

RESTORING ACCESS TO THE SAFETY NET

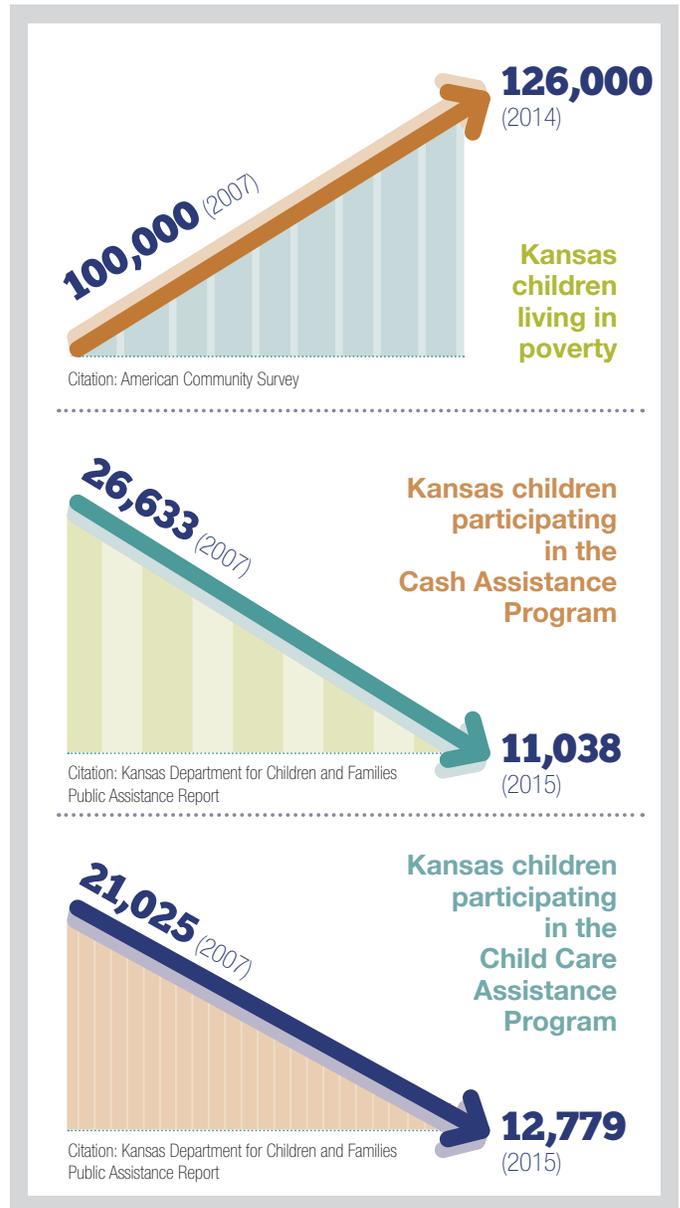
SAFETY NET PROGRAMS SERVE FEWER FAMILIES DESPITE HISTORICALLY HIGH LEVELS OF NEED.

The number of Kansas children living in families with incomes that fall below the federal poverty level (\$20,090 per year for a family of three) continues to linger far above pre-recession levels. **Since 2007, the Kansas childhood poverty rate has risen 20%.** However, the state safety net is reaching fewer and fewer families in need of assistance. In 2007—prior to the Great Recession—26,633 Kansas children were in families that received cash assistance. By 2015, the number of poor Kansas families grew but the number of Kansas children receiving cash assistance dropped by more than half, to 11,038.

STATE POLICY CHANGES PREVENT FAMILIES FROM USING SAFETY NET PROGRAMS.

Recent state policy changes prevent safety net programs from reaching the families they are intended to help. In 2015, Kansas created additional barriers to accessing safety net programs. The “HOPE Act” legislation:

- » **Shortened cash assistance eligibility for families to three years in their lifetime.** Cutting off a family's cash assistance before they find work means children live in households that cannot afford necessities like food, diapers, clothing, or rent.
- » **Increased work requirements for mothers of infants.** A newborn child's first year of life is a critical period for healthy brain development. Kansas should do everything possible to ensure the youngest, poorest children live in households with the resources to meet infants' needs.¹
- » **Codified cross-program “sanctions” into law, which can jeopardize a family's well-being by ending eligibility for assistance following a minor infraction of administrative policy.** Research shows that sanctioned families in the cash assistance program are more likely to experience hunger, eviction, homelessness, utility shutoff, or an inability to receive medical care due to cost.²
- » **Restricted Kansas families from spending cash assistance across state lines, or from withdrawing cash assistance from ATMs more than once per day.** This may prohibit prudent practices like comparison shopping, and may especially harm families trying to relocate during a crisis. Unnecessary limits on spending cash assistance weaken the program's ability to ensure families can meet their basic needs.



Short term, the legislation may further reduce the number of Kansas families with children who access safety net programs. Long term, policymakers increased the likelihood that today's poor children will become tomorrow's poor adults.

PARTICIPATING IN SAFETY NET PROGRAMS IMPROVES OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES.

Safety net programs benefit kids and Kansas as a whole. Investing in the state's youngest, poorest citizens sets the stage for them to flourish as adults. Research shows that children's early years play a significant role in shaping their life trajectory. In the long run, safety net program participation leads to better outcomes for children and families. Income supports, like the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, serve as a critical hand up for families. Just \$3,000 in additional annual income for a poor family correlates to a 17% boost in earnings when children grow up. Children in families with additional income also perform better in school and work more hours as adults. Children in families with fewer resources available complete fewer years of school, work and earn less as adults, experience poorer health, and are more likely to use safety net supports.³ In short, ensuring Kansas families who need assistance can get it is good for kids and good for Kansas.

Studies confirm that children do better when safety net programs help meet their basic needs:

- » Children who participate in the **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)** experience improved health and economic self-sufficiency over a lifetime.⁴
- » Children insured by **Medicaid** are much more likely to graduate from high school and complete college, become healthy adults, and achieve economic success.⁵
- » **Child Care Assistance** helps families afford high-quality early education. High-quality early learning results in higher test scores, reduces behavioral problems, lowers rates of grade repetition, and improves employment opportunities and earnings for children.⁶

KANSAS SHOULD CHANGE COURSE AND MAKE SURE THAT THE STATE SAFETY NET REACHES FAMILIES IN NEED.

Kansas policymakers can strengthen the safety net in the following ways:

- » **Repeal policies** preventing families who earn very little money, and Kansans who struggle to find work, from qualifying for programs designed to help people make ends meet. **Struggling families should lose access to the cash assistance program if they need assistance for more than 36 months in their lifetime.**
- » **Ensure cash assistance serves the youngest Kansans** by repealing work requirements that discourage pregnant mothers and mothers with infants from participating in the program. The high cost of infant child care and the unpredictability of scheduling for low-wage jobs makes stringent work requirements especially difficult for parents of infants. Kansas should lengthen the amount of time new mothers are exempt from the work requirement after giving birth to 12 months.
- » **Lift unnecessary barriers to spending cash assistance** that prevent Kansans from making out-of-state purchases with cash assistance or from withdrawing cash assistance from an ATM more than once per day.
- » **Focus federal funds** from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families on the core functions of the program—cash assistance, child care assistance, and employment services—so program participants can successfully obtain jobs that will lift their families out of poverty.

Kansas needs a strong safety net to meet the needs of children and families. The safety net should respond to increasing need in the state so children grow up in households with food on the table, a roof over their heads, clothing to wear, and money to pay the heating bill. Modifying recent policies to expand safety net access will empower Kansans to meet their basic needs and give children the chance to succeed in life.

¹ Elizabeth Lower-Basch and Stephanie Schmit, "TANF and the First Year of Life: Making a Difference at a Pivotal Moment," Center for Law and Social Policy, October 2015, http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/body/TANF-and-the-First-Year-of-Life_Making-a-Difference-at-a-Pivotal-Moment.pdf

² Nancy E. Reichman, Julien O. Teitler, and Marah A. Curtis, "TANF Sanctioning and Hardship," The University of Chicago Social Service Review, June 2005, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/428918?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

³ Greg J. Duncan and Katherine Magnuson, "The Long Reach of Early Childhood Poverty," Pathways Magazine, Stanford University, Winter 2011, https://web.stanford.edu/group/scspi/_media/pdf/pathways/winter_2011/PathwaysWinter11_Duncan.pdf

⁴ Hilary W. Hoynes, Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach, and Douglas Almond, "Long Run Impacts of Childhood Access to the Safety Net," National Bureau of Economic Research, November 2012, <http://www.nber.org/papers/w18535>

⁵ Alisa Chester and Joan Alker, "Medicaid at 50: A Look at the Long-Term Benefits of Childhood Medicaid," Georgetown University Health Policy Institute Center for Children and Families, July 2015, <http://ccf.georgetown.edu/ccf-resources/medicaid-50-look-long-term-benefits-childhood-medicaid/>

⁶ "The First Eight Years: Giving Kids a Foundation for Lifetime Success," The Annie E. Casey Foundation, November 2013, <http://www.aecf.org/resources/the-first-eight-years-giving-kids-a-foundation-for-lifetime-success/> Greg J. Duncan and Katherine Magnuson, "The Long Reach of Early Childhood Poverty," Pathways Magazine, Stanford University, Winter 2011, https://web.stanford.edu/group/scspi/_media/pdf/pathways/winter_2011/PathwaysWinter11_Duncan.pdf