



Highlights of [GAO-05-701](#), a report to congressional requesters

### Why GAO Did This Study

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program introduced specific work requirements and benefit time limits. However, the Family Violence Option (FVO) requires states that adopt the FVO to screen TANF clients for domestic violence and grant waivers from program requirements for clients in domestic violence situations. TANF also allows the use of TANF funds for marriage and responsible fatherhood programs. Given states' broad discretion in implementing the TANF program, including most aspects of the FVO and marriage and responsible fatherhood programs, this report examines (1) how states identify victims of domestic violence among TANF recipients, (2) how states address domestic violence among TANF recipients once they are identified, and (3) the extent to which states spend TANF funds on marriage and responsible fatherhood programs, and how, if at all, these programs are addressing domestic violence.

### What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Department of Health and Human Services (1) examine domestic violence screening practices of states and determine whether certain practices—such as employing and training domestic violence specialists—are particularly promising approaches to screening for domestic violence, and (2) provide states with information on these practices, and encourage their adoption.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-701](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-701).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For(415) 904-2272 or bellisd@gao.gov.

## TANF

# State Approaches to Screening for Domestic Violence Could Benefit from HHS Guidance

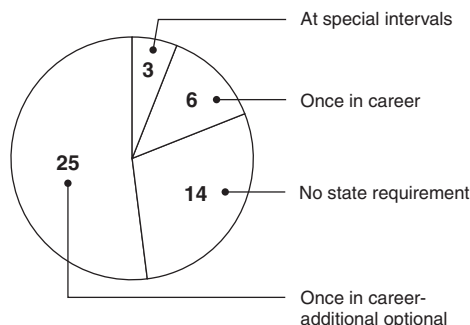
### What GAO Found

Forty-eight states have adopted the FVO or a comparable state policy. Most of these states actively screened clients by directly questioning them about domestic violence, whereas five states simply notified clients of domestic violence waivers without making a direct inquiry. Most states provide staff with a screening tool, but the detail and depth of these tools vary. State officials said that staff in local TANF offices often have limited skills in dealing with domestic violence issues, and policies regarding staff training vary. To address this issue, some state TANF offices employ domestic violence specialists. Although HHS has compiled and disseminated information about domestic violence screening, HHS has not issued guidance regarding best practices in domestic violence screening.

State TANF programs help clients address domestic violence issues by granting waivers that exempt victims from TANF requirements, and by referring clients for domestic violence services. Most states will waive the TANF program's federal requirements pertaining to work, the 5-year lifetime limit on cash assistance, and the child support requirements. However, the conditions of these waivers vary from state to state. For example, 27 states required that clients participate in domestic violence services. Limited data on the number of domestic violence waivers indicates that a comparatively small portion of TANF recipients obtain such waivers.

Most states have used TANF funds for marriage or responsible fatherhood programs or both. Specifically, 15 states reported funding marriage programs and 28 reported funding responsible fatherhood programs. States that provided usable data reported spending about 5 percent or less of their federal TANF budget on these programs. In addition, some states funded these programs through other funding sources or had programs in development. According to research and practitioners in the field, these programs generally do not explicitly address domestic violence, and HHS has stated that all future Healthy Marriage projects should include domestic violence protections.

**Number of States with Particular Policies Regarding Frequency of Domestic Violence Training**



Source: GAO survey.