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## **Resigned to the Process:**

# Barriers to Accessing and Maintaining TANF among Low-Income Families with Young Children in Illinois

*Center for Budget & Policy Priorities Panel | September 8, 2022*

**HEARTLAND ALLIANCE**



- Introductions
- Acknowledgment of Loss & Moment of Silence
- Overview of Partnership
- Research Questions, Methods & Findings
- Questions & Discussion

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Data was provided by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) and that the findings may not necessarily represent the opinions and views of IDHS or the State of Illinois.

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## MOMENT OF SILENCE

*Over the course of the project our team lost two researchers who were part of our research advisory board, **Ms. Leeanna Majors** and **Ms. Edrika Fulford**. Their contributions as researchers and advocates to this project cannot be overstated. This report is dedicated to these two women.*

*We also acknowledge **Keith Freeman**, who led recruitment efforts for the individual interviews in Cook County who also passed during the project. He and them are truly deeply missed.*



Ms. Leeanna Majors



Ms. Edrika Fulford

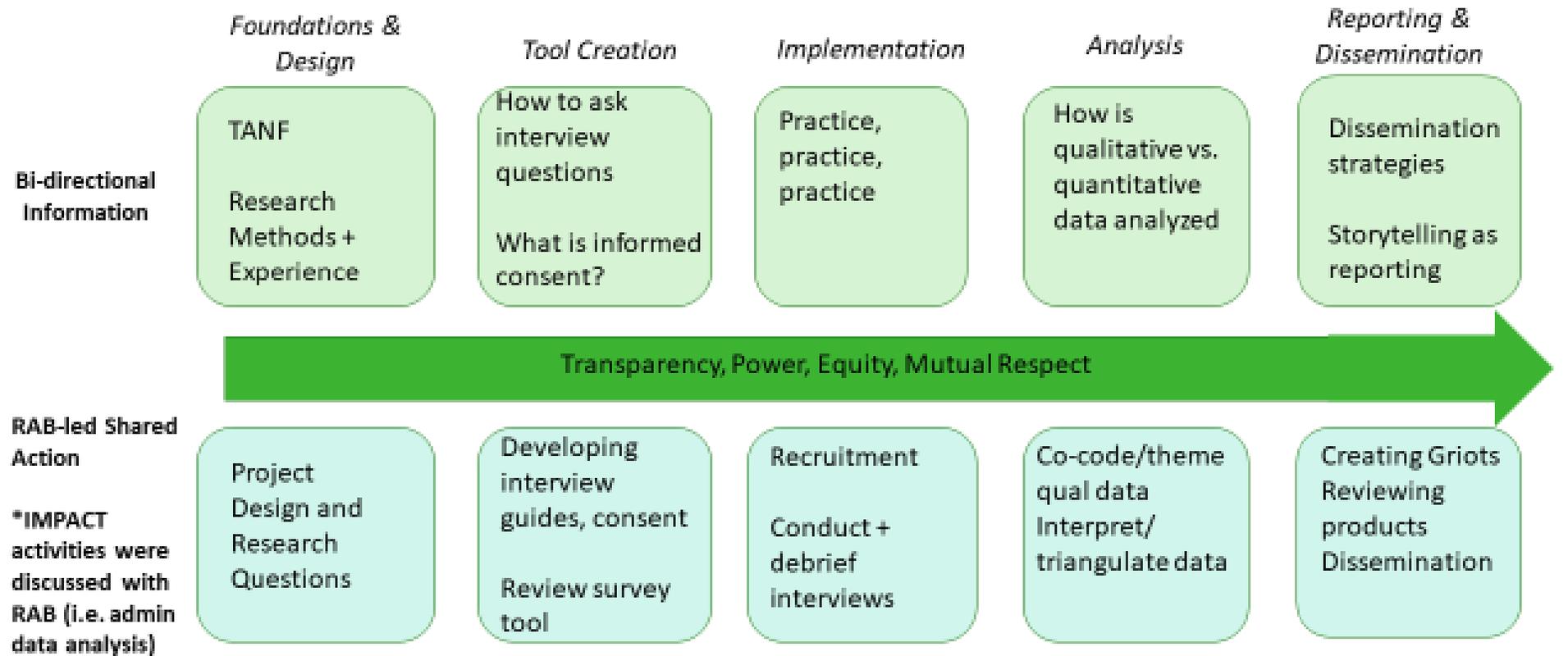
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## OVERVIEW OF PARTNERSHIP

Community-engaged research is “the process of working collaboratively with groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interests, or similar situations with respect to issues affecting their well-being.”

*Balls-Berry, J.E., Acosta-Perez, E. (2017). “The use of Community Engaged Research Principle to Improve Health: Community Academic Partnerships for Research” P R Health Sci. J. 36(2): 84-85; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Principles of Community Engagement. 2. Washington, DC: NIH Publication; 2011*

# TANF RAB approach



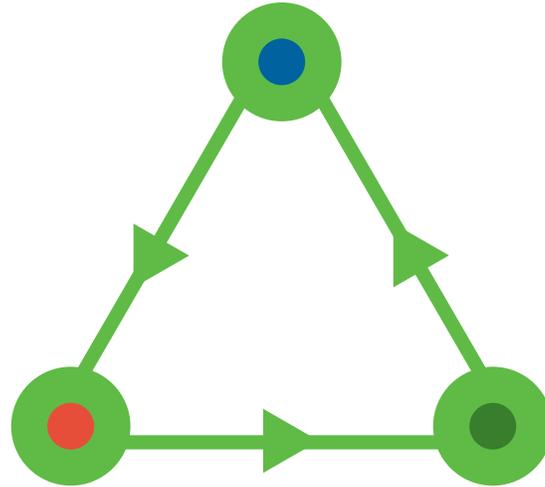
January 2020 – September 2022

How do the demographics of families with young children (<5) who are TANF-eligible differ from the demographics of families with young children who are enrolled on TANF in Illinois?

What are the barriers to accessing and maintaining full enrollment (i.e., no sanctions) in TANF for families with young children in Illinois?

How has the 2018 increase in the TANF award amount affected TANF caseload, particularly for historically marginalized groups?

**TANF  
ADMINISTRATIVE  
DATA (2018-2020)**



**IDHS  
CASEWORKER  
SURVEY**

**QUALITATIVE  
INTERVIEWS  
WITH TANF  
CUSTOMERS  
& COMMUNITY  
PARTNERS**

**ANALYSIS METHODS:**

-   UNIVARIATE/BIVARIATE ANALYSES, STATISTICAL TESTING
-  THEMATIC ANALYSIS
-    DATA TRIANGULATION & ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS



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## **FINDINGS**

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## KEY FINDING 1

Less than two-thirds of estimated eligible families with children under 5 were enrolled in TANF in 2018 and 2019.

*“It’s just hard to get, like, I was shocked that I got it. Yes, [there is] literally a group on Facebook for people asking how to get TANF.”*

**62%** of TANF-eligible families with children under 5 were enrolled in TANF in 2018

**63%** of TANF-eligible families with children under 5 were enrolled in TANF in 2019

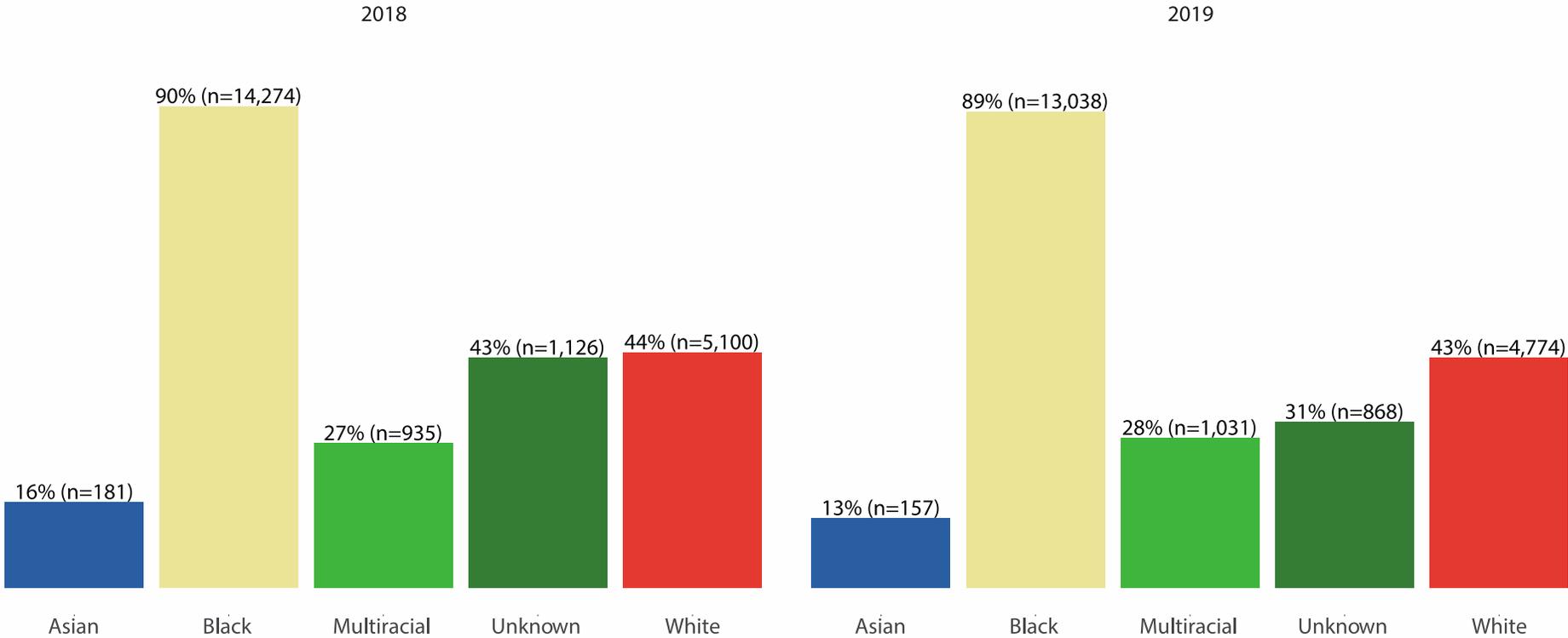
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## KEY FINDING 2

A higher proportion of eligible Black families are enrolled in TANF as compared to other racial groups in Illinois.

*“It’s a good program when you come from a place, you know where you don’t have much, or, you know, depending on your family who raising you, you know what I’m saying? So. It depends. It depends on your life. You know, if you need it, then you need it... TANF actually helped me after one month. I just saved my whole TANF and got up out of there [past living situation]. And it been going up since then. So you know, some people really do need it.”*

Around **90%** of Black families in 2018 and 2019 who were eligible for TANF were enrolled in TANF as compared to around **44%** of White families, **28%** of Multiracial families and **15%** of Asian families



*Uptake rate between TANF-eligible and TANF-enrolled by race in 2018 and 2019 for families with young children (<5)*  
 $X^2(4) = 3772.18$   $p < .000$  for 2018 ( $N = 21,616$ ) and  $X^2(4) = 4024.82$ ,  $p < .000$  ( $N = 19,868$ ) for 2019.

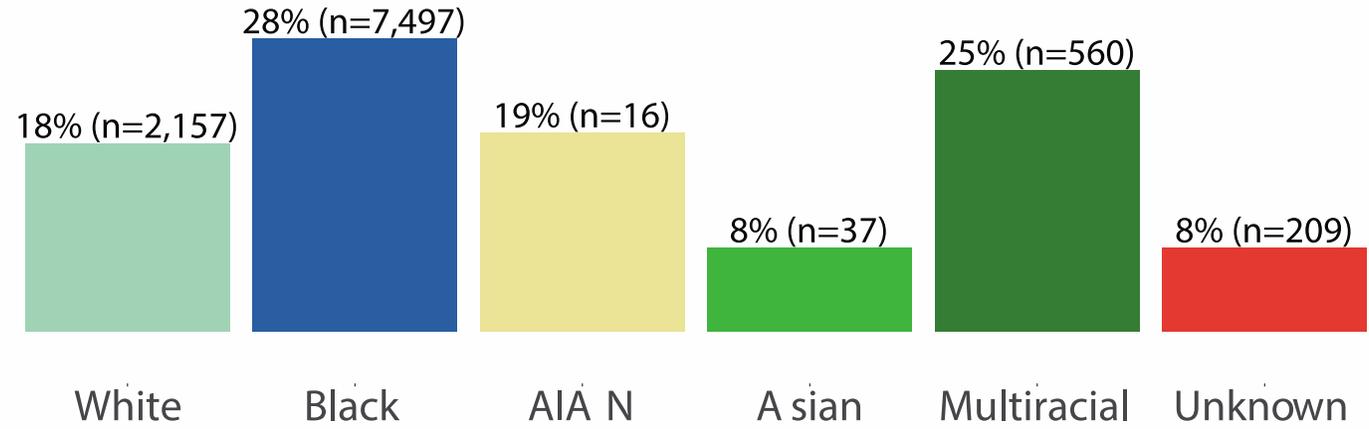
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## KEY FINDING 3

Black families are disproportionately sanctioned as compared to other racial groups in Illinois.

*“That’s what it is. It’s frustrating. Cause it’s like, uh, you know, when all else fails to have a job or [if you] can’t ask anybody for something, then it’s government assistance that should be there. It’s supposed to be there. And did they make it- they literally make you cut off an arm and a leg to receive it.”*

Across 2018-2019, **28%** of Black families and 25% of Multiracial families received at least one sanction as compared to **18%** of White families



*Families enrolled in TANF (2018-2019) with at least one sanction by race*

**KEY FINDING 3**

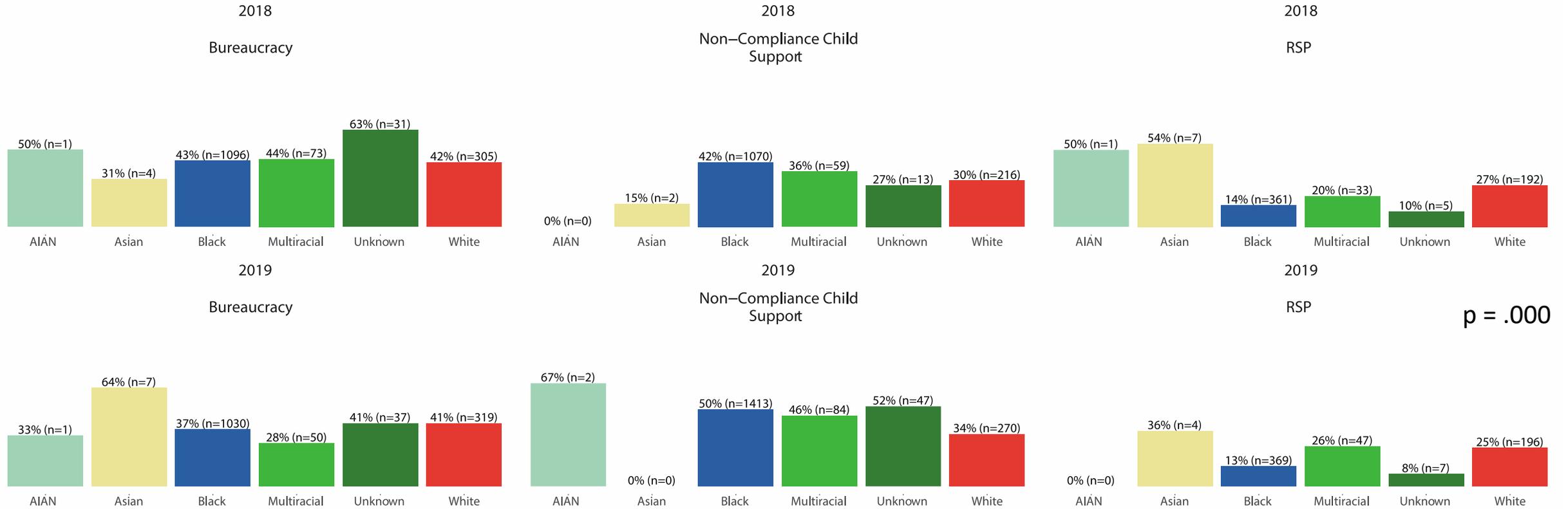


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## KEY FINDING 4

While the bureaucracy of TANF is the most frequently reported reason that a family is sanctioned, Black families are more likely to be sanctioned for child support non-compliance

*“It didn’t matter to them, I was just a case number, you know. And I explained my situation. Cause at first, you know, I didn’t have my middle child’s dad’s birthday. And she told me that you can’t... That board is not going to listen to that, because he could be sitting there next to you and you got women all about to get child support and the man be sitting there next to you, and I’m trying to tell her, like, I know his birthday I just don’t know his year, and she’s trying to tell me, there’s no way you’re out here doing things with men unprotected even though you don’t know their birthday. **Yeah, just trying to make me feel two feet tall.**”*



p = .000

*Top three sanction groupings by race for 2018 and 2019*

p = .000

**KEY FINDING 4**



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## KEY FINDING 5

The IDHS staffing structure and the lack of interagency coordination compounds this already bureaucratic process, by removing the human/personal connection from the process.

*Every time the person called, it was always a different person.... It [the lack of caseworker consistency] was hard because you would have to keep on talking about the same thing that you had already talked about with the caseworker yesterday. “Now I have to tell you about it again? Like, I just told a caseworker the same stuff yesterday.” “Well, ma’am, I’m not that caseworker. You have to tell me what you told her.” You know, you get tired of repeating yourself.”*

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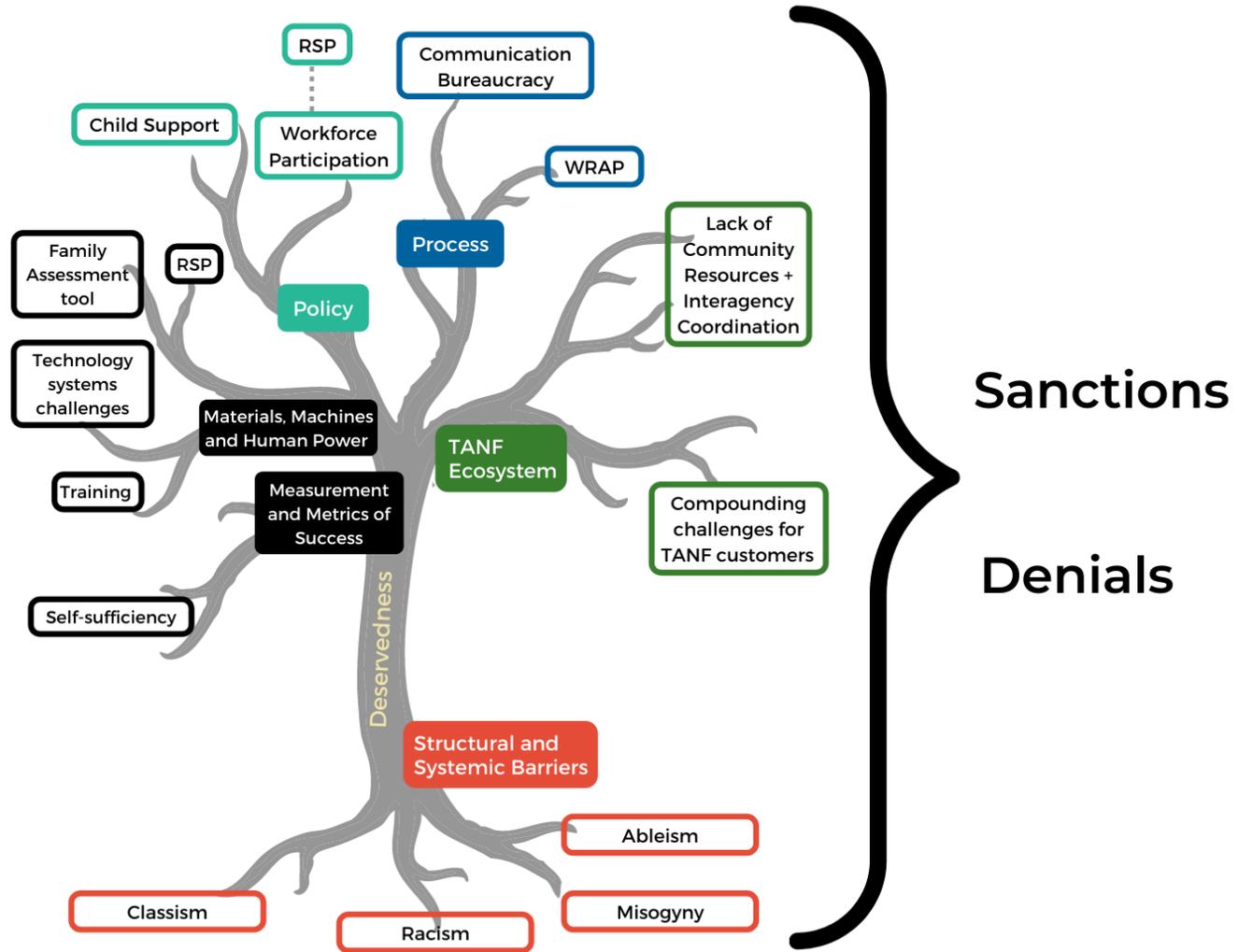
*“I was asked to identify the supportive services provided to TANF customer by DHS. I didn’t know them because in my 7 years and prior to my employment with DHS, I wasn’t aware of them and nobody told me. I asked several TANF workers who didn’t know. I have always used other services outside of DHS. When I have customers who were on the eviction list, with the permission of the customer, I contacted DCFS who was able to save their housing. I have family who work for DCFS and they didn’t know they provided those services. **The problem with the state is they provide a lot of services but the agencies have a huge disconnect.**”*

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## KEY FINDING 6

The implementation of TANF should reflect the complex challenges that customers face and should seek to remove barriers to enrolling and maintaining TANF.

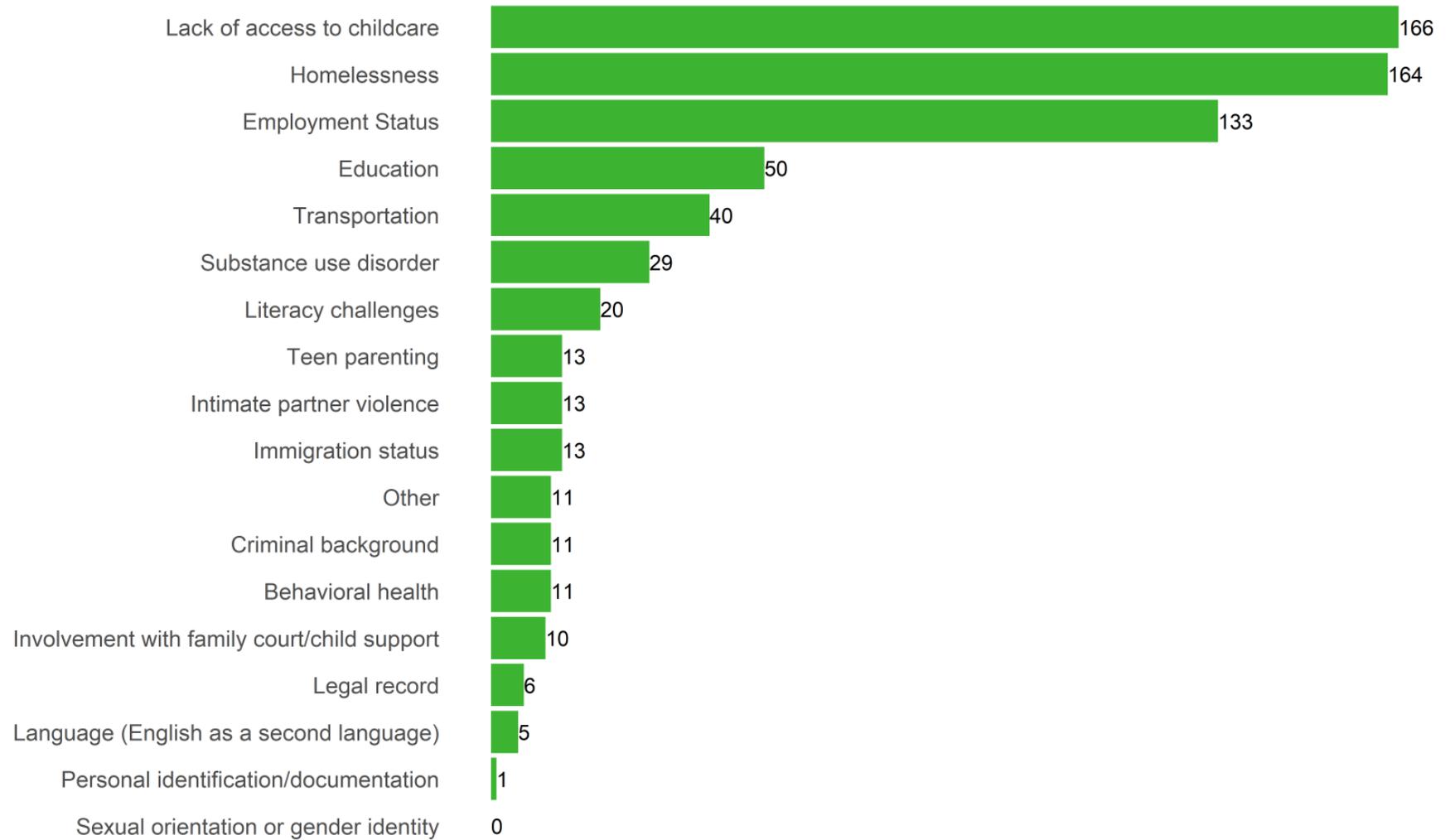
*“I’m like, you guys have the tools, you have the system, you know, you can do this. And she said that it was my job to find out because I needed the help.”*



KEY FINDING 6

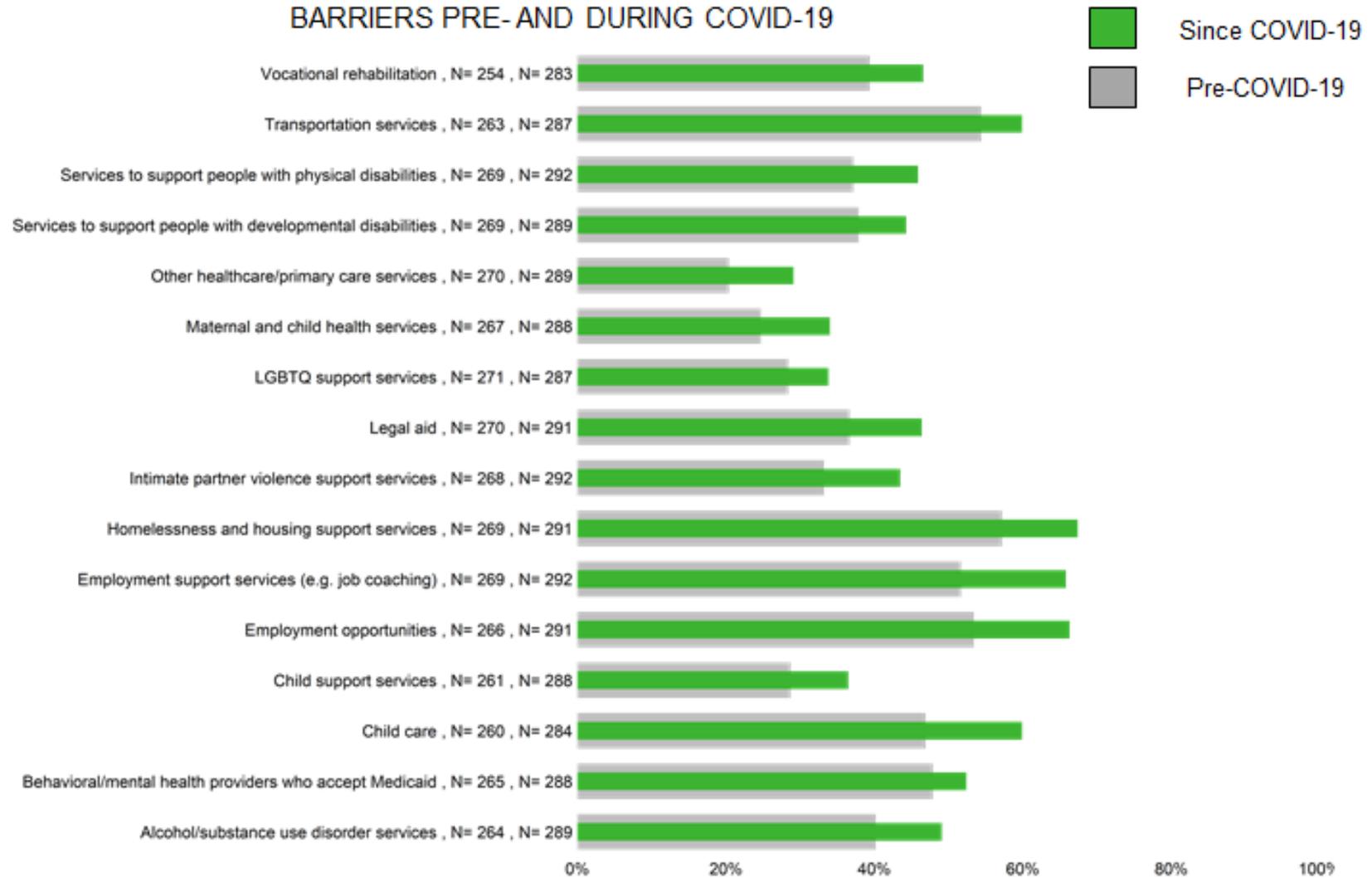


Customer-Faced Barriers ranked most frequently as Number 1 (n=696)



## KEY FINDING 6

## BARRIERS PRE- AND DURING COVID-19

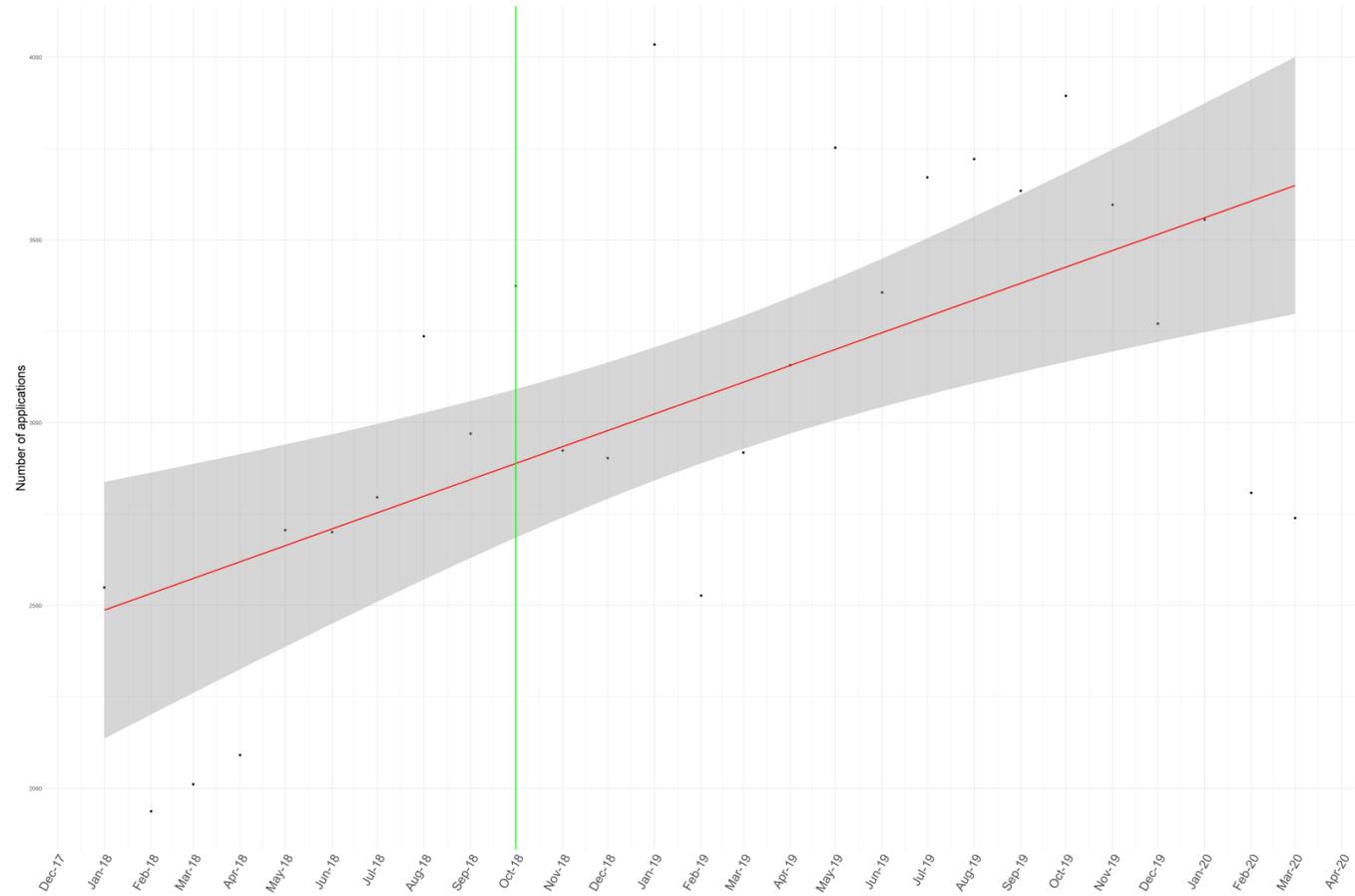


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## KEY FINDING 7

The increase of the TANF cash amount did not increase TANF enrollment in Illinois

“it's only a certain amount of money. So you got to use it wisely, make you a checklist of things that you need to buy. Make sure you know how to save, make sure you know how to budget, don't spend it all in one sitting, because once it's -- once it's gone, it's gone, and you have to wait a whole another month just to get some more money.”



*TANF applications December 2017 – April 2020*



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## **STATE-LEVEL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

The TANF cash amount should be increased.

IDHS and HFS should collaborate to create a customer-centered service delivery model.

TANF families should receive the full amount of child support paid by the noncustodial parent.

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## FEDERAL-LEVEL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

**Guaranteed income is an alternative with a growing evidence base.**

A guaranteed income would require federal policy change so in the absence of such a change the following recommendations would make incremental changes to TANF to better support families:

- Restructure the TANF block grant so that cash assistance is prioritized and sustains its value.
- Eliminate work requirements and instead make participation in work programs voluntary.

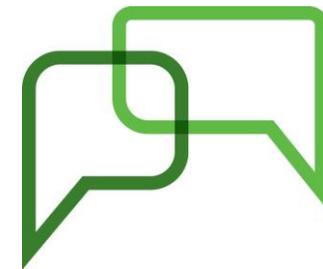
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## **FEDERAL-LEVEL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

Remove child support compliance requirements.

Bar states from utilizing sanctions that either reduce benefit amounts or eliminate cash assistance altogether.

Remove the 60-month time limit to acknowledge the complex and unique circumstance that force families to remain in poverty.



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## QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION