



ACCESS TO INCOME SUPPORTS FOR WORKING FAMILIES IN CHICAGO

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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS**

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Cook County Department of Public Health
Day Care Action Council of Illinois

Gilead Outreach and Referral Center
Illinois Hunger Coalition
Illinois Maternal and Child Health Coalition/
Covering Kids Illinois Coalition
Mayor's Office of Workforce Development
National Center on Poverty Law
Women Employed
Work, Welfare, and Families

Interview Sites

Tax Counseling Project Sites
Harold Washington College
Area Four Police Headquarters, North Lawndale
Association House of Chicago, Humboldt Park

Job Training Agency Interview Sites
Chicago Commons
Greater West Town Development
SER Central States
Strive Employment Services, North and West Offices
Suburban Job Link

Agencies Interviewed about Outreach Activities

America's Second Harvest
Bureau of KidCare
Chicago Anti-Hunger Federation
Campaign for Better Health Care
Chicago Public Schools
County Department of Public Health/
Access to Benefits and Care Project
Day Care Action Council of Illinois
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A large number of eligible working families in Chicago do not participate in income support programs such as Food Stamps, the Child Care Subsidy, Medicaid, and KidCare. Participation rates in Medicaid and Food Stamps have declined since TANF reauthorization in 1996 as many former TANF recipients no longer receive the benefits they had before and to which they are still entitled. Low take-up rates for income supports mean that many low-income working families in Chicago are unable to provide the basic necessities for their families. These low rates also mean that local communities and businesses are not benefiting from the expenditures made possible by participation in income support programs.

The Income Support Access Project was developed in conjunction with an initiative undertaken in 2001 by the Center for Law and Human Services (CLHS) to distribute information about income support programs to low-income participants at its Tax Counseling Project sites. Building on this initiative, the Center for Impact Research (CIR) undertook research in order to identify barriers to accessing income supports and ways to improve outreach and application support. The research involved surveying over 600 low income adults at tax service sites and job training agencies about their knowledge and experience of benefits programs. CIR also interviewed caseworkers at job training agencies as well as outreach workers and project directors. The findings and recommendations have been developed in consultation with the project working group whose members represent a range of Chicago-area community agencies and advocacy organizations.

FINDINGS

Many working families did not know it is possible to receive food stamps, Medicaid, and the child care subsidy independently of TANF.

- ▶ Nearly one-half of the tax service respondents and one-third of the job training respondents said they did not know it is possible to receive benefits such as food stamps, Medicaid, KidCare, and child care assistance after leaving TANF.
- ▶ The Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) was the most frequently reported source for knowing that it is possible to receive benefits after leaving TANF. A smaller proportion of respondents reported learning this from family and friends; one-third of job training respondents reported learning this from the job training agency.
- ▶ Outreach workers and community agencies interviewed by CIR reported that many immigrants do not know about programs for which they and their children may be eligible. They also reported that misinformation and fear about the effect of benefits receipt on immigration status are widespread.

Many working families are not accessing benefits programs although their incomes are within the limits.

- ▶ The median employment income of survey respondents was \$10,000, with a large number of them having incomes low enough to make them potentially eligible for one or more income support programs. Fifty-five percent of tax respondents and 48% of job training respondents with children under 18 had 2000 income less than \$10,000. In addition to low pay, working families also face a high level of job insecurity. Fifty-seven percent of the tax group and 42% of the job training group were employed at their main job for six months or less. By the first quarter of 2001, one-third of tax respondents and three-quarters of job training respondents no longer worked at the main job they had in 2000.
- ▶ Work schedules of respondents present a barrier to applying for and retaining benefits, which in most cases require repeated visits to IDHS offices. Over three-quarters of respondents reported working during all or a portion of the hours between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. on Mondays through Fridays; nearly one-half of respondents did not have paid vacation days at their main job.
- ▶ Eighteen percent of tax respondents and 16% of job training respondents worked a second job during 2000 at the same time as their main job.
- ▶ Outreach workers and community agencies interviewed by CIR reported that accessible application support is the crucial next step after outreach. According to outreach workers, many eligible families do not complete the application process without it because of low literacy levels, limited English proficiency, and lack of comfort or fear of involvement with government agencies.

The majority of respondents said they would apply for food stamps, child care assistance, and KidCare if they were eligible and knew how to apply.

- ▶ Four-fifths of respondents said they would apply for child care assistance, with three-fifths to one-half reporting that they would apply for food stamps. Four-fifths of respondents with uninsured children said they would apply to KidCare.
- ▶ When asked about how they learned about the tax service or job training program, respondents reported a range of sources. When asked about their usual sources of news and information, the most frequently cited sources were family and friends, television, newspaper, and radio.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the instability of employment, low levels of income, and low participation rates among working families, there is an urgent need to ensure that eligible households have access to benefits programs. Access is also crucial for meeting the goal of supporting TANF recipients in leaving welfare and retaining employment. The diversity of working families and their circumstances requires the development of a multifaceted strategy that coordinates ongoing outreach with services that make the application and renewal processes more accessible.

Expand outreach activities throughout the community and coordinate them with media campaigns and application assistance.

More working families need to know about their potential eligibility for programs and how and where to apply for them. Outreach materials must be designed to address the fear of stigma that deters people from applying for these programs by positively promoting them as benefits for working families. To maximize their efficacy, outreach activities, media campaigns, and application support need to be carefully coordinated. In this way, a range of trustworthy sources communicates information about the programs and directs potentially eligible families to locations where they can receive application assistance. The need for a broad-ranging approach to outreach is indicated by the survey's findings about the different ways that respondents obtain information. Outreach workers reported to CIR that application support is the crucial next step after outreach; many eligible families do not complete the application process without it.

Increase accessibility of the application and renewal processes.

Most working families in the survey were not available to go to IDHS offices during standard office hours and outreach workers reported there is considerable aversion to going there for fear of the stigma or possible ill-treatment. Addressing these issues and increasing the accessibility of the programs require that application and renewal services be available at community sites that offer evening and weekend hours.

Expand the availability and capacity of user-friendly Internet-based screening and application tools.

Access can be increased by expanding the availability and capacity of innovations such as the Real Benefits initiative, which currently makes an Internet-based screening and application tool for food stamps available for use at selected community agencies in Chicago.

Address needs of immigrant households through outreach and application assistance.

Outreach workers reported that many immigrant families are misinformed about programs and eligibility requirements. Intensive outreach and application support is necessary to gain trust of immigrant groups and assist them in navigating the application and renewal processes.

Introduce administrative measures that facilitate increased access to and retention of benefits.

Adoption of administrative options that modify requirements and procedures would remove barriers for working families. Such actions include: extending the period of eligibility for both food stamps and child care assistance; simplifying the recertification/redetermination process; and providing more training to IDHS caseworkers on details of programs, eligibility of working families, and immigrant issues.

Undertake and evaluate a demonstration project that places application services in accessible community locations.

Best practices for improving access can be developed through a demonstration project. Such a project would involve placing application workers at accessible community sites that offer evening and weekend hours. Possible sites are the neighborhood Human Services Centers of the Chicago Department of Human Services, food pantries, and other community agencies.

INTRODUCTION

A large number of eligible working families in Chicago do not participate in income support programs such as food stamps, Medicaid, KidCare, and the child care subsidy.¹ The one-year increase of 8.8% reported in May 2002 for food stamp participation rates in Illinois is most likely related to increases in unemployment, particularly since September 11, 2001. During the period May 1997 to May 2002, however, there has been a 10.1% decline in food stamp participation in Illinois.² Using data for 1999, another report estimates that 27 to 40% of eligible households in Illinois do not participate in the food stamp program.³

Participation rates in Medicaid and Food Stamps have declined since TANF reauthorization as many former TANF recipients no longer receive the benefits they had before and to which they are still entitled. For example, researchers found that the majority of those who left TANF in Illinois between September 1998 and September 2000 also lost Medicaid (56%) and food stamps (82%), and Cook County residents were more likely to lose these benefits. And those who lost both benefits were almost three times more likely to return to TANF than those who kept them.⁴ A USDA study found that the loss of benefits is detrimental to families, with nearly half of TANF leavers facing hardship in providing food, housing, and medical care for their families.⁵

Low take-up rates for income supports mean that many low-income working families in Chicago are unable to provide the basic necessities for their families.⁶ These low rates also mean that local communities and businesses are not benefiting from the expenditures made possible by participation in income support programs. In Illinois, an increase of 5% in federal nutrition funds for participation or benefits would mean an increase in funding for the programs of \$70 million. Enrollment of 1,000 new households in the food stamp program can typically bring a state \$158,000 federal dollars per month or \$1,896,000 per year, and the “multiplier effect” of these dollars further enhances their effect on economic activity.⁷

¹ There is considerable variation in the name used for this program. The State of Illinois officially refers to it as the Child Care Program; the Day Care Action Council of Illinois used to call it the Child Care Subsidy and now uses the term, Child Care Certificate; one child care advocate thought the state’s name to be the Illinois Child Care Assistance Program. This report follows the conventions used in much of the literature and refers to the program as the child care subsidy or child care assistance.

² “Food Stamp Program Participation in May 2002,” *FRAC Current News and Analyses*, August 2002.

³ “The Red Tape Divide: State-by-State Review of Food Stamp Applications,” Public Policy and Research Department, America’s Second Harvest.

⁴ “The Importance of Transitional Benefits,” Illinois Families Study Policy Brief, December 2001, Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University.

⁵ “The Decline in Food Stamp Participation: A Report to Congress,” *USDA Nutrition Assistance Research Report Series*, Report No. FSP-01-WEL, July 2001.

⁶ Most studies focus on the needs of low income working families, however, low-income single adults without dependents and non-custodial parents often face barriers to employment as well as restrictions on eligibility for food stamps, Medicaid, and other income support programs. For data on this population in Chicago, see “Help Wanted: Low-Income Single Adult Job Seekers and the Programs Serving Them,” Mid-America Institute on Poverty, May 2001.

⁷ “Good Choices in Hard Times: Fifteen Ideas for States to Reduce Hunger and Stimulate the Economy,” Food Research Action Center, February 2002.

The vigorous outreach and enrollment support for KidCare offers important lessons for other programs. The growth of enrollment in the KidCare program in Illinois is largely attributable to streamlining the application process and developing innovative outreach activities by state and local government agencies and community organizations. These efforts contributed to enrollment of Illinois children under 18 in KidCare skyrocketing 430%, from 29,614 in 1998 to 156,995 in 2001. During the same period, enrollment in Cook County grew at an even higher rate of 509%, from 12,432 to 75,817.⁸ This remarkable increase was made possible by the leadership of the Illinois Department of Public Aid's Bureau of KidCare, the commitment of government, business, and community partners, and the funding to develop and support outreach and enrollment practices. Children's and health care advocacy groups, however, emphasize that ongoing outreach and enrollment support is essential to enrolling the many thousands of eligible children who remain uninsured.

The Center for Impact Research developed the Income Support Access Project in conjunction with an initiative undertaken in 2001 by the Center for Law and Human Services (CLHS) to distribute information about income support programs to low-income participants at its Tax Counseling Project sites.⁹ Building on this initiative, the Center for Impact Research (CIR) undertook research in order to identify barriers to accessing income supports and ways to strengthen outreach. Its purpose was to learn if the working families in our survey:

- Knew about the programs
- Were enrolled in them
- Would apply to them if eligible
- Faced specific barriers in accessing them

⁸ Enrollment figures provided by the Illinois Department of Public Aid; Medicaid enrollments for the same period increased 3% in Illinois and 8.6% in Cook County. "Supporting the Changing Family: Illinois Kids Count 2002," Voices for Illinois Children.

⁹ Income limits for clients at Tax Counseling Project sites in 2001 were \$15,000 for an individual and \$31,500 for families.

METHODOLOGY

STUDY DESIGN

At the outset of the project, the Center for Impact Research (CIR) formed a working group consisting of members from community human services agencies and advocacy organizations. Working group members conferred on research design and survey development, and assisted CIR with arranging access to survey groups. During the course of the project, the working group expanded, with members participating in discussions to interpret research findings and provide feedback on the report as well as assisting in crafting and advocating policy recommendations.

The surveys were administered by community members who were recruited from job training agencies and other community organizations and trained by CIR. Two of the interviewers are bilingual (English and Spanish). Survey respondents were given a five-dollar supermarket food certificate and the Center for Law and Human Services (CLHS) benefits information booklet. Between February and mid-April 2001, CIR conducted 425 survey interviews with low-income participants while they were waiting for free tax preparation services at three Tax Counseling Project (TCP) sites—in the North Lawndale and Humboldt Park communities and at Harold Washington College in downtown Chicago.¹⁰

Between June and August 2001, CIR also administered the survey to 200 participants at six job training programs in Chicago that serve a large number of current and former welfare recipients. Through interviewing participants at job training agencies, CIR sought to learn about their specific service needs, which often relate to the transition from welfare to work, including retention of benefits after becoming employed.

The research underpinning our policy recommendations and advocacy efforts was informed by experienced professionals at agencies that serve and advocate for low-income families as well as by the needs and perspectives of the survey respondents. CIR interviewed caseworkers and supervisors at the six job training programs where we also surveyed participants. Caseworkers were asked about current practices for informing participants about benefits and assisting with the application and retention processes. These interviews are a rich source of information about how job training agencies work with the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) and the Illinois Department of Public Aid (IDPA) to assist participants obtain and retain benefits.

CIR also interviewed sixteen staff members at a wide range of health care, social service, community, and advocacy organizations as well as government agencies—most of whom have been involved with outreach and enrollment for KidCare, and a few for food stamps and the child care subsidy. These interviews provide detailed information on barriers facing eligible families and outreach practices that successfully address them.

¹⁰ The breakdown of TCP sites for our survey respondents is 61% at North Lawndale, 24% at Harold Washington College, and 15% at Humboldt Park.

THE SAMPLE

- ▶ The majority of survey respondents were 18-45 years old, single, female, and had children under 18 living in their households.
- ▶ The majority of respondents with children under 18 had earned income below the federal poverty line.
- ▶ Respondents faced a high level of job insecurity.
- ▶ The majority of households did not have bank accounts and even fewer owned cars.
- ▶ Many respondents faced one or more financial hardship during 2000.

The majority of survey respondents were 18-45 years old, single, female, and had children under 18 living in their households.

Survey respondents were drawn from a diverse population of Chicago area residents, ranging from young adults to senior citizens. However, the majority of the respondents were female, between the ages of 18 and 45, and single and had children living in their household (Table 1). The job training respondents were younger, with a mean age of 38.4 and 31.8 years old for women and 38.9 and 33.0 for men for the tax and job training groups respectively.

African-Americans are the majority in both groups, followed by Latinos, and Caucasians, with very few biracial, Asian, or other groups among the respondents. A large majority of both groups are U.S. citizens and native English speakers, with only 16% of the tax respondents and 11% job training respondents bilingual in English and Spanish. One-quarter of the tax respondents and over one-third of job training respondents did not have a high school degree or GED.

The household composition of both groups is broadly similar. Eleven percent of respondents in both groups lived with a spouse or partner. However, 17% of the tax group and 7% of the job training group not living with a spouse or partner reported other related and unrelated adults living in their households. Sixty percent of respondents had children under eighteen in their households. Eighteen percent of the tax group and 36% of the job training group had three or more children under 18 in the household.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Survey Groups

	Tax Group n=403	JT (Job Training) Group n=193
Gender		
Female	79.6%	69.8%
Male	20.4%	30.2%
Age		
18-25	19.1%	21.5%
26-35	24.8%	46.6%
36-45	29.8%	26.2%
46-55	14.6%	5.8%
56-65	6.2%	---
over 66	5.5%	---
Race/Ethnicity		
African-American	78.2%	73.0%
Latino	14.4%	10.6%
Caucasian	5.0%	9.0%
Biracial	0.7%	4.2%
Asian	0.5%	1.6%
Other	1.2%	1.6%
Marital Status		
Single	89.0%	89.0%
Living with spouse/ partner	11.0%	11.0%
Children in household		
Children <14	49.6%	55.4%
Children <18	60.4%	61.1%
More than 3 children <18	18.4%	35.6%
Educational Level		
Less than HS degree/GED	25.2%	36.5%

The majority of respondents with children under 18 had earned income below the federal poverty line.

Nearly 96% of the tax group had earned income in 2000 compared to only 55% of the job training group. Eighty-four percent of tax respondents and 31% of job training respondents who had employment income in 2000 provided figures for annual employment income. The much lower response rate for total 2000 employment income by job training respondents relates to the fact that their interviews were not conducted in conjunction with receipt of tax preparation services, and thus they did not have 2000 income documents when they were interviewed. The median total household employment income in 2000 was \$8,240 for the tax group¹¹ and \$10,000 for the job training group (Table 2). For each group, the median income figures are similar for respondents with children under 18.¹² Eight-eight percent of job training respondents provided information about their hourly wage, with a median of \$7.25 per hour; 72% of tax respondents stated their hourly wage, with a median of \$8.00 per hour.

¹¹ The Tax Counseling Project reports \$9,785 as the median adjusted gross income for the 2000 tax filing year for a client sample of 10%, "Tax Counseling Project 2001 Data Summary," Center for Law and Human Services.

¹² In 2000 the federal poverty level for a family of two was \$10,239. Tax respondent households with children under 14 reported median total household employment income of \$7,952 (\$11,932 mean), with 37% under \$5,000. For the small number of job training respondents reporting their 2000 total income, the respective figures are \$16,000 (\$17,562 mean), with 43% under \$5,000.

Table 2: Employment Income in 2000

	Tax Group	JT Group
Employment Income in 2000	n=283	n=38
<\$5,000	37.5%	41.2%
<\$10,000	56.6%	58.8%
<\$15,000	69.8%	61.8%
<\$20,000	81.8%	79.4%
Employment Income in 2000: Had Children <18	n=189	n=25
<\$5,000	38.0%	40.0%
<\$10,000	55.0%	48.0%
<\$15,000	69.8%	52.0%
<\$20,000	76.7%	68.0%

Working families face a high level of job insecurity.

The 2000 employment histories reported by respondents indicate a high level of job insecurity. Fifty-seven percent of the tax group and 42% of the job training group were employed at their main 2000 job for six months or less, with one third of tax respondents and three-quarters of job training respondents no longer working at this main job in the first quarter of 2001. Further indicators of job insecurity are the figures of 35% for tax respondents and 17% for job training respondents who had two or more non-concurrent jobs during 2000.

The majority of households do not have bank accounts and even fewer own cars.

Less than half of tax respondents and only 18% of job training respondents have bank accounts. Respondents most frequently said that a lack of money is the reason for not having a bank account. Car ownership was reported by 41% for the tax group and only 15% for the job training group.

Many respondents faced one or more financial hardship during 2000.

Approximately two-fifths of respondents in both groups reported having faced one or more financial hardship at least once during 2000 (Table 3). The most frequently reported hardship for both groups was “had to borrow money to pay bills,” followed by “not enough money to buy food.” About one-fifth of both groups said they could not pay for transportation to work or school, often noting that they did not have enough money to make car repairs.

Table 3: Hardships Experienced at Least Once During 2000

	Tax Group n=403	JT Group n=193
Borrow money to pay bills	40.1%	38.0%
No money for food	29.7%	28.5%
Can't pay for transport	21.1%	21.0%
Can't pay for medical care	12.7%	5.4%
Utilities Cut off	12.5%	9.6%
Can't pay for child care	5.6%	2.9%
Payday loan ¹³	3.4%	3.2%
Evicted	3.0%	9.6%

¹³ Payday loan stores are common in low-income communities. According to the Office of the Illinois Attorney General: "Payday loans offer short-term credit at high rates. When you borrow with a payday loan, you pay a percentage of the dollar amount borrowed or a set fee per dollar amount borrowed. Lenders often charge between \$15 to \$50 for every \$90 borrowed. If you decide to extend your loan through another pay period, you must pay the entire fee again" (<http://www.ag.state.il.us/consumer/paydayloans.htm>). Payday loan rules introduced in Illinois in August 2001 limit the loan size to \$400 and restrict borrowers to two loan extensions.

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

KEY FINDINGS

- ▶ Many respondents did not know it is possible to receive food stamps, Medicaid, or the child care subsidy independently of TANF.
- ▶ Many respondents were not accessing benefits programs although their incomes were within the limits.
- ▶ Many respondents said they would apply for food stamps, child care, and KidCare if they were eligible and knew how to apply.

Many respondents did not know it is possible to receive food stamps, Medicaid, and the child care subsidy independently of TANF.

Nearly one-half of the tax respondents and one-third of the job training respondents said they did not know it is possible to receive benefits such as food stamps, Medicaid, KidCare, and child care assistance after leaving TANF. For both groups, IDHS was most common source of information about the possibility of continued eligibility for benefits after leaving TANF (Table 4). A smaller proportion of responses were for learning this from family and friends; one-third of responses from job training respondents were of learning this from the job training agency.

Table 4: Know Benefits Are Available After TANF

	Tax Group	JT Group
Know benefits available after TANF	n=343 52.2%	n=170 64.7%
Where learned benefits available after TANF	n=157	n=186
IDHS	54.0%	38.7%
Family and friends	33.7%	22.6%
Job training agency	---	32.8%
Read about it	4.3%	2.1%
Other	8.0%	3.8%

Outreach workers and community agencies interviewed by CIR reported that many immigrants do not know about programs for which they and their children may be eligible. They also reported that misinformation and fear about the effect of benefits receipt on immigration status are widespread.

Many working families are not accessing benefits programs although their incomes are within the limits.

With median employment income for 2000 under \$10,000 for respondents with children under 18, and job training respondents reporting a median wage of \$7.25 per hour, and \$8.00 per hour for tax respondents, a large number of survey respondents with children would be eligible for one or more income support programs.¹⁴ The tax group has lower participation rates for TANF, food stamps, and Medicaid/KidCare than the job training group (Table 5). Between 4% and 12% of both groups reported receipt of unemployment benefits, SSI, SSDI, or child support. Housing assistance was reported by 12% and 14% of tax and job training respondents respectively.

Table 5: Do Not Receive Benefits

	Tax Group	JT Group
Do not receive TANF	n=403 91.0%	n=190 66.8%
Do not receive food stamps	n=376 69.4%	n=179 42.5%
Have children <14: Do not receive child care subsidy	n=81 54.0%	n=61 52.0%
No Medicaid/KidCare for respondent's uninsured children <18	n=222 13.1%	n=123 4.9%

In addition to lack of knowledge about program availability and their potential eligibility, the work schedules of respondents present a barrier to applying for and retaining benefits, which require repeated visits to IDHS offices. The work schedules of respondents indicate that the majority work full time and over three-quarters of both groups work at least four of the hours between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. on Mondays through Fridays (Table 6). Furthermore, nearly half of both groups do not have paid vacation days at their main job, paid time off which they might use to visit the IDHS office. Eighteen percent of tax respondents and 16% of job training respondents worked a second job during 2000 at the same time as their main job.

Outreach workers and community agencies interviewed by CIR reported that accessible application support is the crucial next step after outreach. According to outreach workers, many eligible families do not complete the application process without it because of low literacy levels, limited English proficiency, and lack of comfort or fear of involvement with government agencies.

¹⁴ Before factoring in the allowable deductions, the 2000 income ceilings for households with one adult and one child were \$14,628 for food stamps, \$17,663 for child care assistance, and \$15,444 for Medicaid (KidCare Assist).

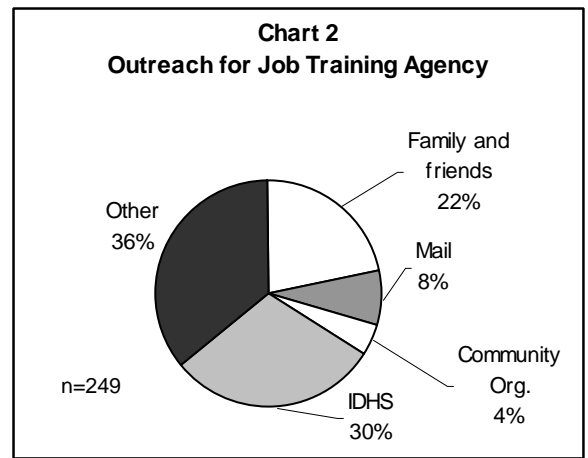
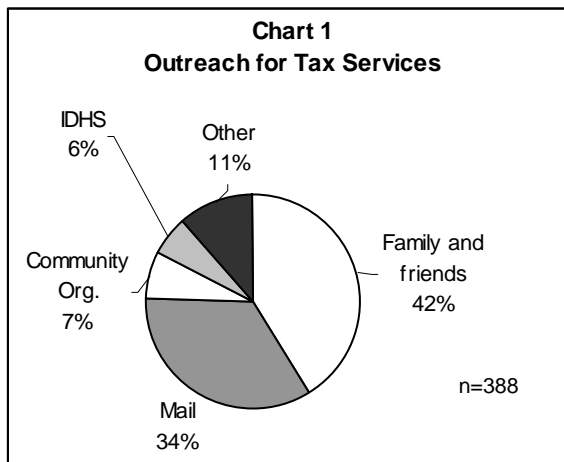
Table 6: Job Type, Work Schedule, and Paid Vacation Days

	Tax Group	JT Group
Job Type	n=374	n=101
Full time	63.1%	67.3%
Part time	32.1%	18.8%
Temporary	3.4%	10.9%
Seasonal	1.1%	3.0%
Work Schedule	n=284	n=97
During some or all 8-5, M-F	85.9%	75.1%
Non-office hours	9.0%	13.7%
Changing schedule	5.1%	10.2%
Paid Vacation Days	n=284	n=99
No paid vacation days	46.5%	48.5%

The majority of respondents said they would apply for food stamps and child care assistance if they were eligible and knew how to apply.

Working families expressed a high level of interest in applying for food stamps, child care assistance, and Medicaid/KidCare. Four-fifths of respondents said they would apply for child care assistance, with three-fifths to one-half reporting that they would apply for food stamps. Four-fifths of tax respondents with uninsured children said they would apply to KidCare.

In order to learn what might be effective avenues for outreach and media campaigns, respondents were asked how they learned about the tax service or job training program, and they reported a range of sources (Charts 1 and 2).



When asked about their usual sources of news and information, the most frequently cited sources for both groups were family and friends, television, newspaper, and radio (Charts 3 and 4). Less than 10% of responses were for other sources of information, such as community organizations, child's school, flyers, or direct mail. The job training agency itself is a significant source of news and information for its program participants, with an 11% response rate by the job training respondents.

Chart 3
Sources of News and Information for Tax Respondents

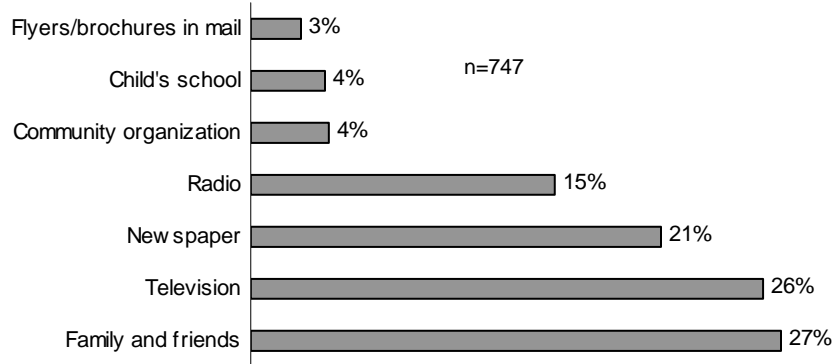
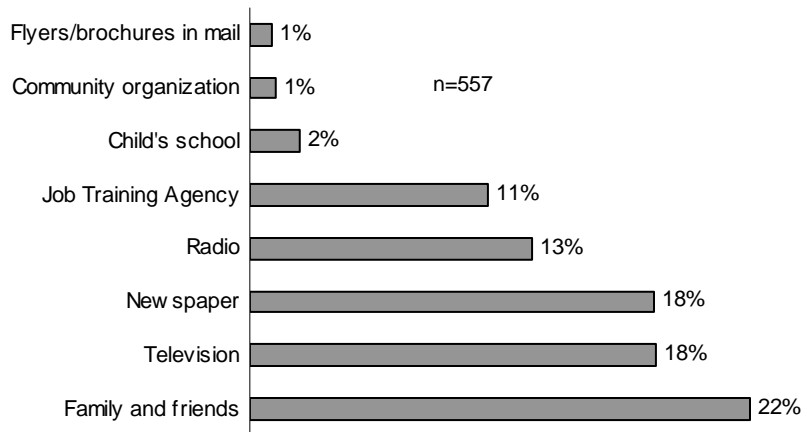


Chart 4
Sources of News and Information for Job Training Respondents



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the instability of employment, low levels of income, and low participation rates among working families, there is an urgent need to ensure that eligible households have access to benefits programs. Access is also crucial for meeting the goal of supporting TANF recipients to leave welfare and retain employment. The diversity of working families and their circumstances requires the development of a multifaceted strategy that coordinates ongoing outreach with services to make the application and renewal processes more accessible.

- ▶ Expand outreach activities throughout the community and coordinate activities with media campaigns and application assistance.
- ▶ Increase accessibility of application and renewal processes.
- ▶ Expand the availability and capacity of user-friendly Internet-based screening and application tools.
- ▶ Address needs of immigrant households through outreach and application assistance.
- ▶ Introduce administrative measures that facilitate increased access to and retention of benefits.
- ▶ Undertake and evaluate a demonstration project that places application services in accessible community locations.

Expand outreach activities throughout the community and coordinate them with media campaigns and application assistance.

More working families need to know about their potential eligibility for programs and how and where to apply for them. Outreach materials must be designed to address the fear of stigma that deters people from applying for these programs by positively promoting them as benefits for working families. To maximize their efficacy, outreach activities, media campaigns, and application support need to be carefully coordinated. In this way, a range of trustworthy sources communicates information about the programs and directs potentially eligible families to locations where they can receive application assistance. The need for a broad-ranging approach to outreach is indicated by the survey's findings about the different ways that respondents obtain information. Outreach workers reported to CIR that application support is the crucial next step after outreach; many eligible families do not complete the application process without it.

Increase accessibility of the application and renewal processes.

Most working families in the survey were not available to go to IDHS offices during standard office hours and outreach workers reported there is considerable aversion to going there for fear of the stigma or possible ill-treatment. Addressing these issues and increasing the accessibility of the programs require that application and renewal services be available at community sites which offer evening and weekend hours. Such sites might include Chicago Department of Human Services Centers, One Stop Career Centers operated by the Mayor's Office of Workforce Development and One-Stop Affiliates, licensed child care centers, schools, and employers receiving federal tax credit for hiring former welfare recipients.

Expand the availability and capacity of user-friendly Internet-based screening and application tools.

Initiated in Chicago in 2002, Real Benefits is an Internet-based screening and application tool for food stamps that is being piloted at selected community agencies by the Illinois Hunger Coalition in conjunction with IDHS. If the evaluation of Real Benefits shows it to be effective an effective tool, its capacity could be expanded so that it screens and prepares applications for other benefits programs.¹⁵ The availability of these services should be publicized while at the same time increasing the number of accessible community sites that provide them.

Address needs of immigrant households through outreach and application assistance.

Outreach workers report widespread misinformation and confusion among immigrant families about eligibility requirements and potential negative consequences of benefits receipt for immigration status. The important work of addressing these issues by KidCare outreach workers and application agents as well as the IDHS-funded Outreach and Interpretation Project of the Illinois Council of Immigrant and Refugee Rights needs to be sustained and expanded. Potential key activities should include:

- Distributing outreach materials and conducting media campaigns to inform immigrant families that children may be eligible for food stamps, KidCare, child care assistance, and other programs regardless of parents' residency status.
- Training outreach and application workers on immigrant issues so that they can cultivate the necessary trust and provide follow-up throughout the application and renewal processes.
- Ensuring availability of culturally appropriate translations of outreach materials into languages of major immigrant groups.
- Providing trained interpreters to assist immigrants with limited English proficiency in navigating the application and renewal processes.
- Offering more training and support to the Immigrant Liaisons at local IDHS offices.

Introduce administrative measures that facilitate increased access to and retention of benefits.

Administrative options and other measures can be implemented to reduce barriers to access and retention. For example, by extending the period of eligibility and simplifying the process of retaining benefits, working families will not risk losing benefits when work schedules make it difficult for them to go to IDHS offices. These measures should include:

- Improving accessibility of all IDHS information and communications to reduce barriers for people with low literacy levels and limited English proficiency.
- Extending period of eligibility for both food stamps and child care assistance. Families more commonly experience loss of employment and decreases in income than substantial income increases within a 12-month period.
- Simplifying recertification/redetermination process so that recipients do not have to go to local IDHS offices.

¹⁵ For a discussion Real Benefits and other innovative programs using Internet-based applications to increase access to benefits programs while decreasing administrative costs, see Michael O'Connor "Using the Internet to Make Work Pay for Low-Income Families," The Brookings Institution, May 2002.

- Providing more training to IDHS caseworkers on details of programs, eligibility of working families, and immigrant issues.

Undertake and evaluate demonstration projects that place application services in accessible community locations.

Given that the survey data show that many potentially eligible families think they are not eligible and are interested in applying for benefits, further effort is necessary to inform them of program requirements and improve access to the application process. Best practices for improving access can be developed through demonstration projects that build on innovations in mail, telephone, and Internet application options. Features of demonstration projects should include:

- Identifying and targeting high-need neighborhoods for intensive outreach and application assistance.
- Coordinating outreach efforts with major employers, conducting on-site application drives and distributing applications with paychecks.
- Installing kiosks in accessible locations such as supermarkets, schools, and medical centers that allow individuals to determine preliminary eligibility and provide instructions about where and how to apply.
- Offering application support services at accessible community sites that offer evening and weekend hours. Sites include the neighborhood Human Services Centers of the Chicago Department of Human Services (CDHS), food pantries and soup kitchens, and other community agencies already accessed by working families in need.
- Training staff and volunteers at community organization and job training agencies to assist clients with the application process.

In addition to the key findings and recommendations of the study that are discussed above, this project report also includes information pertinent to each of the three programs examined in the study. The following three sections present the findings and recommendations for these programs separately—food stamps, child care subsidy, and Medicaid/KidCare.

FOOD STAMP PROGRAM

FINDINGS

- ▶ Over 90% of respondents have heard of food stamps and two-thirds reported learning about the program from “family, friends, or word of mouth.”
- ▶ Working families in our survey have low food stamps participation rates.
- ▶ The majority of respondents not receiving food stamps said they would apply for them if they were eligible and knew how to apply.

Over 90% of respondents have heard of the Food Stamp Program and two-thirds reported learning about the program from “family, friends, or word of mouth.”

Knowledge of the Food Stamp Program is widespread for both survey groups (Table 7). The majority of respondents from both groups said they heard about food stamps from “family, friends, or word of mouth.” A much smaller proportion of both groups said they heard about food stamps from IDHS or community organizations.

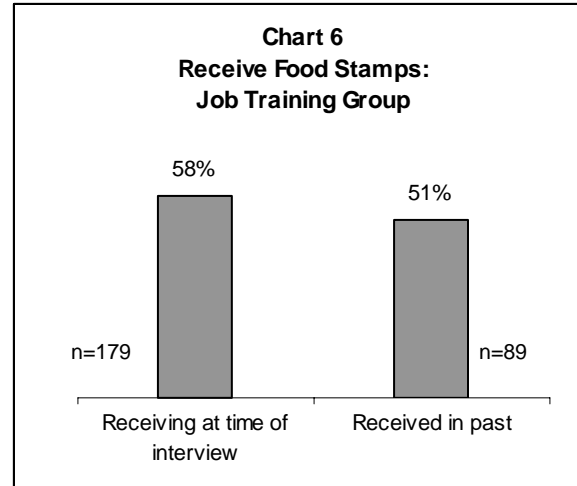
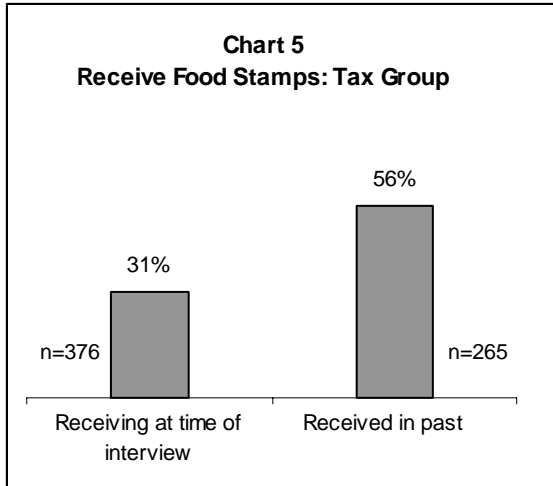
Table 7: Have Heard of Food Stamps

	Tax Group	JT Group
Have heard of food stamps	n=404 91.4%	n=192 94.3%
Where learned of food stamps	n=282	n=181
Family and friends	69.9%	67.4%
Community organization	11.3%	4.7%
IDHS	5.3%	17.9%
Workplace	4.6%	2.6%
Radio, newspaper	3.9%	2.6%

Working families in our survey have low food stamps participation rates.

Only one-third of the tax group currently receives food stamps (Chart 5). However, 55% of those not receiving food stamps had received them in the past.¹⁶ Higher rates of TANF receipt among the job training group likely contributes to a food stamp participation rate considerably higher than that of the tax respondents because recipients of cash assistance are automatically eligible for food stamps and Medicaid (Chart 6).

¹⁶ In the wake of welfare reform, the food stamp participation rate in Illinois decreased 30% between July 1997 and July 2000, see Anu Rangarajan and Philip M. Gleason, “Food Stamp Leavers in Illinois: How Are They Doing Two Years Later?” Mathematica Policy Research, January 2001.



The median 2000 income of tax group respondents not receiving food stamps falls within the program’s eligibility guidelines, indicating that a substantial number of families are potentially eligible.¹⁷ The relatively modest differences in race and ethnicity among non-recipients indicate that these factors do not markedly impact food stamp receipt in this survey population. However, respondents with lower educational levels are more likely to receive food stamps although the difference in participation rates by educational level is less for the job training group.

The most common reason given by both groups for not applying for food stamps was “don’t need them” (Table 8). The median income of tax respondents giving this reason was under \$13,000. The median income for tax respondents who said, “I think my income is too high” was \$8,293; only one job training respondent gave this answer.¹⁸ A small proportion of the tax group’s other reasons for never having applied for food stamps included: immigration status; IDHS said ineligible; too many requirements; do not know where or how; do not want government help; car ownership; lack of time; and badly treated at the IDHS office.

¹⁷ Before factoring in the allowable deductions, the 2000 income ceilings for households with adult and one child were \$14,628 for food stamps. Eligibility is more limited for adults without dependants; their incomes must be under \$11,172 and they must meet the program’s work requirement to receive food stamps for more than three months within a thirty-six month period.

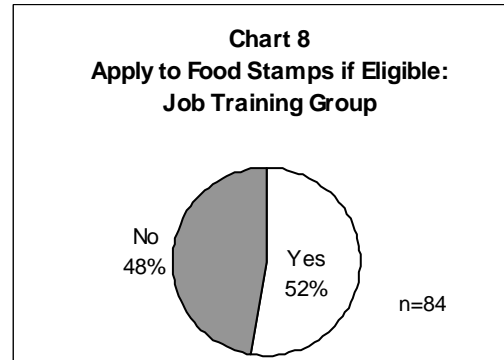
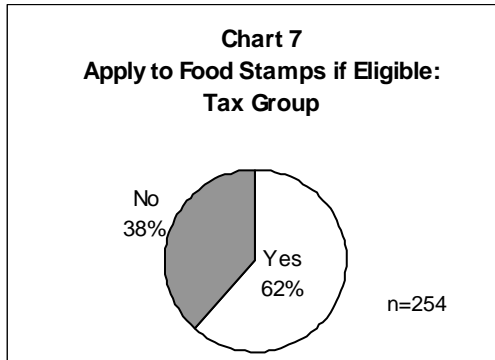
¹⁸ The study of Illinois food stamp leavers found that over half who believe they are ineligible for food stamps because of earned income, in fact have income below the poverty level and 25% have income at less than half of the poverty level. The able-bodied adults without dependants group of food stamp leavers has even lower incomes and a higher prevalence of food insecurity and serious financial hardships than families, the elderly, or the disabled. See Anu Rangarajan and Philip M. Gleason, “Food Stamp Leavers in Illinois: How Are They Doing Two Years Later?”

Table 8: Reasons Never Applied for Food Stamps

	Tax Group n=85	JT Group n=27
Don't need them	40.0%	55.2%
Think income too high	25.9%	3.4%
Immigration status	7.1%	---
Don't know how or where	3.5%	11.1%
Don't want government help	3.5%	6.8%
Too many requirements	4.7%	3.4%
Car ownership	3.5%	3.4%
Other	7.1%	11.1%

The majority of respondents not receiving food stamps said they would apply for them if eligible.

More than half of both groups reported an interest in applying for food stamps, saying that that they would apply if they were eligible and knew where to go and how to apply (Charts 7 and 8).



The median income of respondents who would apply for food stamps if eligible is low; \$8,266 for the tax group and \$10,000 for a small number of job training respondents (Table 9). Of those who would apply to food stamps if eligible, there were no pronounced disparities by age group, gender, or race/ethnicity, with the majority of all subgroups saying they would apply. A considerably higher proportion of tax and job training respondents with lower educational levels, however, said they would apply. Of those not receiving food stamps, 80% of tax respondents and 71% of job training respondents with less than a high school degree or GED said that they would apply for food stamps if eligible; 57% of tax respondents and 46% of job training respondents with a high school degree, GED, or higher educational level said that they would apply for food stamps if eligible.

Table 9: Would Apply for Food Stamps if Eligible: 2000 Employment Income

	Tax Group n=123	JT Group n=6
Median income	\$8,268	\$10,000
Mean income	\$10,366	\$15,582

To further check on willingness to apply for food stamps, the survey asked respondents whether they would go to the IDHS office if they were eligible for food stamps. Over 90% of all respondents said that they would. Although a large proportion of survey respondents said they would be willing to go to IDHS offices, numerous outreach workers told CIR that working families frequently tell them they will not go to IDHS offices to apply for or renew benefits, especially if they have experienced long waits or feel that they or others they know have been mistreated there in the past.

Of those who said they would not apply even if eligible, respondents most frequently said they did not need food stamps, with a median income of under \$14,000 for tax respondents (Table 10). The second most frequent answer of both groups to why they would not apply for food stamps even if eligible was “too many requirements.” Community workers reported to CIR that potentially eligible families also do not apply because of stigma they feared if their employer were contacted for income verification.

Table 10: Reasons Would Not Apply to Food Stamps if Eligible

	Tax Group n=92	JT Group n=61
Don't need food stamps	33.7%	30.6%
Too many requirements	25.0%	29.0%
Badly treated at IDHS office	9.8%	9.7%
Immigration status	8.7%	---
Don't want help from government	7.6%	14.6%
No time to go	--	4.8%
Other	15.2%	8.0%

FOOD STAMP PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ Publicize the availability of food stamps to working families.
- ▶ Bring the application process into the community with application centers at locations more accessible and attractive to working families than local IDHS offices.
- ▶ Inform immigrants about nutrition assistance programs and provide the necessary application support.
- ▶ Address administrative barriers.

Publicize the availability of food stamps to working families.

As the survey data demonstrates, many working families do not know that they may be eligible for food stamps. In contrast to KidCare, community workers report that few resources are available for food stamps outreach at key locations such as food pantries, soup kitchens, churches, and community social service agencies. Outreach and media campaigns should inform

the public about eligibility requirements and the program's availability to people who have never received cash assistance as well as those formerly on welfare.

Bring the application process into the community with application centers at locations more accessible and attractive to working families than local IDHS offices.

- Build on the model of KidCare outreach and application agents to develop the capacity of community organizations to provide food stamp outreach and application support.
- Fund outreach and application work at food pantries and soup kitchens.
- Expand the availability of user-friendly Internet-based application tools such as Real Benefits

Inform immigrants about nutrition assistance programs and provide the necessary application support.

- Conduct outreach and media campaigns to inform immigrants about food stamps eligibility requirements and exemptions for eligible immigrants.
- Continue funding for the application support and interpretation services for immigrants.

Address administrative barriers for working families.

- Implement the administrative option to reduce the reporting requirement from quarterly to semi-annually.
- Address the issue of income verification by employer, which creates a stigma and barrier to participation.
- Provide ongoing training to IDHS caseworkers and community workers about eligibility of working families for food stamps.

CHILD CARE SUBSIDY PROGRAM

FINDINGS

- ▶ Information about the child care subsidy is not widely available throughout the community.
- ▶ The majority of survey respondents with children under 14 do not receive the child care subsidy.
- ▶ A large number of respondents not receiving the child care subsidy said they would apply if eligible and reported 2000 income that falls within the guidelines.¹⁹

Information about the child care subsidy is not widely available throughout the community.

Respondents reported hearing about the child care subsidy from IDHS and job training agencies more frequently than from “family, friends, and word of mouth” or other sources. Nearly 85% of tax respondents with children under 14 said they have heard of child care subsidy (Table 11). On the other hand, almost 90% of job training respondents with children under 14 replied to this question, with 88% reporting they have heard of the program. Caseworkers at job training agencies told CIR that they routinely inform clients about the program and assist them in applying for it.

Table 11: Have Heard of Child Care Subsidy

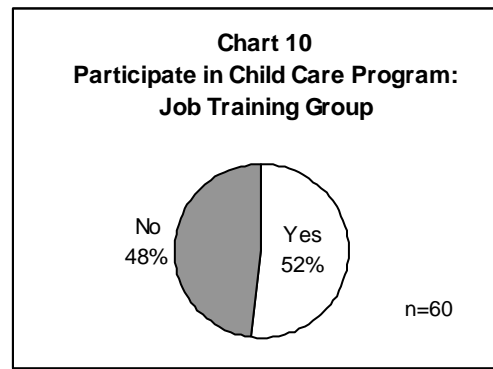
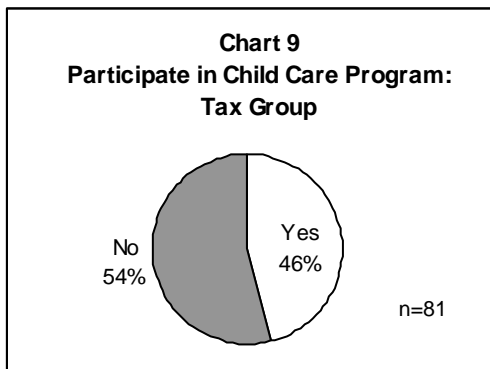
	Tax Group	JT Group
Heard of program: have children <14	n=107 84.4%	n=75 87.8%
Where heard of child care program	n=71	n=182
IDHS	32.4%	22.5%
Job training agency	---	30.8%
Family, friends	26.8%	18.7%
Child care provider	12.7%	11.5%
Community organization	11.3%	--
Workplace	8.5%	4.4%
Child's school	4.2%	7.7%

¹⁹ All families with at least one child under 13 years old whose incomes are below 157% of the federal poverty line are eligible for the child care subsidy program. Before factoring in the allowable deductions, the 2000 income ceiling for a household with adult and one child was \$17,663.

Community workers reported that confusion regarding the name of the program needs to be addressed. The state of Illinois officially refers to it as the Child Care Program; one child care advocate told CIR that the state’s name was the Illinois Child Care Assistance Program; and the Day Care Action Council of Illinois formerly called it the Child Care Subsidy Program but now refers to it as the Child Care Certificate.

Survey respondents with children have low participation rates in the program.

The majority of survey respondents with children under 14 do not receive child care assistance (Charts 9 and 10). Less than two-fifths of tax respondents with children under 14 provided information about participation in the program, possibly making the participation rate higher than it actually is for this group. This may also be the case for the job training group, with only 56% of job training respondents with children under 14 replying to this question.²⁰ The median income for tax respondents with children under 14 who are not enrolled in the program is under \$11,000; nearly half reported having had experienced one or more hardship during 2000.



Respondents report a range of reasons for not applying for child care assistance. Of those who have heard of the program, the same proportion of responses from the tax group was for not applying because they do not need help paying for child care as for because they think they are not eligible; fewer responses cited too many requirements; and only a few responses referred to limits on child care choice, not wanting government help, not knowing how to apply, or family member provides child care (Table 12).

Table 12: Reasons Never Applied to Child Care Subsidy Program

	Tax Group n=31	JT Group n=27
Do not need child care assistance	21.2%	7.4%
Think not eligible	21.2%	11.1%
Too many requirements	15.2%	18.5%
Restrictions on child care choice	9.1%	--
Don't know how	6.1%	18.5%

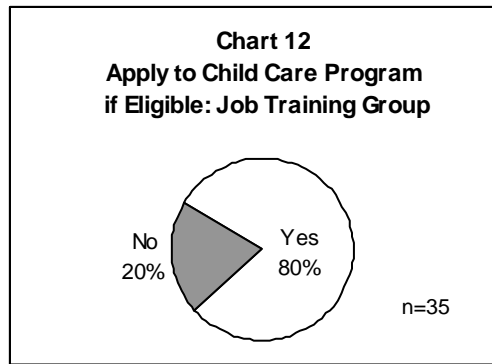
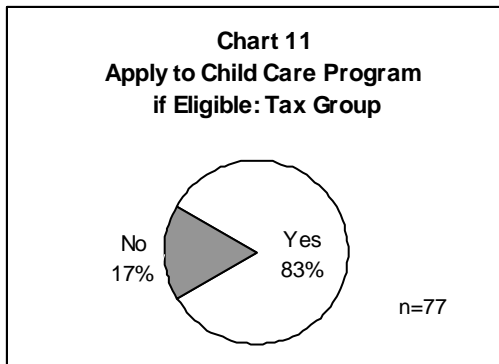
²⁰ The participation rates based on the numbers who responded positively as a proportion of total households with children under 14 would be 20% and 27% for the tax and job training respondents respectively.

A large number of respondents not receiving the child care subsidy said they would apply if eligible and reported 2000 income that falls within the guidelines.

When respondents with children under 14 were asked if they would apply for child care assistance if they were eligible, a large majority—four-fifths of both groups—said they would (Charts 11 and 12). The median income for the tax group who would apply if eligible is \$10,835, well below the eligible limit.

Many respondents did not know that the program could be used to pay family members who provide child care. Over one-half of both groups said that a family member is the usual child care provider. Yet only 42% of tax respondents and 50% of job training respondents whose relatives provide child care said that they are enrolled in the program.

Caseworkers at job training agencies and other community workers reported to CIR that another barrier to enrollment in the program is the shortage of child care agencies that accept the subsidy.



CHILD CARE PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ Publicize the availability of child care assistance and expand outreach to increase awareness of the program among all working families.
- ▶ Bring the application process into the community with application centers at locations more accessible and attractive to working families than local IDHS offices.
- ▶ Address administrative barriers.

Publicize the availability of child care assistance and expand outreach to increase awareness of the program among all working families.

- Select an effective name for the program and use it consistently in all materials related to the program.
- Conduct outreach and media campaigns about the program and its availability to eligible families receiving child care from relatives.
- Increase involvement of community organizations, employers, schools, and child care agencies in outreach.

Increase application support at accessible community agencies.

- Increase availability of application materials throughout the community.
- Train staff at community organizations and child care agencies to assist parents in applying for the program.
- Provide application support and follow up for families with low literacy levels and limited English proficiency.

Address administrative barriers.

- Extend period of certification to one year.
- Increase number of child care providers who accept subsidy.

HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE, MEDICAID, AND KIDCARE

FINDINGS

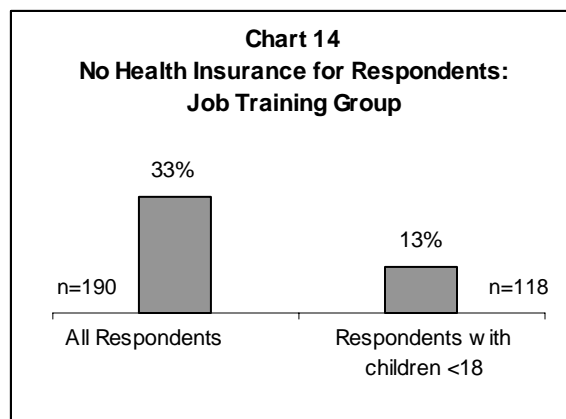
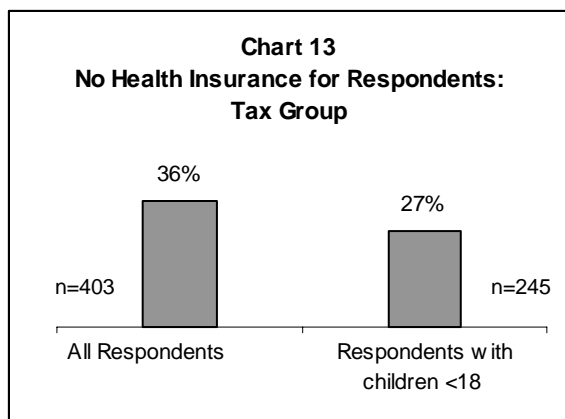
- ▶ One-third of all survey respondents do not have health insurance.
- ▶ Thirteen percent of respondents in the tax group have uninsured children under 18.
- ▶ More than one-half of respondents reported that their employer does not offer health insurance for themselves and two-thirds said their employer does not offer health insurance for the spouse or children.
- ▶ Medicaid is the leading source of health insurance for respondents and their children under 18.
- ▶ Approximately three-fifths of respondents have heard of the KidCare Program and learned about it from a range of sources.
- ▶ About three-quarters of respondents with uninsured children under 18 said they would apply to KidCare if eligible and their median income was under \$8,000.²¹

One-third of survey respondents did not have health insurance.

Approximately one-third of both groups do not have health insurance for themselves (Charts 13 and 14).²² However, respondents with children under 18 are somewhat more likely to have insurance.

²¹ KidCare Assist (Medicaid) provides coverage at no cost to children in households with incomes up to 133% of the federal poverty level (\$15,444 for a household with one parent and one child). The income qualification level is 200% of the federal poverty level for KidCare Moms and Babies. The KidCare Share, Premium, and Rebate plans are available to families with incomes between 133 and 185% of the federal poverty level. Children must be U.S. citizens, legal residents, or another approved type of immigration status to enroll in the programs; information on the legal status of parents and guardians is not required; and pregnant women regardless of their legal status are eligible. Most KidCare participants are enrolled in KidCare Assist (135,125); Moms and Babies has 7,312 infants and 13,447 pregnant women; and the other three plans have a total of 22,256 participants (“KidCare Enrollment,” March 2, 2002, www.kidcareillinois.com).

²² An estimated 14.4% (1,546,000) of the non-elderly population in Illinois is uninsured; the figure is almost twice as high for non-elderly in households with incomes below 200% of the poverty line (28.7%; 838,000). Urban Institute estimates based on pooled March 1997, 1998, and 1999 Current Population Survey, prepared for the Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured.



Although Latinos in our study did not have a lower rate of health insurance coverage than African Americans or Caucasians, other Illinois studies have found higher percentages of uninsured Latinos.²³ The median household income of uninsured respondents was low, ranging from \$9,500 to \$8,500 (Table 13).

Table 13: No Health Insurance for Respondent: 2000 Employment Income

	Tax Group	JT Group
No health insurance for respondent: Income	n=109	n=10
Median income	\$8,556	\$9,500
Mean income	\$11,476	\$13,846
No health insurance for respondent with children <18: Income	n=53	---
Median income	\$9,106	---
Mean income	\$12,022	---

Thirteen percent of respondents in the tax group have uninsured children under 18.

Survey respondents report much higher rates of health insurance coverage for their children than for themselves (Table 14). Thirteen percent of tax respondents and 5% of job training respondents have uninsured children under 18 in their households.²⁴ The median income of tax respondents with uninsured children was \$12,000.

²³ For example, a 1999 report states that Latinos account for 43% of Chicago's uninsured, while only constituting 26% of the city's population under 65. See Micah Holmquist, Sara Karp, and Vince Kong, "For the Record: More Latinos Lack Insurance," *The Chicago Reporter*, November/December 2001. See also Dianne Rucinski, "Report to the Illinois Assembly on the Uninsured: Illinois Population Survey of Uninsured and Newly Insured," Center for Health Services Research, Health Research and Policy Centers, 2001, which finds that the uninsured in Illinois disproportionately includes Latinos and African Americans, and low-income segments of the population and disproportionately reside in Cook County.

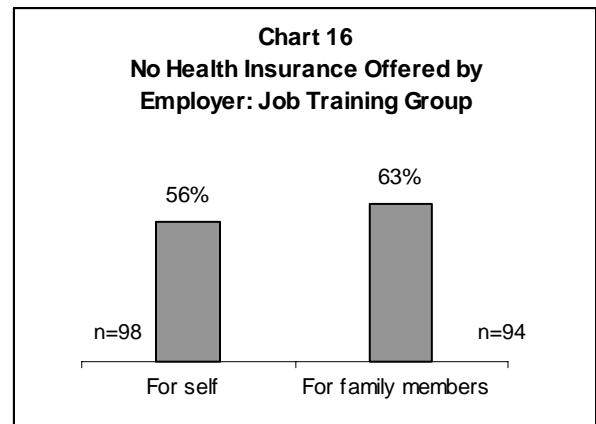
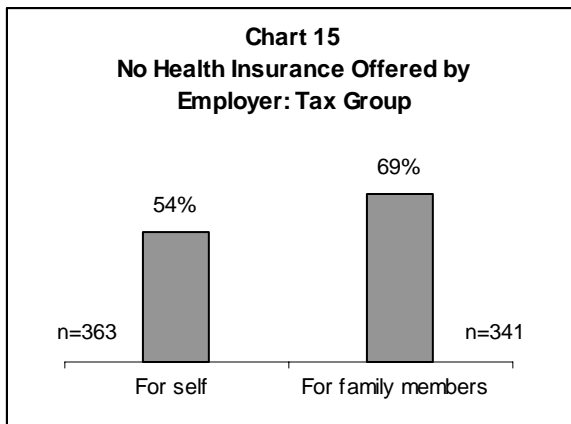
²⁴ The finding of 13% for uninsured children of tax respondents is consistent with the figure of 12.7% reported elsewhere for the uninsured Illinois population under 18 (464,334).²⁴ However, of the population of

Table 14: No Health Insurance for Children of Respondents

	Tax Group	JT Group
No health insurance for respondent's children <18	n=222 13.1%	n=123 4.9%
No health insurance for respondent's children <18: Income	n=19	---
Median income	\$12,000	---
Mean income	\$15,017	---

Over one-half of all respondents reported that their employer does not offer health insurance for themselves and two-thirds said their employer does not offer health insurance for their children.

Over 50% of both groups said that their employer does not offer health insurance for themselves and two-thirds reported their employer does not offer health insurance for their children or spouse (Charts 15 and 16).



Medicaid is the leading source of health insurance for respondents and their children under 18.

Almost one-half of the insured respondents of the tax group and nearly three-quarters of the job training group have Medicaid coverage for themselves, with 65% and 70% of tax and job training respondents' insured children under 18 enrolled in Medicaid (Table 15). Forty-four percent of the tax group respondents and only 17% of job training respondents have coverage through their employers. Coverage for respondents' children through the employer was about 24% for the tax group and 8% for the job training group. Many respondents noted that although their employer offered health insurance, they could not afford to pay the premiums for it ²⁵ Only a small

Illinois children under 18 in families with incomes below 200% of the poverty line, the proportion of uninsured children is 25.1percent (350,731). "Illinois Child Health Coverage Statistics," Urban Institute, 2000. Based on data from March Current Population Surveys, 1998-2000.

²⁵ In another study, almost 50% of the uninsured working population do not have insurance offered by their employers; those whose employers do offer insurance report "cost/values issues as a barrier to coverage," Dianne Rucinski,

percentage of each group (2 – 13%) has health insurance for themselves or their children through the respondent’s spouse or the child’s other parent.

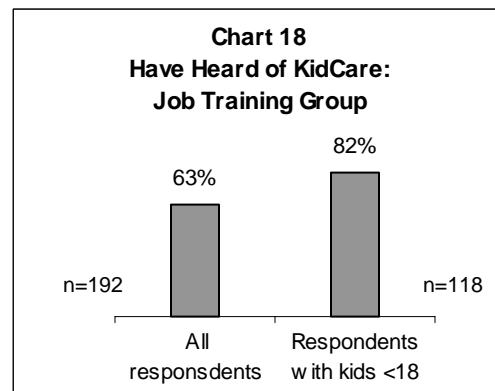
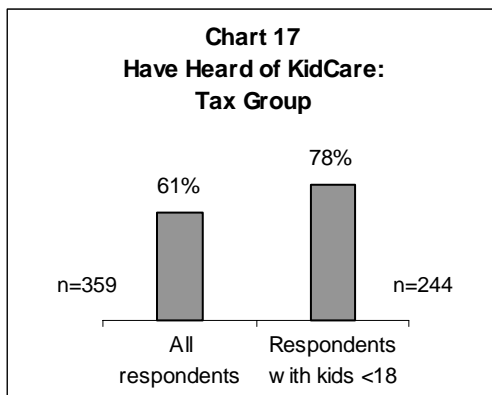
Working families, however, can find it difficult to retain benefits despite continued eligibility. For example, community workers told CIR that many families do not renew their case if it requires them to go to the local IDHS office. They said that some recipients report it is difficult for them to take time off of work; others say they have been mistreated in the past and are so reluctant to go to the local IDHS office that they prefer to let their case be closed. In such cases, outreach workers say that some families later reapply for KidCare through an application agent but others do not.

Table 15: Source of Health Insurance Coverage

	Tax Group	JT Group
Source of health insurance for respondent	n=255	n=126
Medicaid	47.5%	73.0%
Employer	44.0%	16.7%
Employer of spouse	1.6%	7.1%
Source of health insurance for respondent’s children	n=191	n=117
Medicaid	65.3%	70.1%
Employer	23.7%	7.7%
Employer of child’s other parent	5.3%	12.8%
KidCare	5.3%	9.4%

Approximately three-fifths of respondents have heard of KidCare and learned about it from a range of sources.

Over 60% of respondents in both groups reported that they have heard of the KidCare program (Charts 17 and 18). The respondents least likely to have heard of KidCare are those without children in their household, particularly men and persons over 55 years old, as well as those with less than a high school degree or GED. Latino respondents are slightly less likely to know about KidCare than African Americans or Caucasians. The median 2000 employment income for tax group households with children under 18 who have not heard about KidCare was \$7,3000.



“Report to the Illinois Assembly on the Uninsured: Illinois Population Survey of Uninsured and Newly Insured,” Center for Health Services Research, Health Research and Policy Centers, 2001.

Respondents reported hearing about the KidCare program from a variety of sources, with the most common sources being family and friends, child’s school, health care provider, IDHS office, and job training agency (Table 16).

Table 16: Where Learned about KidCare Program

	Tax Group	JT Group
Where learned about KidCare	n=224	n=192
Family, friends	25.0%	17.7%
Child’s school	18.8%	9.3%
Community organization	12.9%	3.1%
Health care provider	11.7%	11.5%
IDHS office	10.4%	21.9%
Job training agency	---	21.0%
Child care provider	---	4.6%
Other	14.6%	8.8%

About three-quarters of respondents said they would apply to KidCare if eligible.

Survey respondents were interested in learning more about KidCare; a large majority of tax respondents with uninsured children said they would apply if eligible (Table 17). Very few parents of uninsured children said that would not apply if eligible, giving as their reasons that they felt the program has too many requirements, their immigration status, or they did not want government help. KidCare outreach and application workers reported that the income verification requirements present difficulties for self-employed parents and can be a barrier for families who do not want employers to know they are applying for public programs.

Table 17: Would Apply to KidCare if Eligible

	Tax Group	JT Group
Have uninsured children <18 and would apply to KidCare if eligible	n=15 76.5%	--
Median income	\$7,953	---
Mean income	\$10,725	---

RECOMMENDATIONS ON HEALTH INSURANCE PROGRAMS

- ▶ Conduct outreach to uninsured working adults about programs and eligibility. Target former TANF recipients, who may still be eligible for transitional Medicaid as well as parents, who may be eligible for the Family Care State Health Insurance Program.²⁶
- ▶ Continue to support the successful work of KidCare outreach workers and application agents.
- ▶ Address administrative barriers and implement program innovations.
- ▶ Conduct outreach to uninsured working adults about programs and eligibility.

Target former TANF recipients, who may still be eligible for transitional Medicaid as well as parents, who may be eligible for the Family Care State Health Insurance Program.

With nearly one-third of survey respondents reporting that they do not have health insurance, there is an urgent need to assist uninsured adults in accessing programs for which they may be eligible. Uninsured former TANF recipients should be targeted so that those eligible for Transitional Medicaid are enrolled and retain their benefits for as long as possible. Similarly, effective outreach must be undertaken to enroll eligible parents in Family Care as soon as program details are finalized.

Continue to support the successful work of KidCare outreach workers and application agents.

Innovations in outreach and application support for the KidCare program have resulted in the dramatic expansion of enrollment. KidCare outreach and application support workers recommend the following measures to ensure access for eligible families.

- Sustain or increase grants for outreach and application support, using allocated 10% of SCHIP funds for outreach grants to KidCare advocates with successful records.
- Conduct media campaigns to increase awareness of KidCare among the general public as well as targeting specific low-income groups, including immigrants, self-employed workers, and teens.
- Provide public education about importance of preventative health care and its availability through public insurance coverage.

²⁶ The proposed Illinois Family Care Program would provide coverage to an estimated 235,000 parents of children enrolled in KidCare if the income limit were set at 185% of the poverty level. "Illinois Family Care Waiver Proposal Allows First Phase to Start this Year with No New State Spending," *Illinois Welfare News*, January-February 2002. This plan, however, does not address the needs of the many thousands of other uninsured parents and adults in Illinois.

Address administrative barriers and implement program innovations.

- Implement self-attestation of income for KidCare application and renewal.²⁷ This measure will address issues reported by community workers such as the fear of stigma and difficulties facing self-employed parents.
- Adopt presumptive eligibility for Medicaid/KidCare as allowed by federal regulations. This provision allows children immediate access to health services by giving them temporary health insurance through Medicaid or KidCare if they appear to be eligible.²⁸ It also assures payment to health care providers for uninsured children who are not yet enrolled. Presumptive eligibility is an effective outreach tool because it introduces parents to the program and its benefits in concrete circumstances of need when they bring their child for health care. Outreach workers can follow up with these cases to ensure that presumptively eligible families complete the application process.
- Pay application agents to complete KidCare renewal forms to ensure eligible families can retain benefits without having to take time off of work and go to the local IDHS office.

²⁷ Self-attestation of income allows the applicant to declare current income rather than using more intrusive means to obtain information about income such as contacting the employer.

²⁸ One community worker reported to CIR that her organization advocates for presumptive eligibility and coordinated enrollment, e.g., coordinating KidCare applications with school lunch applications, as efficient methods for expanding the enrollment of eligible families in KidCare and Medicaid. For an overview of presumptive eligibility see, "Presumptive Eligibility for Children in Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP): A Fact Sheet," Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau, May 2001. Federal regulations allow for presumptive eligibility, but just a handful of states have adopted it for Medicaid and CHIP. Illinois only has Medicaid Presumptive Eligibility for pregnant women, which provides ambulatory care and no inpatient services. For further information on presumptive eligibility as well as coordinated enrollment, see "Means-Tested Programs: Determining Financial Eligibility Is Cumbersome and Can Be Simplified," U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO-02-58), November 2, 2001; and Donna Cohen Ross and Meg Booth, "Enrolling Children in Health Coverage Programs: Schools are Part of the Equation," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, prepared for Covering Kids, October 2001.

CONCLUSION

Many low-income working families in Chicago are struggling to find and keep their jobs, feed their families, pay for child care, and obtain health insurance for themselves and their children. Based on the findings from surveys with working families and interviews with outreach workers and other representatives from community agencies, the recommendations of the Income Support Access Project focus on how to assist eligible working families to apply for and retain benefits.

Within the broad category of working families, specific groups need to be targeted, including legal immigrants, former TANF recipients, and two-parent families. For example, with legislative reauthorization introducing program changes into food stamps, TANF, child care assistance, and Medicaid/SCHIP, working families need to be informed of how these changes impact their eligibility. Improved access requires that the application and renewal processes be placed outside IDHS offices in community locations that offer evening and Saturday hours. The innovations associated with KidCare have accomplished much to expand outreach and the streamline the application process; they are strategies that can be replicated for improving access to other programs. For example, by being community-based and persistent in their follow up activities, KidCare application agents have proven to be a crucial support for ensuring that many working families successfully complete the application process.

During discussions with CIR in January and March 2002, the Mayor's Office and City of Chicago Departments indicated the City's interest in publicizing the availability of food stamps, KidCare, child care, and other resources for working families. The Mayor's Office responded to advocacy based on CIR's research findings and the working group's recommendations with an outreach initiative. In September 2002, the City of Chicago began distribution of "Keeping Chicago Affordable" brochures at City agencies and launched a website to publicize programs for working families.²⁹

Representatives from IDHS and KidCare also expressed interest in the project's research findings and recommendations of the working group. However, it was felt that given the state's budgetary difficulties, it was unlikely that IDHS would be able to direct resources to the activities recommended by the working group in the near future. During 2002 and 2003, CIR and the project working group will continue to advocate for outreach and improvements to the application process. We will also advocate for a demonstration project to bring the application process into accessible community locations and to further develop best practices for outreach and application support. In fact, discussions are underway between CIR and the Chicago Department of Human Services about establishing a demonstration project to provide outreach and application support for programs for working families at the department's community service centers.

²⁹ www.cityofchicago.org/Mayor/AffordableChicago