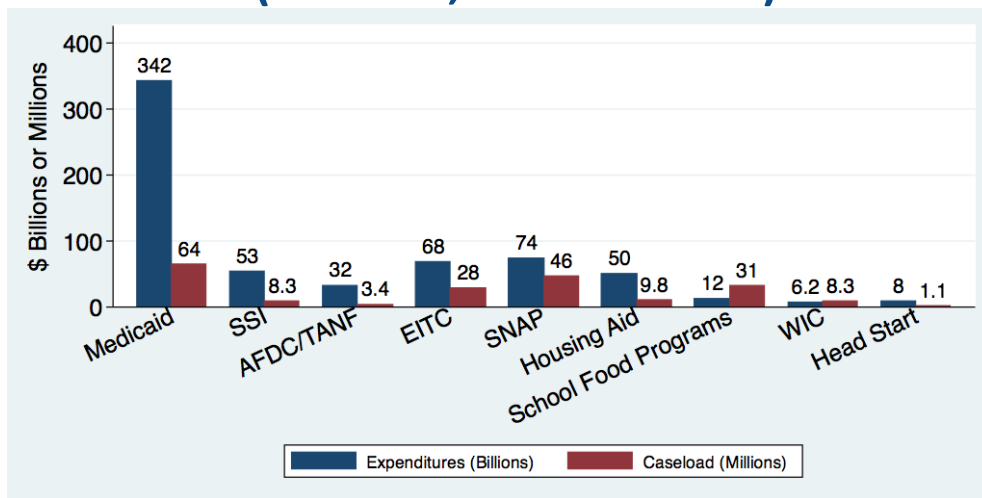


## U.S. Safety Net Expenditures, 2019



15

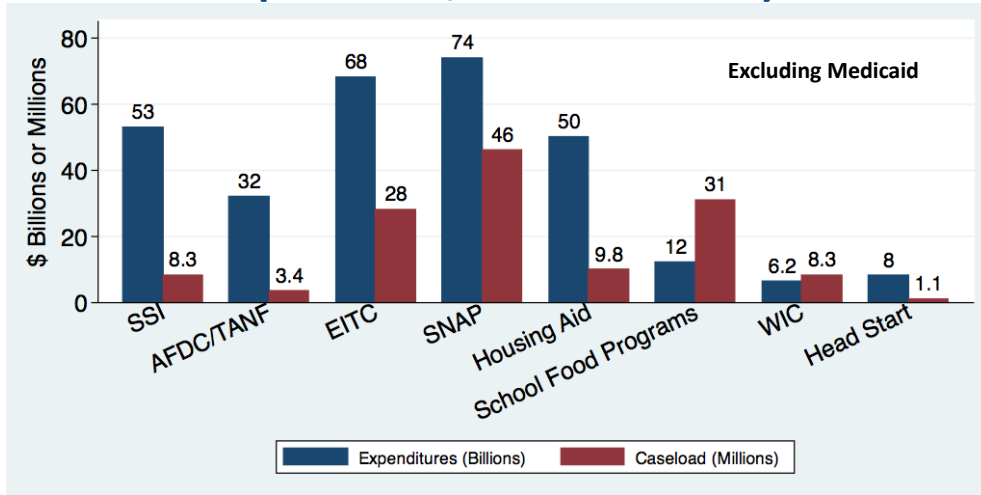
## U.S. Safety Net Expenditures (\$ Billions, 2019) and Caseload (Millions, 2014 or 2015)



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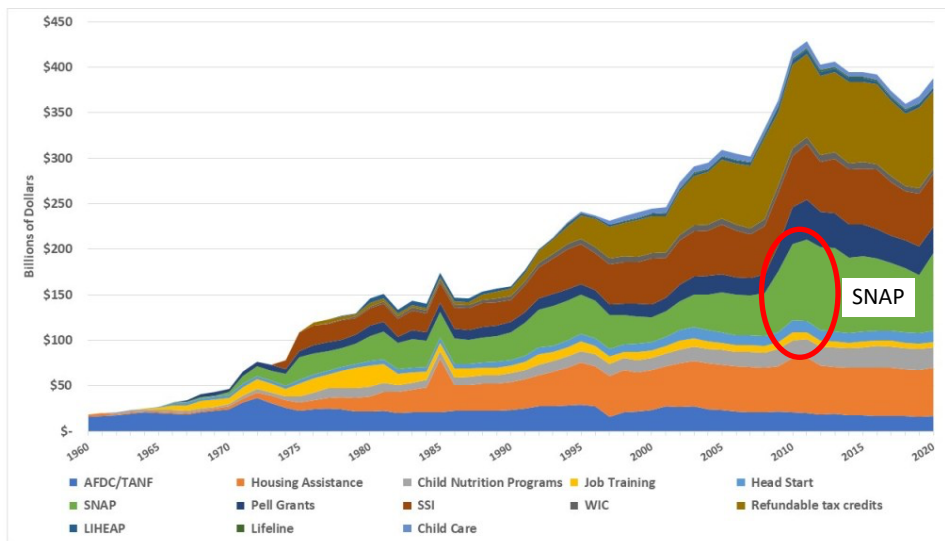


## U.S. Safety Net Expenditures (\$ Billions, 2019) and Caseload (Millions, 2014 or 2015)



17


## Expenditures Over Time (Inflation Adjusted)



18

# 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)



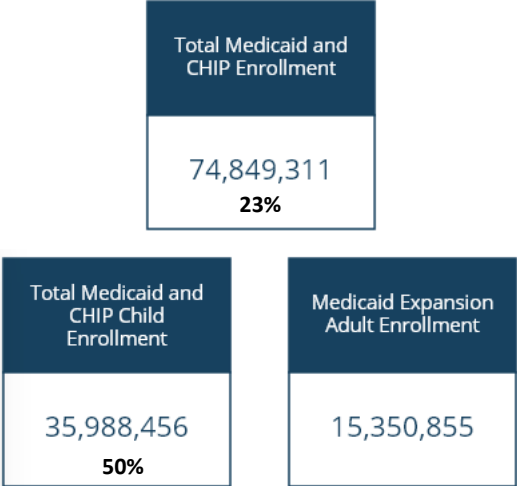
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19

# Eligibility & Enrollment

- **Children**
- **Pregnant women**
- **Very low-income adults**
- **People with disabilities**
- **Elderly, poor adults**



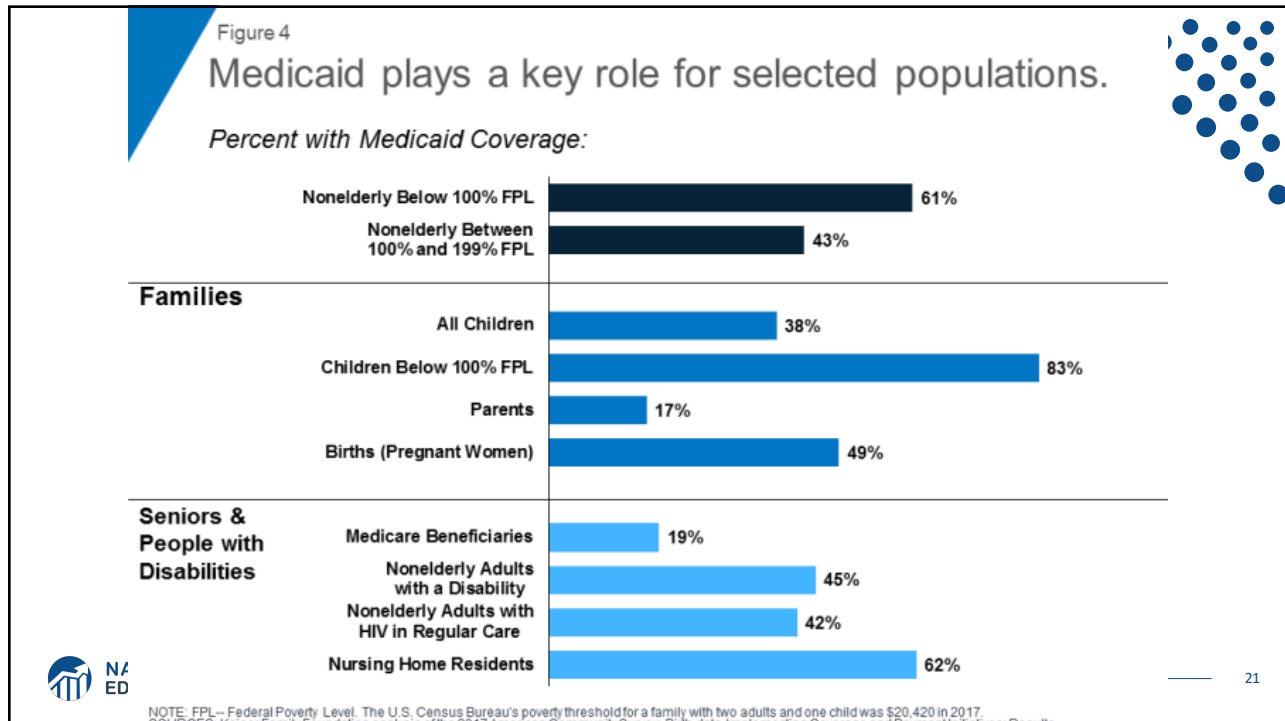
Total Medicaid and CHIP Enrollment	74,849,311	23%
Total Medicaid and CHIP Child Enrollment	35,988,456	50%
Medicaid Expansion Adult Enrollment	15,350,855	



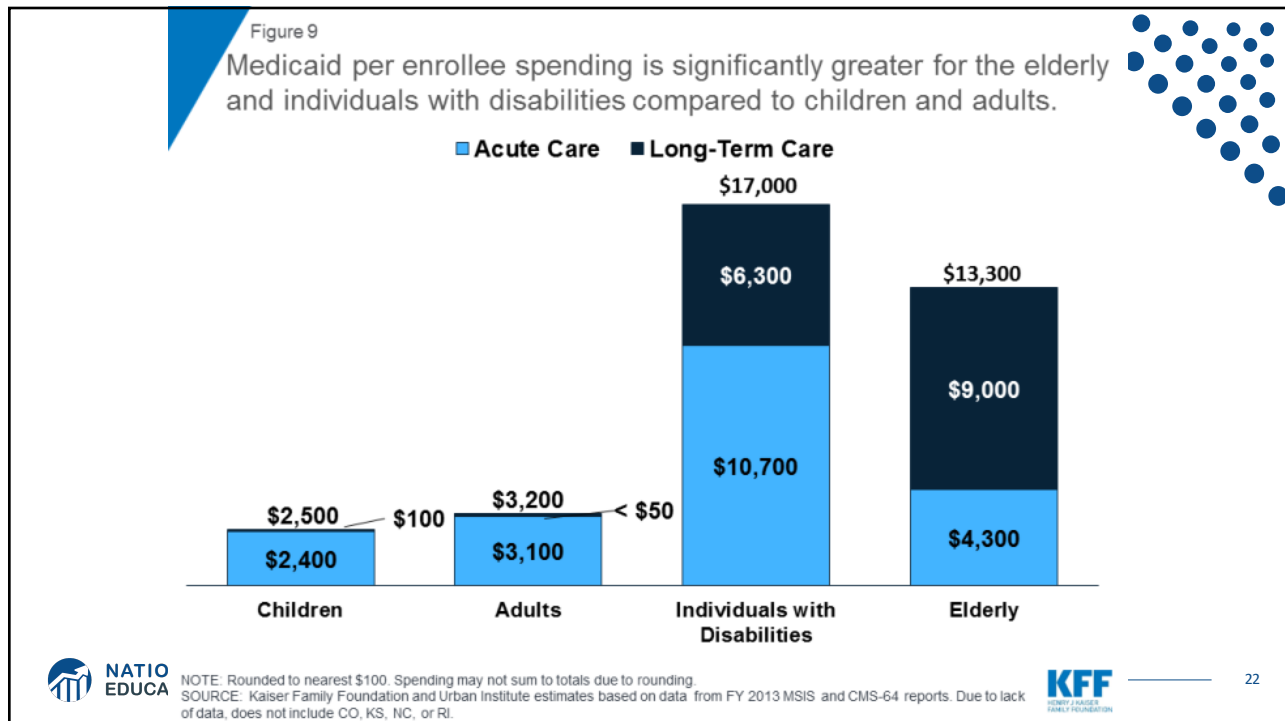
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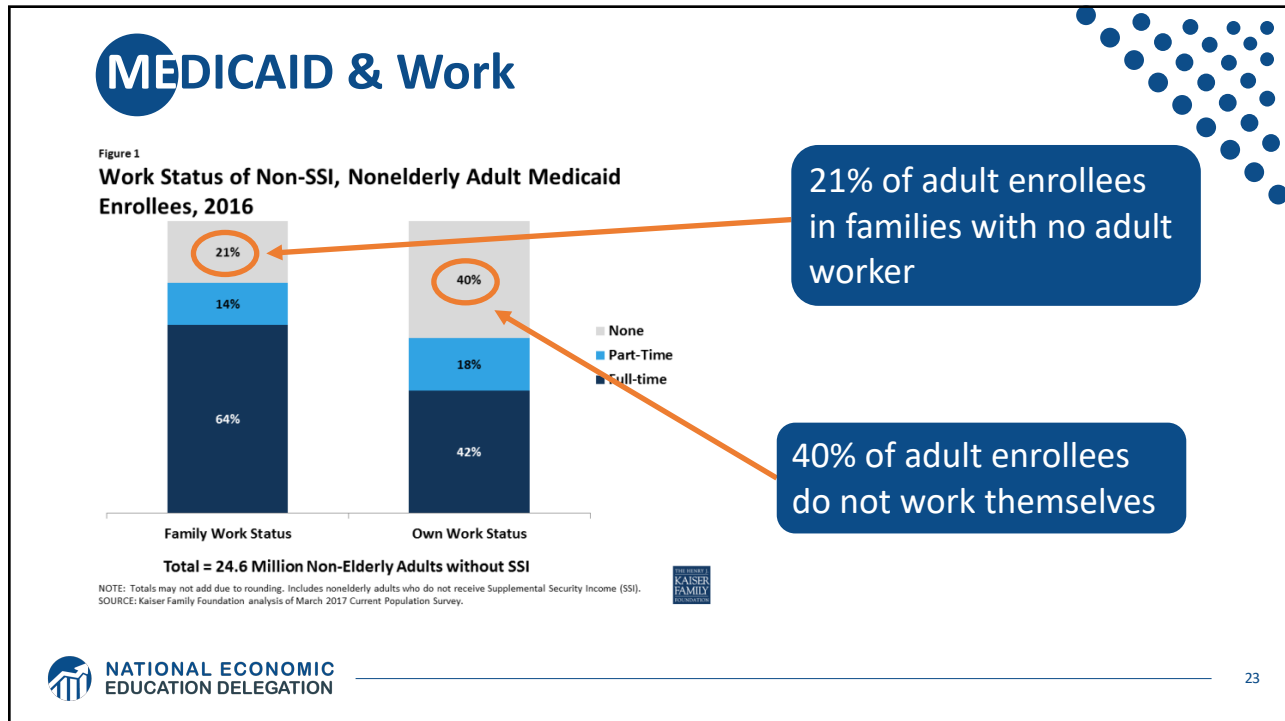
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21



22



23

## Supplemental Security Income (SSI)

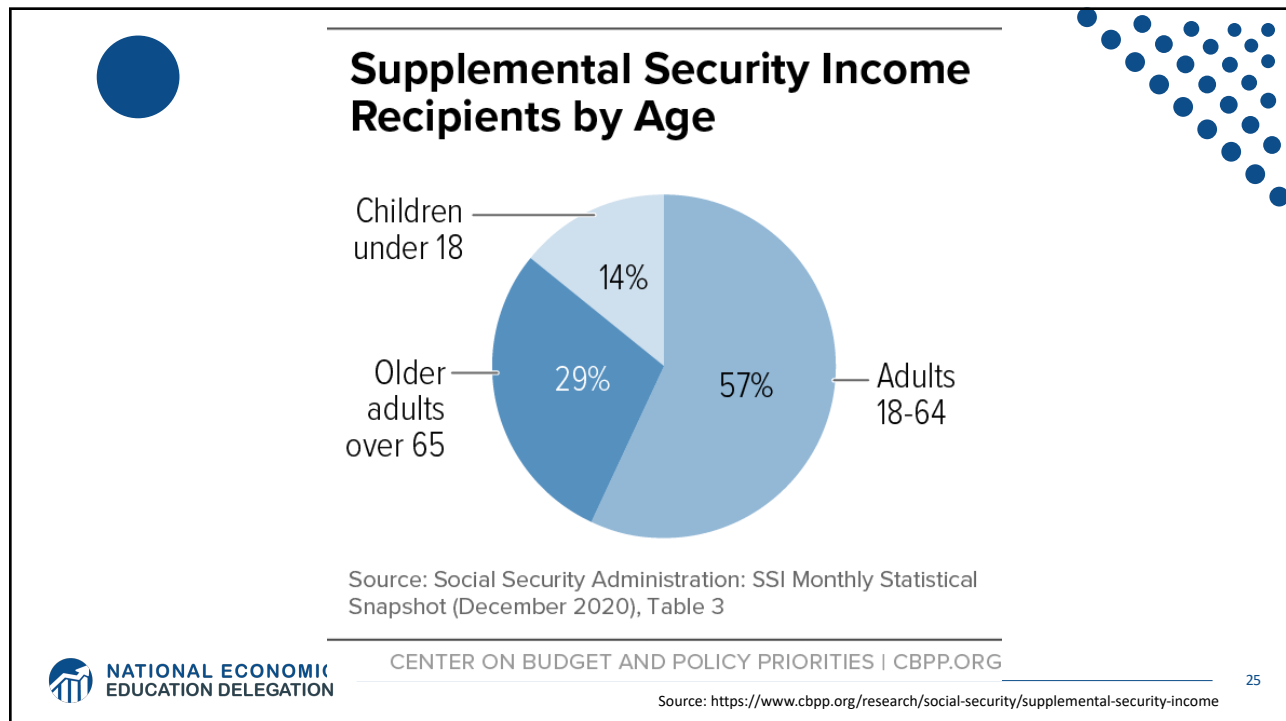
- **Eligibility:** Disabled/blind adults and children with low income; people 65 and older with low income.
- **Participants:** In 2019, **8.1 million** people received SSI.
- **Spending:** Total spending from in 2019 was roughly **\$56 billion**.

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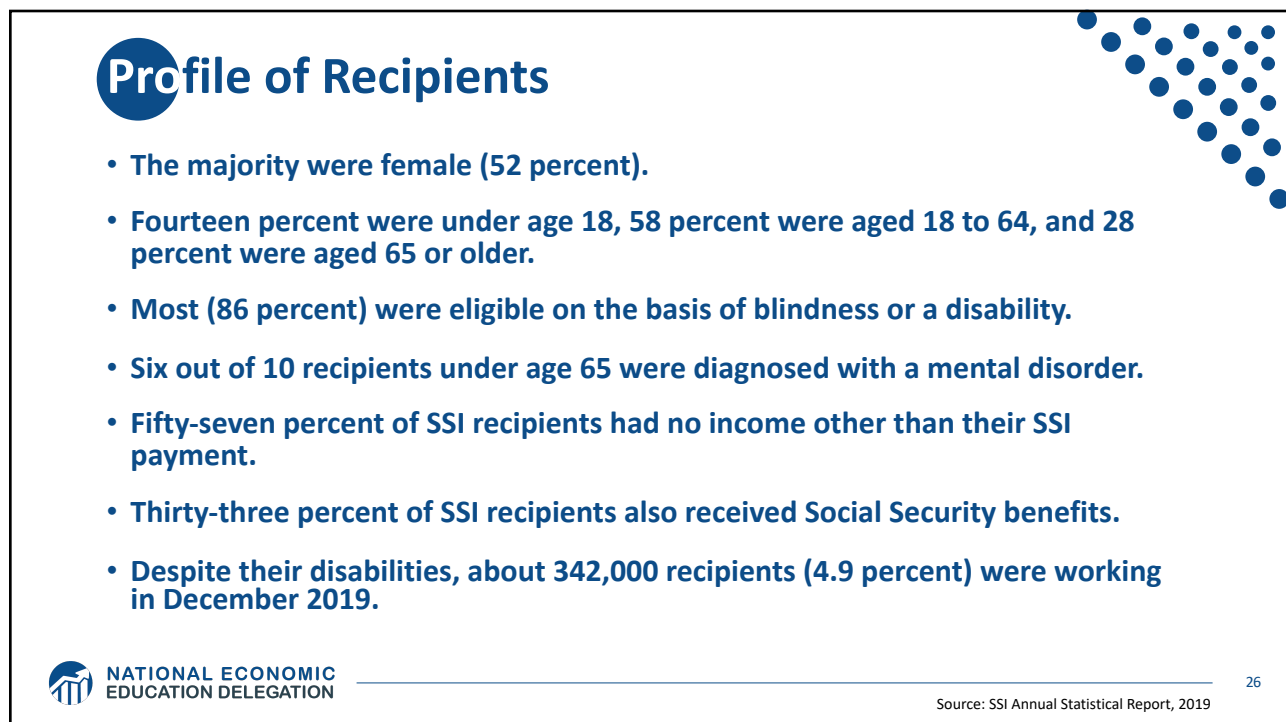
Source: SSI Annual Statistical Report, 2019

24

24



25



26

# TANF: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

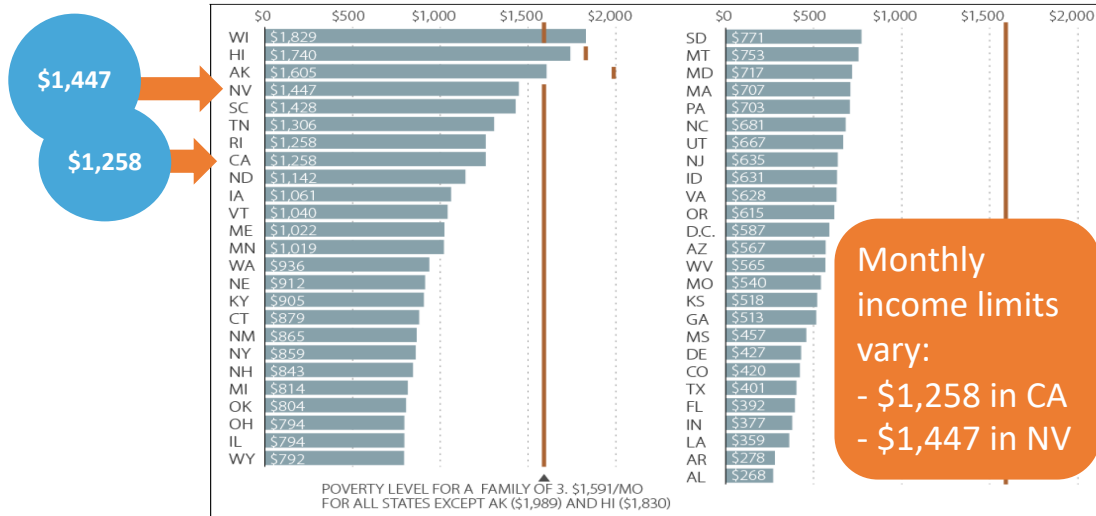
## Formerly AFDC: Aid to Families with Dependent Children

- **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)



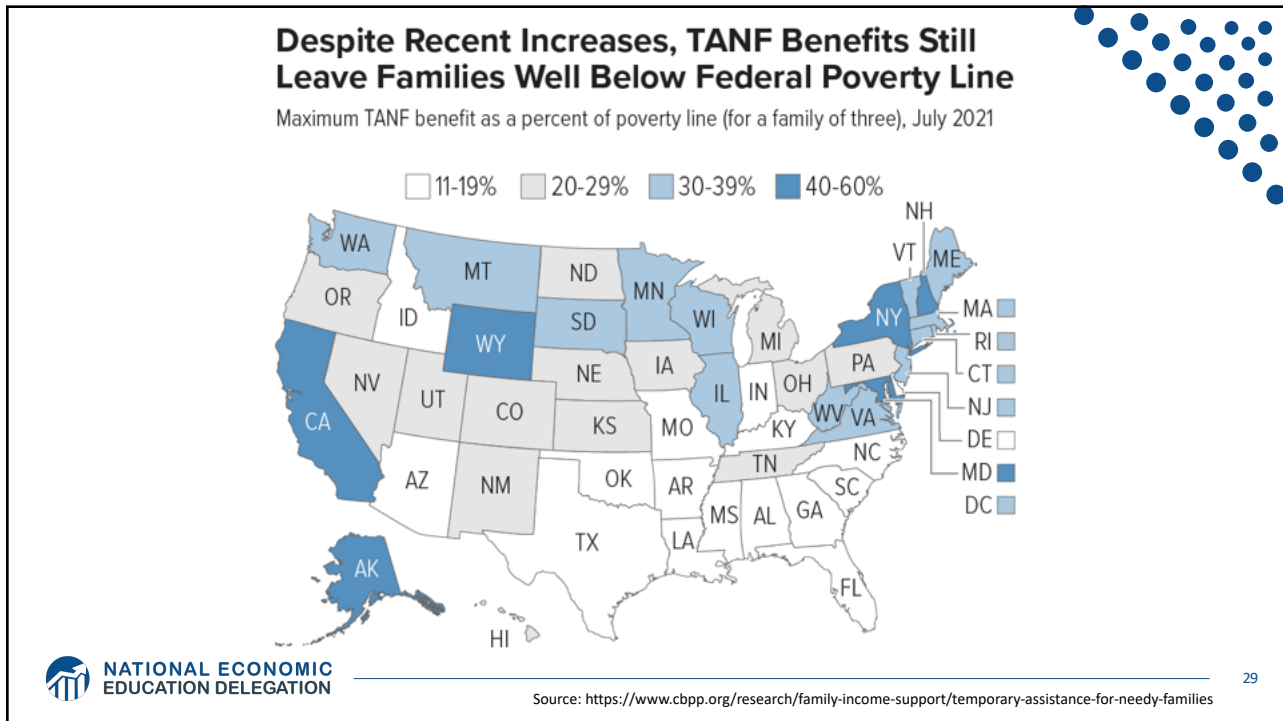
27

**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**

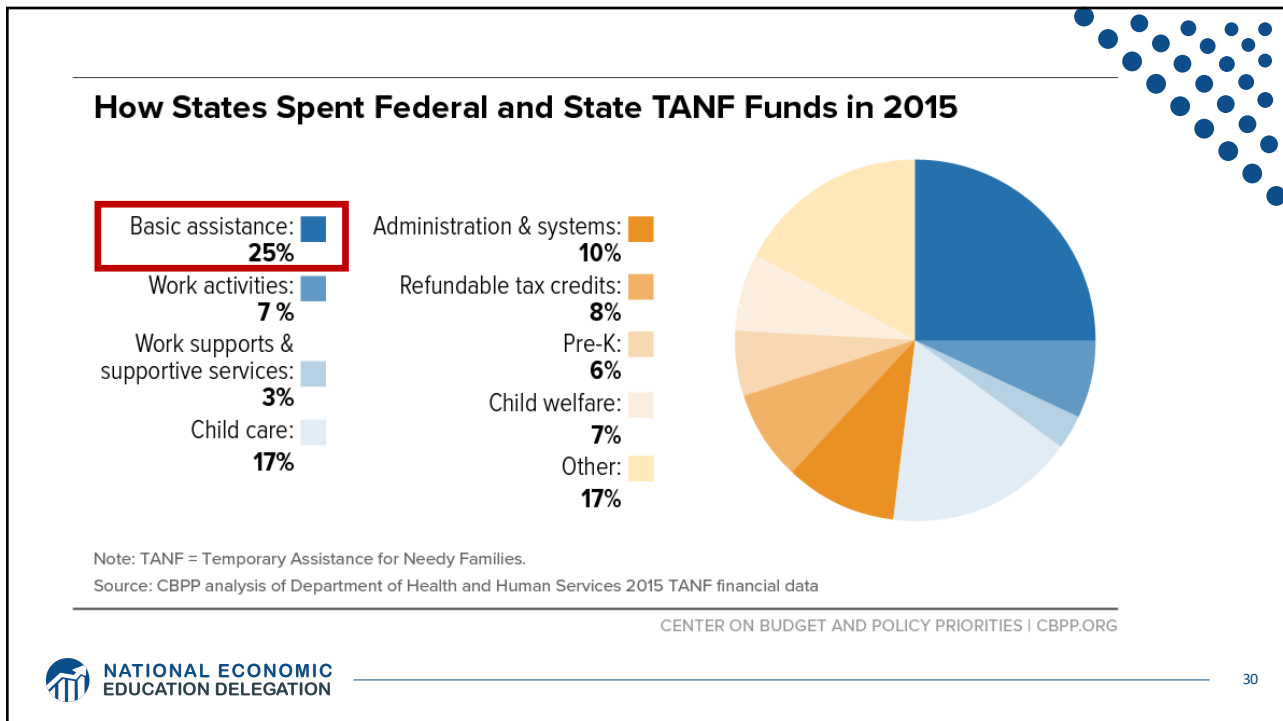


Source: Congressional Research Service (CRS), based on data from the Urban Institute's Welfare Rules Database

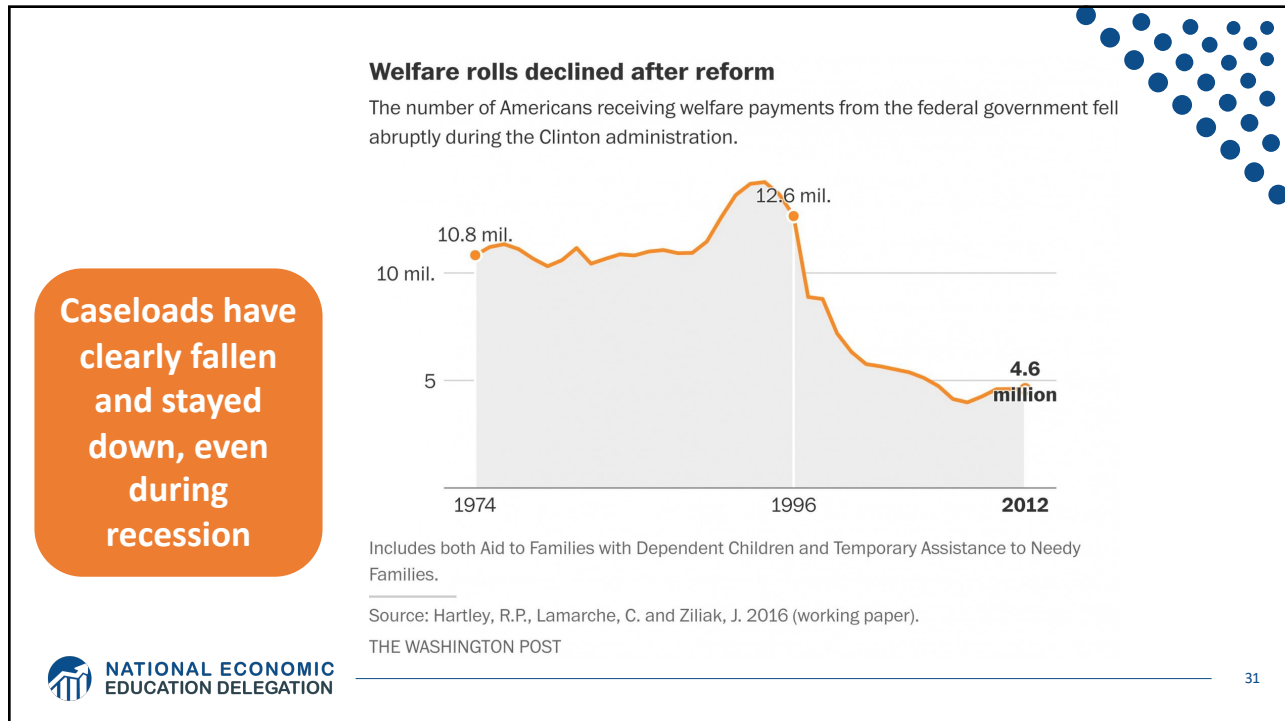
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29



30



31

## 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

32



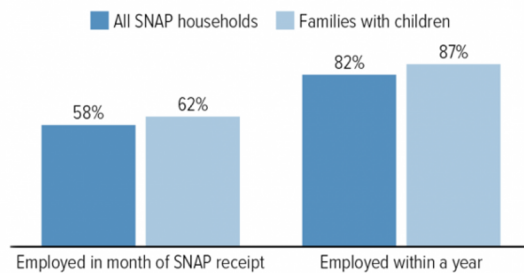
# SNAP: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

- **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**.

# SNAP (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



Most SNAP recipients are employed

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

CENTER ON BUDGET AND POLICY PRIORITIES | CBPP.ORG

## 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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35

35

## 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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36

36

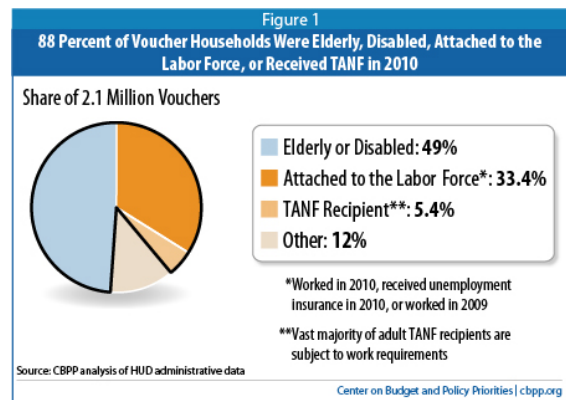
## Participation by Racial Category

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%
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,837,671</b>	<b>99.99%</b>

## 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**

# Social Insurance Programs: Not Means-Tested

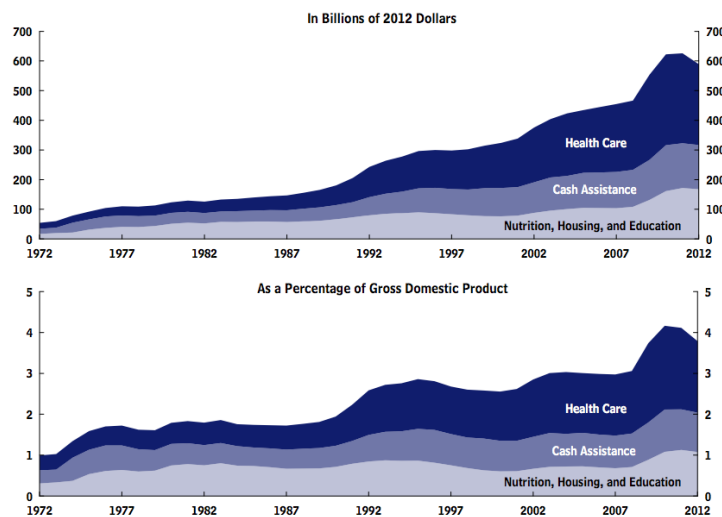
- Social Security (Old Age and Survivors Insurance Program)
- Medicare
- Unemployment Insurance
- Disability Insurance
- Workers' Compensation



41

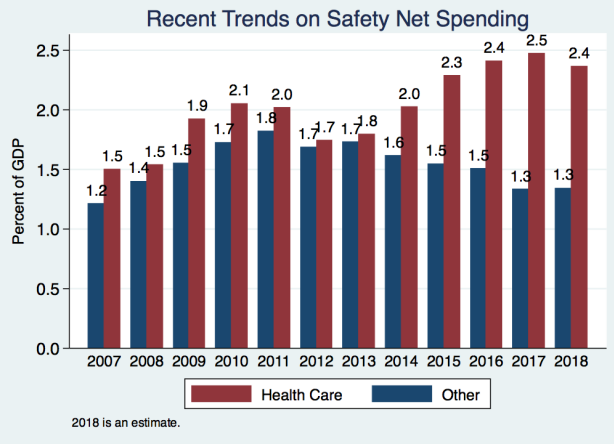
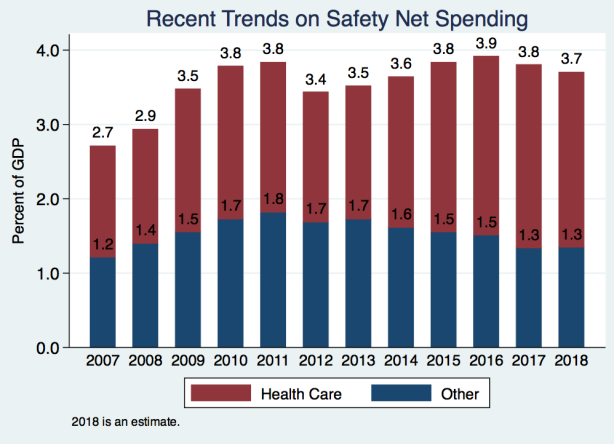
# Expenditures on Means-Tested Transfers over Time

Federal Spending on Various Categories of Means-Tested Programs and Tax Credits, 1972 to 2012



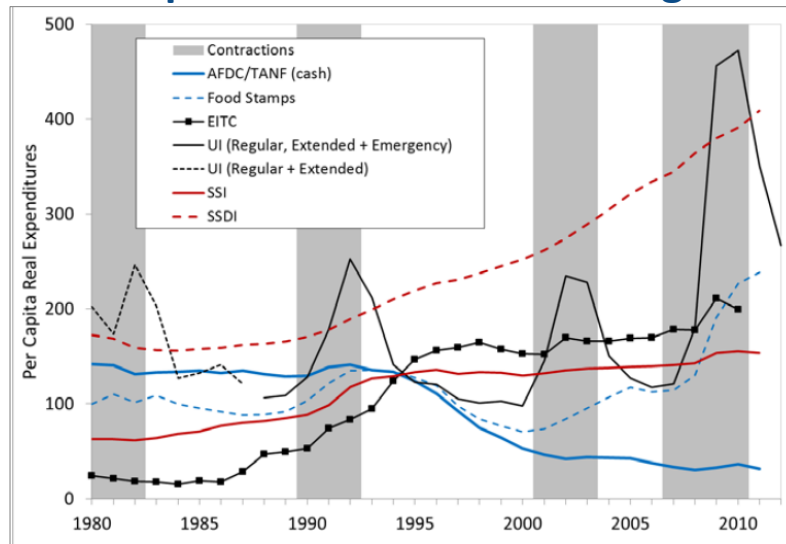
42

## Expenditures on Means-Tested Transfers over Time

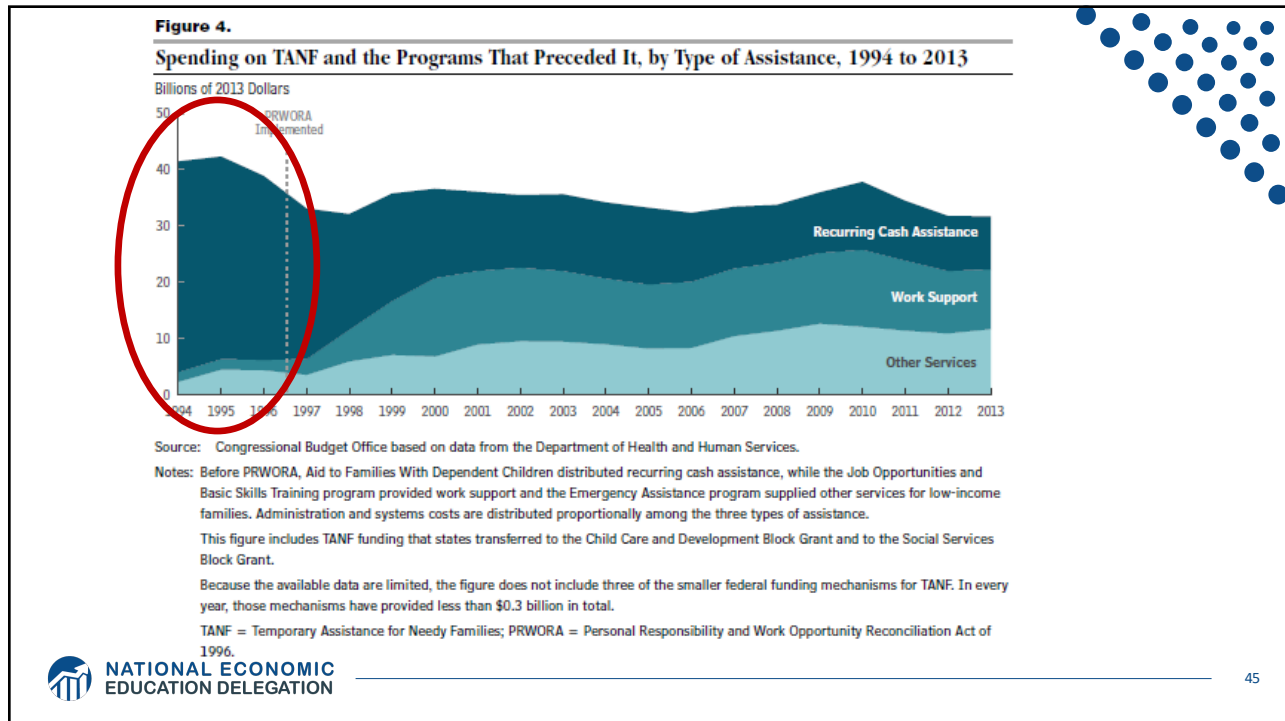


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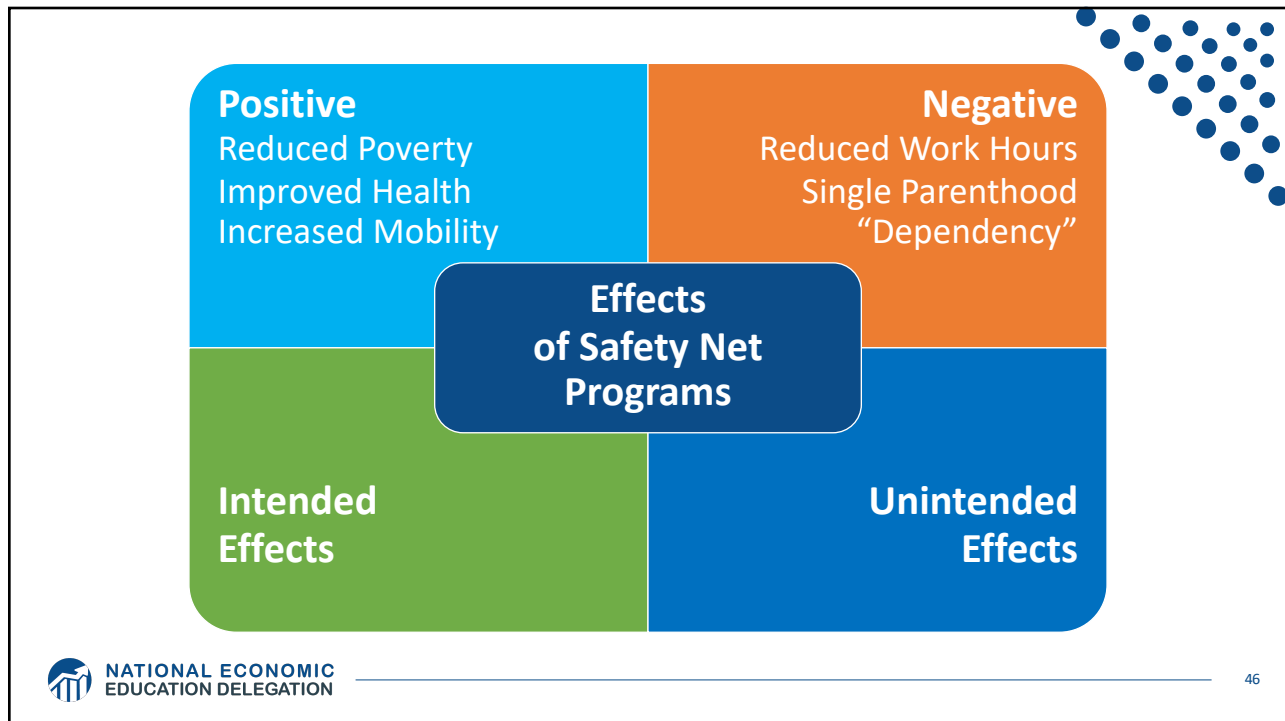
## Expenditures on Specific Means-Tested Programs



44



45



46

# 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.**

47

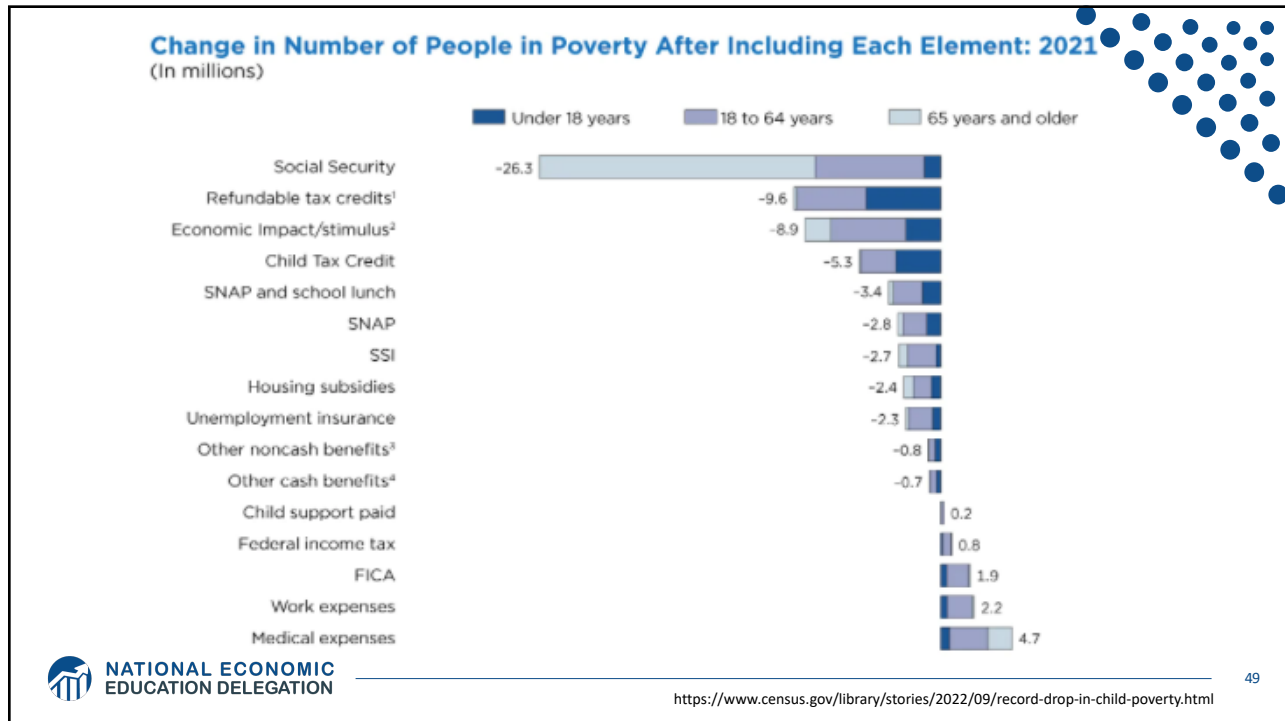
Table 5a.  
**Effect of Individual Elements on SPM Rates: 2015**  
 (Margin of error in percentage points. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see [www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps/techdocs/cpsmar16.pdf](http://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps/techdocs/cpsmar16.pdf))

Element	All people		Under 18 years		18 to 64 years		65 years and over	
	Estimate	Margin of error <sup>1</sup> (±)	Estimate	Margin of error <sup>1</sup> (±)	Estimate	Margin of error <sup>1</sup> (±)	Estimate	Margin of error <sup>1</sup> (±)
<b>All people</b> . . . . .	<b>14.32</b>	<b>0.28</b>	<b>16.11</b>	<b>0.50</b>	<b>13.80</b>	<b>0.30</b>	<b>13.67</b>	<b>0.50</b>
<b>ADDITIONS</b>								
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
<b>SUBTRACTIONS</b>								
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

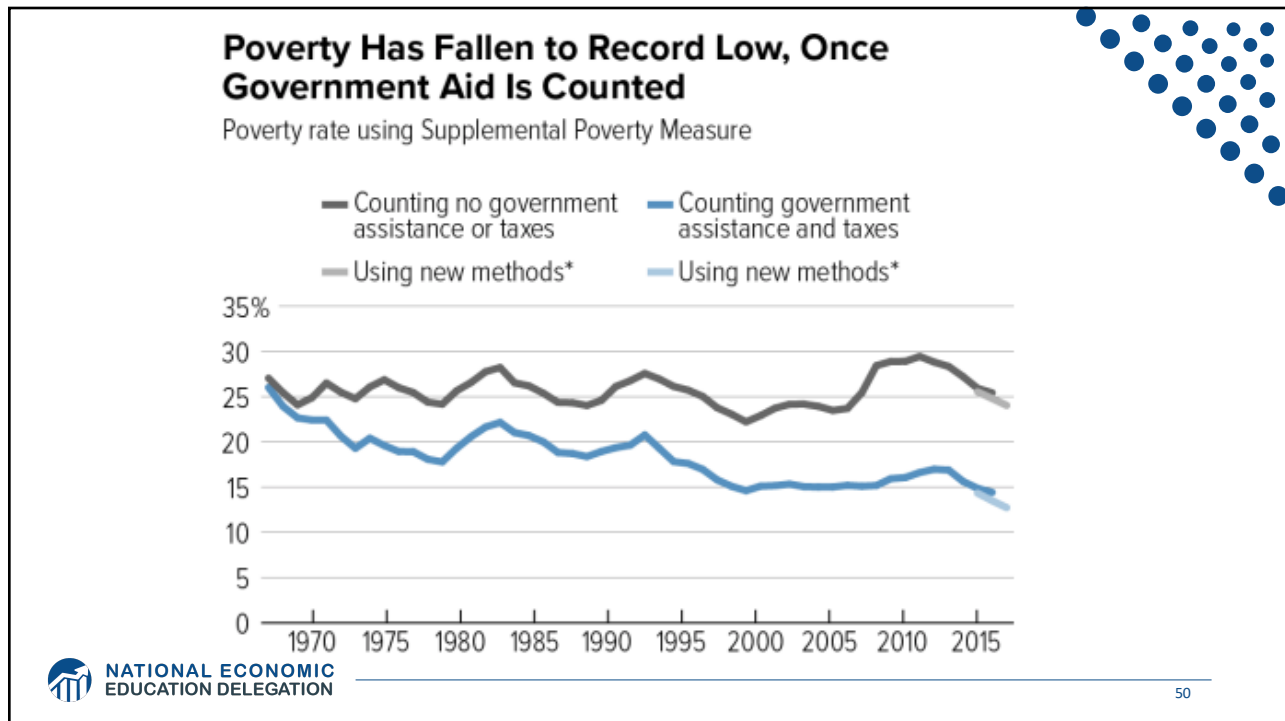
<sup>1</sup> The margin of error (MOE) is a measure of an estimate's variability. The larger the MOE in relation to the size of the estimate, the less reliable the estimate. The MOE is the estimated 90 percent confidence interval. The MOEs shown in this table are based on standard errors calculated using replicate weights. For more information, see "Standard Errors and Their Use" at [www2.census.gov/library/publications/2016/demo/p60-256sa.pdf](http://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.

48

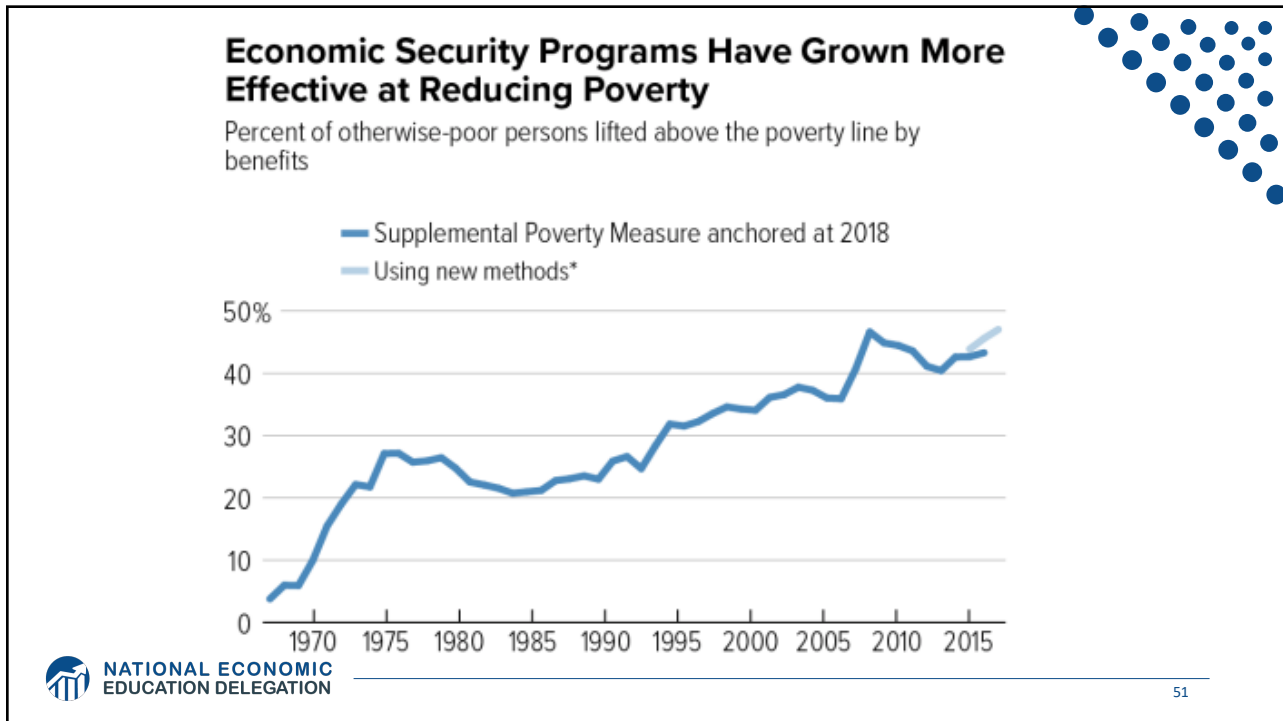




49



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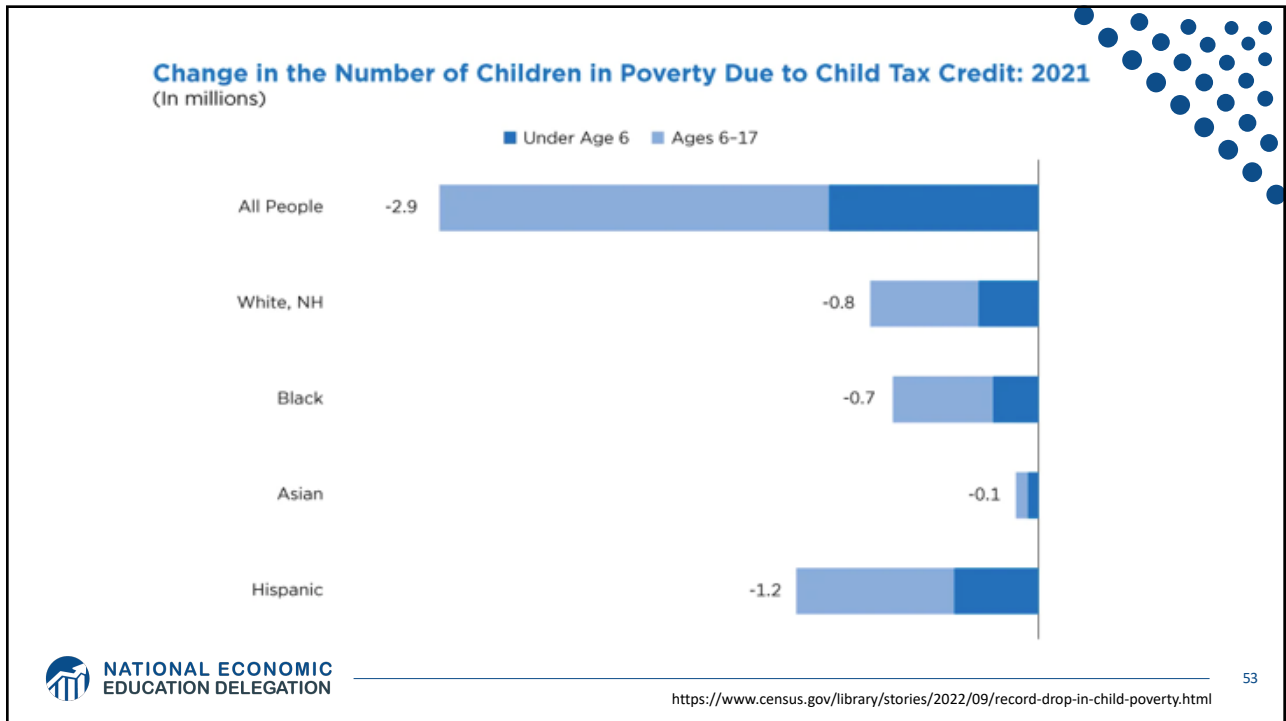
51

# Child Poverty Fell to Record Low 5.2% in 2021

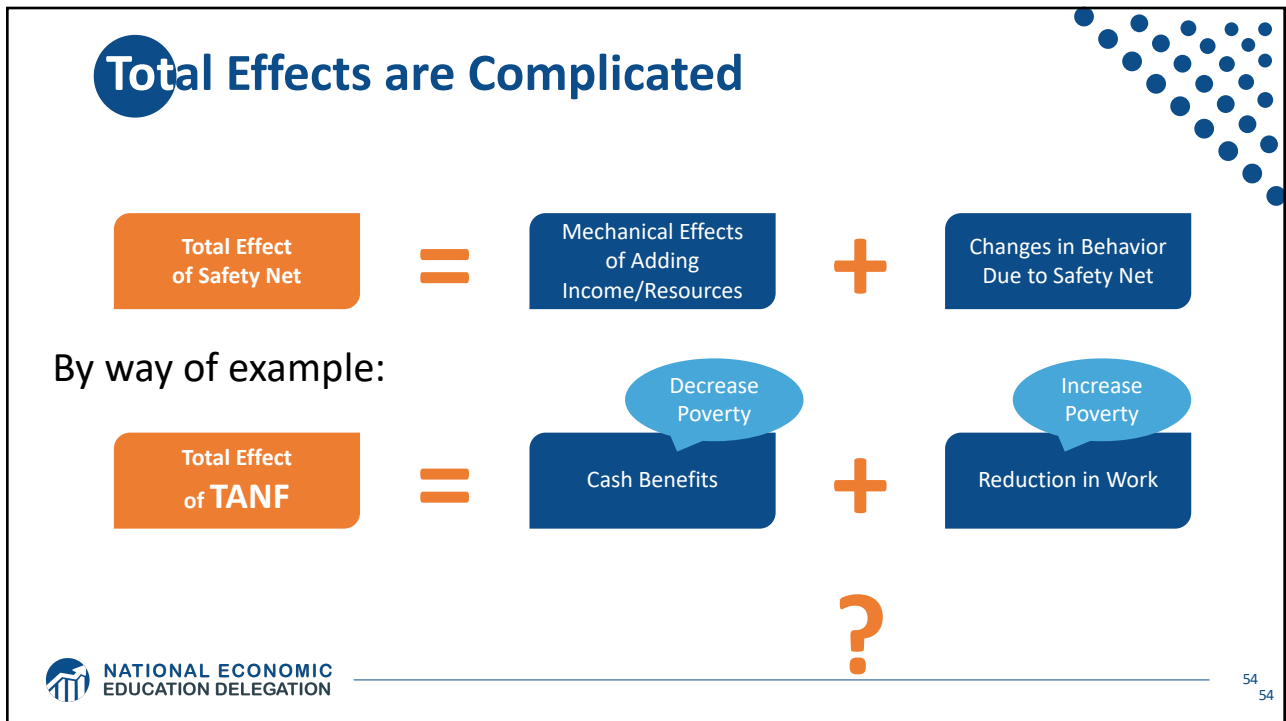
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52

52



53



54

## 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 (associated with Cash Benefits)

Decrease Poverty (associated with Increase in Work)

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55

55

## 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?

Provides benefits

TANF maximum grant

Grant amount falls with earnings

Reduces benefits with earnings

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56

56

## 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)



57

## What do we know about magnitude of work disincentives from welfare?

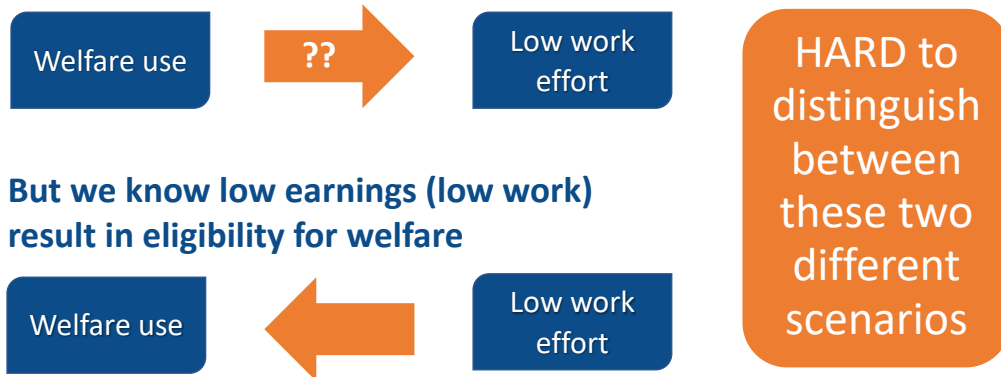
- **Many studies**
- **Basic approach is important**



58

## Challenges to Empirical Studies

Does welfare use cause low work effort?



But we know low earnings (low work) result in eligibility for welfare

59

## What evidence do we have?

What does it say?

“ Studies across states, or across states over time, of policy changes ”  
~ Robert Moffitt (1983)

- AFDC program as a whole reduced hours of work by participating single parents by:

10% to 50%, 546 hours per year

60

## 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 as a whole reduced work for recipients by 571 hours per year



## Welfare (TANF) today

- Adds explicit work requirements to welfare program.
- Increase in employment with welfare reform suggests TANF may have smaller work disincentives than prior programs.



## 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.**

63

## How Big Are Work Disincentives?

Median marginal tax rate, by earnings group



64



## 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.



## 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.



67

## 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)



68

## 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 wont be as inclined to join the workforce
- **Delays Discussion of Job Creation:** may crowd out discussion of job creation or growth for poverty reduction

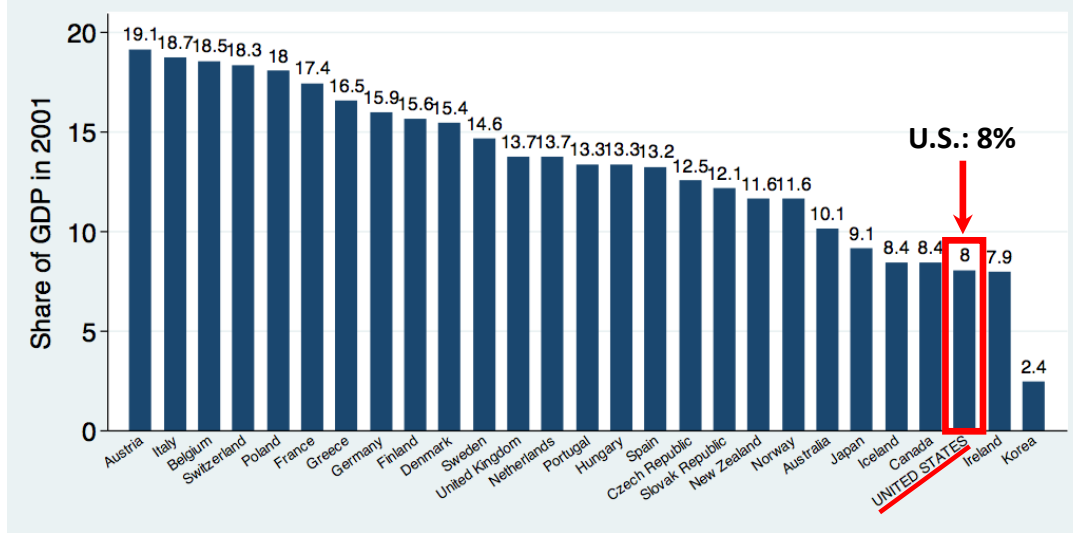


## Summary: U.S. Safety Net

- **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 under measures that fully account for benefits.**



## Safety Net Spending Across the OECD



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Source: World Bank Social Safety Nets Primer Notes

71

71

## November 15: Economic Inequality



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72

72

**Thank you!**

# Any Questions?

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Jon Haveman, Ph.D.

[Jon@NEEDelegation.org](mailto:Jon@NEEDelegation.org)

Contact NEED: [info@NEEDelegation.org](mailto:info@NEEDelegation.org)

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