

The most effective cash programs are rooted in trust and dignity

Our principles for direct cash assistance put people first

Direct cash is the most flexible, efficient, and cost-effective way to support every community across Washington, eliminate racial disparities in economic opportunity, and create true shared prosperity. Washington's few cash assistance programs are underfunded, and many of them operate in a way that is punitive and suspicious of people who are seeking support, through burdensome work and application requirements. To be most equitable and effective, direct cash assistance programs in Washington need to be rooted in trust and dignity and provide meaningful income support. To do that, policy makers should adhere to eleven principles when designing direct cash programs.

PRINCIPLES FOR DIRECT CASH ASSISTANCE

1. Community led
2. Honors tribal sovereignty and the leadership of Native people
3. Targeted
4. Inclusive
5. Unconditional
6. Unrestricted
7. Recurring
8. Sufficient
9. Accessible
10. Complementary to existing supports
11. Protected from extraction and exploration

Our North Star

Establishing an income floor in Washington through unrestricted direct cash payments that allow everyone to meet their basic needs and put food on the table, regardless of their ZIP code, skin color, immigration status, or ability.

Direct cash has proven impacts

Research on direct cash shows significant improvements in people's health, housing stability, education, and employment outcomes.^{1, 2, 3, 4, 5}

Direct cash programs in Washington

- + **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families** is a federal program, administered by the state, which provides lifeline support for families experiencing deep poverty.
- + **The Working Families Tax Credit** is a state tax credit which provides an annual cash boost to people and families with low to moderate incomes across Washington.
- + **Guaranteed Basic Income** is a form of direct cash assistance which provides recurring cash payments with no strings attached, and which has been shown to increase wellbeing, financial stability, and health outcomes for participants. While several smaller pilots exist, lawmakers have yet to invest in a statewide program.

Principles for Direct Cash Assistance

Principle 1: Community led

Communities impacted by past and current policies that were designed to exploit and exclude certain populations should take the lead in developing new policies to reduce poverty. These communities understand the problems intimately, and they know what changes are needed and most effective. When programs do not center the people who are impacted by policy choices, they can be ineffective and harmful and even exacerbate existing disparities.

Principle 2: Honors tribal sovereignty and the leadership of Native people

Policymakers should respect the leadership and self-governance of tribal nations and communities and work with tribal leaders when designing direct cash programs. It is important to recognize how public assistance systems have exploited and harmed Indigenous people in the past and present, and how repercussions are felt today.

Principle 3: Targeted

To increase equity, direct cash programs should target people with the highest level of need, especially those who have been systematically excluded from opportunities to build financial stability and wealth. This includes Black, Indigenous, and people of color, as well as people who:

- ▶ Are LGBTQIA2S+;
- ▶ Have a disability or behavioral health condition;
- ▶ Are experiencing homelessness;
- ▶ Were formerly incarcerated;
- ▶ Are exiting the foster care system; and/or
- ▶ Are an immigrant, refugee, or asylee.

Principle 4: Inclusive

Eligibility criteria must not exclude anyone based on criminal history, immigration status, work participation, or household make-up. These exclusions are rooted in racism, paternalism, and outdated notions of family composition that have no place in our public programs.

Principle 5: Unconditional

Eligibility for direct cash programs should be decoupled from work, surveillance, and punitive program requirements. Surveillance of compliance with work participation requirements disproportionately impacts Black and Latinx families who are investigated and removed from benefits at higher rates than white families.⁶

Principle 6: Unrestricted

People should be able to use their direct cash benefits in whatever way meets their needs. People are the experts in how to take care of themselves and their families. Direct cash programs should be rooted in trust and dignity and should not monitor or control how benefits are used.

Principle 7: Recurring

To increase financial stability, direct cash programs should deliver regular payments that people can count on to pay for recurring expenses.

Principle 8: Sufficient

The benefit amount should be enough for people to meet a basic level of self-sufficiency. Programs can use the Need Standards set by the Department of Social and Health Services, which represents the amount of income required to maintain a minimum and adequate standard of living for households in Washington state.



Principle 9: Accessible

People who need direct cash assistance should receive it quickly through a transparent, non-invasive process. Application processes for public support are often needlessly complicated and put a large burden of time, effort, knowledge, and proof on the people who have the least resources.

Principle 10: Complementary to existing supports

Direct cash programs should supplement, not replace, other public assistance programs for health care, housing, nutrition, child care, and more. This includes implementing benefits protection policies to prevent participants from facing ineligibility for other programs or a net loss of support.

Principle 11: Protected from extraction and exploration

Benefits should not be garnished by private companies or public agencies, such as collection agencies or state departments. People already experiencing economic insecurity should not face additional financial burdens because of state policies, or because of exploitative fees from companies who help people access benefits, like tax preparation companies.

Direct cash can support...



Seniors of color in rural areas, who are disproportionately likely to experience poverty. Nearly one in three Black seniors, more than one in five Native seniors, and more than one in six Latinx seniors in rural Washington live under the poverty line.⁷



Young people exiting the foster care system, especially LGBTQIA2S+ foster youth, who experience high rates of homelessness due to lack of financial and familial support.⁸



Unpaid caregivers, who are over three times more likely to be women and experience a loss of income to take care of a family member.⁹



Undocumented and mixed-status families, who are excluded from other supports like food assistance programs and the federal Child Tax Credit.

The Washington State Budget and Policy Center is a research and policy organization that works to advance economic justice for everyone in Washington.

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Learn more about specific direct cash programs and why direct cash is the most effective and equitable way to build thriving communities and economies in our report, [*"A vision for how direct cash can create an equitable foundation for all."*](#)

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5. Stacia West and Amy Castro, "Impact of Guaranteed Income on Health, Finances, and Agency: Findings from the Stockton Randomized Controlled Trial," Journal of Urban Health, Vol. 100, April 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11524-023-00723-0>.
6. LaDonna Pavetti, "TANF Studies Show Work Requirement Proposals for Other Programs Would Harm Millions, Do Little to Increase Work," CBPP, November 13, 2018, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/family-income-support/tanf-studies-show-work-requirement-proposals-for-other-programs>.
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