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Work mandates shrink Ohio cash-assistance ranks

Many leave program without jobs or aid; food-program requirements to start

The overall caseload at Ohio Works First has plummeted while unemployment remains high in counties across the state, according to a [new report by Policy Matters Ohio](#). Many participants have lost aid because they have been unable to meet work requirements in the state's cash-assistance program. Similar work requirements are about to be applied to food assistance in 72 Ohio counties, with potentially harmful results for 134,000 adults.

“Shrinking aid presents a challenge for Ohio’s poorest families and the human service organizations that serve them, especially as Ohio’s economy struggles with a slow recovery,” said report author Wendy Patton of Policy Matters Ohio.

Patton analyzed data on economic conditions and interviewed the directors of Job and Family Services agencies in three counties. They discussed changes in work participation rates and what the new work requirements for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program could mean for the lowest-income residents of their counties.

“There is a myth out there that people on cash assistance lead a comfortable, luxurious life,” said Athens County Director Jack Frech. “This observation is made by people who have never been poor nor known anyone who is poor.”

Cash assistance and food stamps together put a family of three at 60 percent of the federal poverty level.

“We’re seeing a contradiction in state policy,” said Patton. “Ohio just made a smart decision to expand Medicaid, but has put in place work requirements that are labor intensive for service agencies, difficult for participants to meet, and may deny food aid to people who need it.”

The full report, interview transcripts, and county-by-county data on economic conditions and need are posted to the Policy Matters website at www.policymattersohio.org/shrinking-nov2013.

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*Policy Matters Ohio is a nonprofit, nonpartisan state policy research institute
with offices in Cleveland and Columbus.*