

Mapping State Policy Strategies to Address Benefits Cliffs



Across the country, individuals and families seeking to improve their economic circumstances often face a paradox: earning more can mean a sharp drop in, or even a loss of, critical public benefits. These “benefits cliffs” can undermine economic mobility and create disincentives for employment or advancement, even when policies exist to ease these transitions. As a result, state leaders are seeking clear, actionable information on which policy approaches help smooth pathways to self-sufficiency—and how they work in practice.

To support this need, the **American Public Human Services Association’s (APHSa) Benefits Cliff Dashboard** provides policymakers, practitioners, and other stakeholders with clear insights into state strategies to mitigate benefits cliffs. The dashboard examines how policies operate across multiple public benefit programs where benefits cliffs often occur. By documenting policy solutions and mapping approaches across states, the dashboard serves as a practical resource for informing decision-making and advancing economic mobility.

Upcoming enhancements to the benefits cliff dashboard

In collaboration with APHSa, the American Institutes for Research (AIR) will expand and enhance the Benefits Cliff Dashboard by adding new states, updating and validating policy information through targeted state engagement, integrating outcome-focused evidence on benefits cliff mitigation strategies, and improving the dashboard’s design and usability to better support state decision-making.

The phased approach includes research on benefits cliff policies in newly added states, interviews with state leaders, dashboard redesign, and development of supplemental materials—such as a clear dashboard introduction explaining each policy. Watch for dashboard updates and new resources by Summer of 2026.

AIR’s Expansion of State Benefits Cliff Policy Insights

Building on the 12 states currently represented, AIR, in collaboration with APHSa, will expand the dashboard to include benefits cliff mitigation policies from up to 8 additional states. Examples of these policies include:

- ◆ Increasing asset limits or eliminating asset tests
- ◆ Phasing out benefits rather than abruptly terminating them
- ◆ Disregarding a portion of earned income for benefit eligibility
- ◆ Increasing income eligibility thresholds
- ◆ Implementing categorical eligibility
- ◆ Extending assistance through transition benefits
- ◆ Allowing full or partial passthrough of payments (e.g., child support)
- ◆ Providing employer incentives

The enhanced dashboard will integrate evidence on policy effectiveness to inform and support data-driven decision-making and ongoing system improvement. Learn more about AIR’s approach to research, evaluation, and technical assistance at <https://www.air.org/about>.

Jan.–Mar. 2026

Research on State Policies and Outcomes

For newly added states

Mar.–Apr. 2026

Interviews with State Leaders

To learn more about state-specific approaches

Apr.–Jun. 2026

Dashboard Design and Supplemental Materials

To enhance dashboard usability

Summer 2026

Expanded Benefits Cliff Dashboard Launch

Including more states and enhanced features

For more information, contact **Kapria Lee at APHSa** (klee@aphsa.org) or **Rachel Cook at AIR** (rcook@air.org).