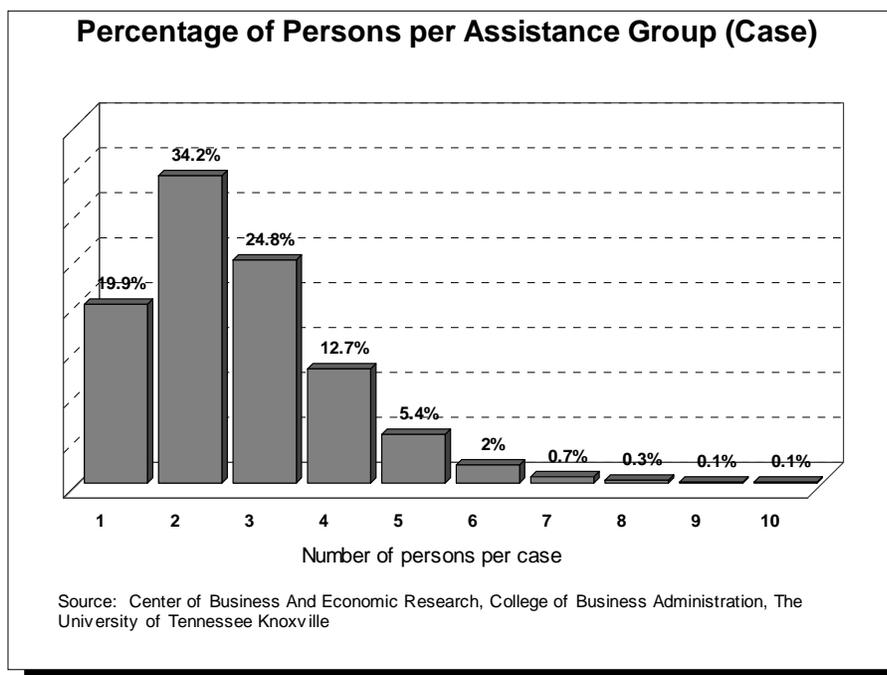


Families First

is limited to 18 months at a time, with a five-year lifetime limit. Sanctions are imposed on those who fail to meet their goals on the PRP or Work Plan.

Participants may receive Transitional Services, such as child-care assistance, Food Stamps, and TennCare. Eligibility for Families First requires that children be dependent due to having an absent, unemployed, incapacitated, or deceased parent.



More than 95 percent of assistance groups receive benefits due to absent parents, according to the *Families First 1997 Case Characteristics Study*. Only 13.7 percent of these families receive child support from the absent parent. For those who do receive child support, the monthly child support payment increased from an average of \$157 in 1995 to \$218 in 1997.

In October 1997, Families First had 54,762 families, representing 142,674 people. The average family receiving benefits has 2.6 family members; 76.2 percent have two children or less. The average age of the children in the Families First program is 7.6 years of age. Over 90 percent of Families First school-age children are enrolled and attending school.

In more than 95 percent of assistance groups the caretaker is a female, with almost 83 percent being the children's mother. One half of the mothers have never been married. The average age of the caretaker is 34.2 years of age, two years older than in 1995. More than 53 percent have a high school diploma or GED. Although one-third of caretakers are employed at any given time, 74.4 percent held a job during the 12 months prior to the survey. Less than 35 percent had access to an automobile.

The average grant to each assistance group has decreased since 1995 from \$157 to \$148. The maximum monthly grant to a family of three is \$185, the same as under AFDC. The grant amount has not changed since 1991, when it was lowered from \$195. Tennessee ranked 47th among the 50 states in average grant amount in 1996. Only Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana provided lower monthly benefits.

The majority of Families First participants live in the four major urban areas of the state. Davidson, Knox, Hamilton, and Shelby counties account for over 65 percent of participants.