

Services & Support for Low Income People



The income support system of Massachusetts is a series of programs designed to help people who cannot find work — because they have been laid off, are considered inexperienced, or are too old — and people who cannot work — because they are too young, disabled, or caring for children. These programs are inadequate. One out of every five Massachusetts citizens continues to suffer from the lack of decent housing, an adequate diet, and proper health care. Programs that do exist offer limited assistance to only a few. Working people with low or moderate incomes often get no assistance at all.

The present income support system of Massachusetts consists of numerous categorical programs (programs targeted to specific groups or needs). These programs are differentiated by the various “strategies” they employ. One set of programs is based on the “cash income transfer” strategy. Welfare programs such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), General Relief (GR), Worker’s

Compensation, Unemployment Compensation, and Old Age, Survivors, Disability, and Hospital Insurance (OASDHI), operate under this principle. A second set of programs involve what is referred to as a “transfer-in-kind” strategy. This strategy is based on the belief that government should guarantee both the unemployed and those who cannot work a minimal amount of essential goods and services necessary to basic survival. Programs such as Medicaid, Medicare, Foodstamps, Rent Supplements, and Children Nutrition Programs provide for such basic necessities as shelter, food, and medical care. The third and final strategy emphasizes putting people in productive work so that they can better provide for themselves. Programs such as manpower training, child-care and job bank programs represent ways of helping people increase their marketable skills, increase their participation in the labor force, and minimize the length of time they remain unemployed. In theory this system could provide a decent standard of living for all people who cannot work or who cannot find work. In fact, it does not.

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