Data Appendix

State Safety Net Database v3

July 2026

Citation:

Please cite any use of the State Safety Net Database.

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Purpose:

Simulate welfare generosity across states over time for a constant sample of families using federal and state

program rules.

Approach:

Overview. The state safety net database is generated using state and federal safety net program rules for tax credits, the TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) program, SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), SSI (Supplemental Security Income), and Medicaid. The rules for these programs are applied to a constant simulated sample of families as if that sample lived in each state and year and as if they claimed the full benefit amount for which they were eligible. Because the simulated sample of families is held fixed, differences across states and over time reflect changes in federal and state rules, not changes in economic circumstances of families. Benefit amounts in dollars are averaged by state and year and reported as an index of generosity in thousands of 2024 dollars. Medicaid eligibility is reported as a percentage of individuals in a family that are covered.

Updates. This update improves the constant simulated sample relative to the earlier version in important ways. First, the sample now includes two-parent married families and cohabiting-partner families alongside single-parent families. Second, the sample now includes families with disabled adults or children. The earlier version excluded families with any work-limiting disability. The underlying simulated sample is now based on pooled 2015-2019 data. As before, families including immigrants are excluded from the simulated sample.

The policy calculator also contains improvements. We added two new safety net programs—SSI and Medicaid—and significantly improved the benefits calculator for other safety net programs. Policy years 2023 and 2024 have been added, and values are now reported in 2024 dollars. Because of significant changes to the simulated sample and the policy calculator, users should not use both versions at the same time.

Simulated Sample. 2015-2019 Annual Social and Economic Supplements of the Current Population Survey (CPS), pooled and weighted using survey weights. Included families have at least one child under age 18, no members 65 or older, and no immigrant members.

Unlike the earlier version, this sample now includes three family structure types with children: (a) single-parent families with children, defined as an unmarried reference person with no cohabiting partner; (b) two-parent married families with children, defined as a married reference person and spouse; and (c) cohabiting-partner families with children, defined as an unmarried reference person with a cohabiting partner. Children under age 19 residing in the household are included in the benefit unit, as are any additional children ages 19–23 who are full-time students. For individuals who are disabled, the age 19 cutoff is replaced with age 24. Only children with at least one biological parent in the family are included in the sample. Other household members are disregarded for the purposes of benefit calculations.

The simulated sample is replicated as if families lived in each state and in each year 2001 through 2024. Earnings are based on prior calendar year reported income and inflation- adjusted so that the real value is the same in each simulated year for a given family. Thus, the simulated sample has a consistent distribution of demographic characteristics and real earnings for each state and year, so that output differences across states and over time stem only from changing program rules.

Disability is identified in the CPS using self-reported SSI recipiency, the self-reported work-limiting disability variables for adults age 15 and up, and age-appropriate disability variables for children. The CPS disability measure is an imperfect proxy for SSA's formal disability determination process. As a result, the simulation will capture some families who report a work disability but who would not pass SSA's medical review, and may miss some individuals whose conditions do not limit work as reporte

Tax credit calculation. We use the National Bureau of Economic Research TAXSIM test program (https://taxsim.nber.org/taxsimtest/) in years 2001-2020 to impute federal EITC, state EITC, and the refundable portion of the Child Tax Credit for each family based on their family structure, earnings, and simulated state and year. We use PolicyEngine's TAXSIM replacement (https://www.policyengine.org/us/taxsim) in years 2021-2024. We do not incorporate sources of income other than earnings into the calculation of taxes and benefits. We include only the refundable portion of the Child Tax Credit (the Additional Child Tax Credit) in the generosity index; the downloadable data also includes the nonrefundable portion of the Child Tax Credit. Note that in 2021 the CTC was fully refundable, and therefore the full amount is reported as part of the ACTC. For the downloadable data, we also include a measure of net refundable tax credits, which are defined as the absolute value of tax liability for families with negative tax liability, and zero otherwise.

TANF calculation. We impute monthly TANF benefits for families by coding state-year-specific information from the Urban Institute Welfare Rules Database (https://wrd.urban.org/). First, we check whether families meet TANF eligibility standards for new applicants based on earnings and family structure. If so, we impute benefits assuming they are in their first month of program participation on July 1 of the relevant year. When there are multiple sets of rules within a state, we use those that apply to the majority of the population. Families are assumed to fully access the TANF program to the extent possible based on their earnings and family structure. TANF rules through 2023 are drawn from the 2023 release of the Welfare Rules Database; rules for 2024 are carried forward from 2023 where updates are not yet available.

SNAP calculation. We impute SNAP eligibility according to federal rules on July 1st of the relevant year using earnings and family structure. TANF income is considered part of income when determining SNAP eligibility, so SNAP benefits are reduced for families that are imputed to be TANF-eligible. Pandemic-era SNAP emergency allotments (in effect April 2020 through 2022, with state-specific phase-out dates) are incorporated for simulation years 2020-2022. Pandemic EBT is not considered part of the SNAP program for the purposes of the index.

SSI calculation. We impute monthly SSI eligibility and benefit amounts for disabled adults and families with disabled children, applying the federal Supplemental Security Income rules and each state's Supplementary Payment or the relevant year. The Federal Benefit Rate and State Supplementary Payment amounts by state and year are drawn from SSA administrative data. Certain states provide supplements generous enough that some individuals qualify for the state supplement even when federal SSI eligibility is not met; these state-only eligible cases are included in the simulation.

Medicaid calculation. We impute Medicaid eligibility separately for adults and children using state-year-specific income thresholds, with distinct rules for the pre-ACA period (simulation years 2001– 2013) and the post-ACA period (2014–2023). Medicaid provides insurance coverage rather than a cash transfer, so we do not impute a dollar benefit value. We calculate the share of adults and children eligible for Medicaid in each family.

For simulation years 2001–2013, we apply pre-ACA rules under which eligibility depends on categorical status: parents are assessed against working and non-working income thresholds, disabled adults against state disability income limits, and children against age-specific tiers ranging from 75 to 400 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL), with earned income disregards applied to the income measure. For 2014 and later, we apply post-ACA rules that replace this structure with a single MAGI-based income standard — one threshold for parents, one for non-parents (covering childless adults in expansion states at or below 138 percent of FPL), and a single cutoff applied uniformly to all children regardless of age.

Indices. All annual benefit levels for the simulated sample are averaged by state-year, state-year-family type, state-year-disability, or state-year-family type-disability, and converted to 2024 dollars. The first cash index sums TANF, SSI as well as the federal EITC, state EITC, and refundable portion of the CTC. An alternative, second cash index sums TANF, SSI and federal and state income tax credits (net refundable). The food index is the average imputed SNAP benefit in the state-year. The combined cash + food index uses the first version of the cash index. The average fraction of adults and fraction of children in a family with Medicaid eligibility are included as well. The indices do not measure benefit amounts for any particular family, but reflect a measure of generosity of the safety net rules. Administrative burdens or other reasons for incomplete take-up are not considered.

Cash v1 (*cashv1 = TANF + SSI + Federal EITC + State EITC + ACTC)*

Cash v2 (*cashv2 = TANF + SSI + Federal and state income tax credit (net refundable))*

Cash + Food (*cashfood = SNAP + TANF + SSI + Federal EITC + State EITC + ACTC)*

Datasets available for download.

Sna_styr_v3	state, year
Sna_styr_v3_fam	state, year, family type
Sna_styr_v3_dis	state, year, any disability
Sna_styr_v3_famdis	state, year, family type, any disability

Variables.

Year

State

Family type

Any disability (0/1)

SNAP

TANF

SSI

Federal EITC

State EITC

ACTC

CTC

Cash v1

Cash v2

State income tax credits (sii_credit)

Federal income tax credits (fii_credit)

Federal and state income tax credits (fii_sii_credit)

Average family share of adults eligible for Medicaid

Average family share of children eligible for Medicaid

Cash + Food (SNAP + TANF + SSI + tax credits)

State directed (State EITC + TANF)

Federally directed (Federal EITC, ACTC, SNAP)

In addition, a version of the indices and variables that represent the purchasing power of benefits in states is available starting in 2008. Index values are adjusted using a state-specific cost of living index, the Bureau of Economic Analysis Regional Price Parities 2024 series (https://www.bea.gov/data/pricesinflation/regional-price-parities-state-and-metro-area). These variables include the _rs prefix.

Additional information:

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