

GARRETT COUNTY: ADULTS RECEIVING TEMPORARY CASH ASSISTANCE IN 2017

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Despite its small size, Maryland is a diverse state. Its 24 jurisdictions sometimes have very different populations, and, consequently, may have very different needs. While statewide data can be extraordinarily helpful to state-level program managers and policymakers, it may not reflect the customers that local departments of social services see in their offices.

To assist local departments in serving their Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) customers better, we are examining adult recipients in each of the 24 jurisdictions over the course of four years. In this brief, we focus on Garrett County, one of three counties in Western Maryland that border West Virginia and Pennsylvania. In Garrett County, 16% of families with children under 18 years of age are living in poverty compared to one in 10 (10.6%) in Maryland (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017b). Additionally, the median family income (\$56,782) in Garrett County is about \$35,000 less than the median family income in Maryland as a whole (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017b). With less than 1% of the state's TCA caseload in state fiscal year (SFY) 2017, Garrett County is one of seven jurisdictions serving less than 100 adult recipients.

Even though adult recipients in Garrett County are a very small portion of the state caseload, it is worth noting ways in which they differ from recipients in other parts of the state. Table 1, on the following page, provides an overview of the demographic characteristics of Garrett County adult recipients. TCA recipients in Garrett County are Caucasian (93.2%) women (78.4%) in their mid-30s who are married (20.3%) or had previously been married (33.8%). The typical adult recipient in Garrett County reflects the demographic composition of the county, but it is very different from the average TCA recipient across the state. Compared to all other jurisdictions, Garrett County has the largest percentages of male and Caucasian recipients. The high percentage of men may be related to the fact that Garrett County has the largest percentage of recipients who are married or were previously married. Additionally, Garrett County recipients are older—nearly 40% were above age 35, compared to 30% for the entire state.

KEY FINDINGS

- ❖ Garrett County adult recipients are typically Caucasian women in their mid-30s who are married or were previously married.
- ❖ Just over one in three have not finished high school, and slightly less than one in three have a disability that is expected to last over 12 months.
- ❖ Over half worked in the year before they began receiving TCA, but only 42% of employed adults worked all four quarters in that year.
- ❖ Earnings among employed adult recipients in that year were low, with a median of about \$5,400.
- ❖ About 40% of Garrett County adult recipients who worked in the year before they received TCA were employed in restaurants or general retail.

Table 1. Demographics

Gender	
% Female	78.4%
Age	
Average	34.8
Race & Ethnicity	
% Caucasian^	93.2%
% African American^	4.1%
% Hispanic	2.7%
% Other^	0.0%
Marital Status	
% Married	20.3%
% Never Married	45.9%
% Divorced, Separated, or Widowed	33.8%

Note: ^=non-Hispanic. Valid percentages reported.

For adult recipients who are required to work or to participate in work-related activities, educational attainment is a particularly important characteristic, as it can affect the job opportunities that are available to customers. Figure 1 places

educational attainment among Garrett County adult recipients in context with adult recipients statewide and in other jurisdictions. The lines represent the range of values seen in all 24 jurisdictions, with the bars at the top and bottom indicating the *statewide high*—the highest value across all jurisdictions—and the *statewide low*—the lowest value across all jurisdictions. The square shows what the statewide average is, and the colored diamond denotes where Garrett County falls.

Comparing Garrett County with the rest of the state reveals that adult recipients in this County have lower educational attainment than their counterparts elsewhere. Over one in three (35.1%) Garrett County adult recipients has not finished high school or received a GED, which is the third highest percentage in the state. In the jurisdiction with the lowest percentage not completing high school, close to 15% lack a high school diploma, although the statewide average is about 30%.

Data and Study Population

Data comes from the Client Automated Resource and Eligibility System (CARES) and the Maryland Automated Benefits System (MABS), which are the administrative data systems for TCA and Unemployment Insurance (UI), respectively. CARES provides individual- and case-level data on demographics and program participation for families receiving TCA. Additional data on adult recipients' disabilities comes from WORKS, which documents participation in work and work-related activities. The MABS system includes data from all employers covered by the state's Unemployment Insurance (UI) law and the Unemployment Compensation for Federal Employees (UCFE) program. Together, these account for approximately 91% of all Maryland civilian employment.

There are a variety of limitations to MABS data. MABS only reports data on a quarterly basis, which means that it is not possible to calculate weekly or monthly employment and earnings. Another limitation is that MABS does not contain data on certain types of employment, such as self-employment, independent contractors, and informal employment; consequently, earnings from under-the-table jobs are not included. Finally, MABS has no information on employment outside Maryland. In Garrett County, 13% of residents work out of state, which is well above the national average (3.7%) but below the state average (16.9%) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017a). As a result, we may be understating employment and some earnings.

The study population in this report is the unique number of adults who received at least one month of TCA in SFY 2017 (July 2016 to June 2017). Statewide, 23,216 adults received TCA in SFY 2017; in Garrett County, 74 adults received TCA.

The percentage of adult recipients in Garrett County who have finished high school is about the same as the statewide average. Three in five (60.8%) Garrett County adult recipients have a high school diploma, similar to the state average (61.9%). However, educational attainment among adult TCA recipients is much higher in some jurisdictions. Just over 75% of adults in the jurisdiction with the highest percentage have finished high school.

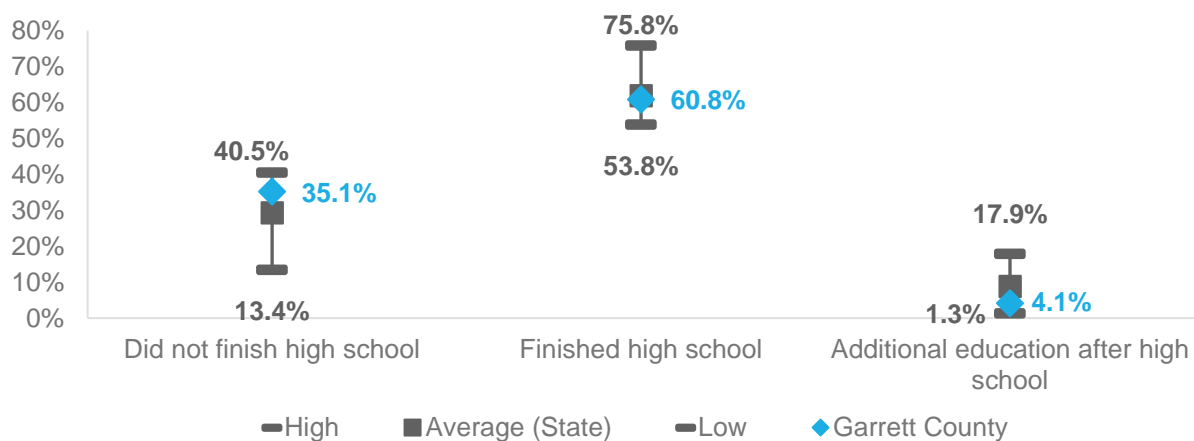
Garrett County adult recipients are less likely to have any education beyond high school. Only 4% have additional education after high school; the statewide low is 1%, and the average is 9%. On this measure, Garrett County is far from the statewide high of 18%. Still, a few customers may have specialized education or training that could lead to well-paying jobs.

More broadly, the high percentage of adults in Garrett County without a high school education is concerning. Our research shows that the more education adult recipients have, the more likely they are to find good jobs or to realize economic stability (Nicoli, Passarella, & Born, 2013;

James & Nicoli, 2016). Thus, acquiring more education could be crucial to Garrett County adult recipients' efforts to achieve self-sufficiency.

The Maryland Department of Human Services is already pursuing one potential avenue to increase educational attainment by partnering with the Maryland Department of Labor, Licensing & Regulation's Division of Workforce Development and Adult Learning. Adult basic education can help adult recipients who lack a high school education with any number of goals, from improving literacy to completing a GED. Furthermore, federal law, in the form of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, encourages this kind of partnership, and Maryland has been a leader in ensuring that high-need adults, such as TCA recipients, receive priority of service as the law mandates (Center for Law and Social Policy, 2016). The Western Maryland Consortium (n.d.), which has offices in each of the three Western Maryland counties, indicates that these services result in "improved workforce quality, reduced welfare dependency, and enhanced productivity and competitiveness."

Figure 1. Educational Attainment



Note: *High* refers to the jurisdiction with the highest percentage. *Low* refers to the jurisdiction with lowest percentage. General Education Development program (GED) certificates are included in high school completion rates. Valid percentages reported.

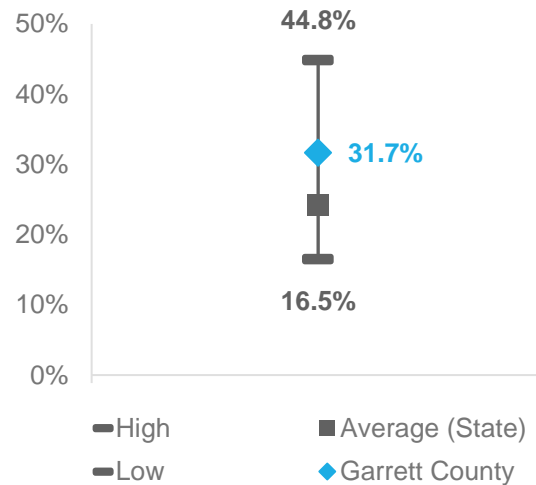
Partnerships with other entities within Maryland's workforce system may also be beneficial for adult recipients with disabilities. Figure 2 shows the percentage of adult recipients who have disabilities that are expected to last longer than 12 months.¹ As with education, this figure includes the percentage for Garrett County adult recipients, the statewide average, and the highest and lowest percentages among all 24 jurisdictions. Nearly one third (31.7%) of adult recipients in Garrett County have such a disability, compared to about one quarter (24.2%) of adults statewide. Although the percentage of adults in Garrett County is higher than the statewide average, there are another six jurisdictions with a higher percentage. Still, the county is substantially higher than the jurisdiction with the lowest percentage of 17%.

Given that the percentage of Garrett County adult recipients with disabilities is above the statewide average, there are some adults who require disability-related services. This could be anything from assistance with applications for federal disability programs, such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI), to support for finding and keeping jobs while also managing disabilities. Through a statewide contract with a vendor, caseworkers can offer assistance to those who need help with applications. For those who want to work, the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS), housed within the Maryland State Department of Education, may be an excellent resource. DORS is locally operated across the state with an office in Cumberland for residents of Garrett and Allegany counties. Like the TCA

¹ This data, which comes from WORKS, represents the percentage of adult recipients with an OTD code at any point in SFY 2017. OTD is a state-defined activity code indicating that the individual has a disability that is expected to last over 12 months.

program, DORS is part of Maryland's workforce system, so this is another way that closer collaboration with workforce partners may benefit TCA customers.

Figure 2. Percent with Disabilities Lasting 12+ Months



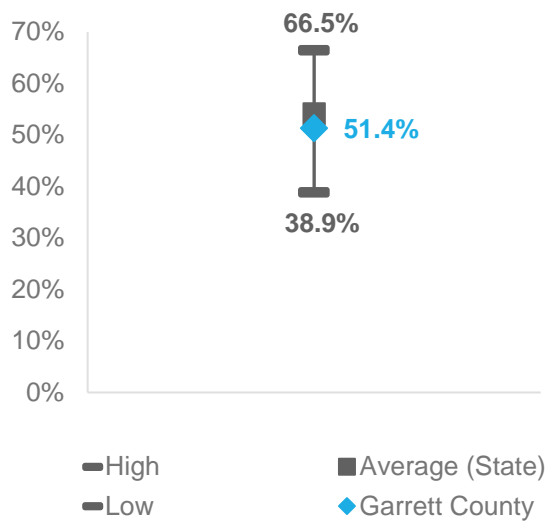
Note: *High* refers to the jurisdiction with the highest percentage. *Low* refers to the jurisdiction with lowest percentage. Valid percentages reported.

As TCA moves toward being more fully integrated with its workforce partners, understanding adult recipients' work histories is even more important. After all, past employment experiences can shape future employment and earnings. To that end, Figure 3 displays the percentage of adult recipients who worked in the year before they began receiving TCA.² Just over half (51.4%) of Garrett County adult recipients were employed in that year, which is just under the statewide average (54.1%). Although this percentage is near the statewide average, employment participation is the fifth-lowest in the state—

² This percentage reflects adult recipients who were engaged in formal employment in a job covered by the Maryland Unemployment Insurance system. Please see the sidebar on data on page 2 for more information.

and 15 percentage points below the jurisdiction with the highest percentage. However, the low employment rate in Garrett County may be related to employment outside of Maryland; given the county's proximity to West Virginia and Pennsylvania, customers may frequently work out of the state.

Figure 3. Percent Employed
Year before TCA Receipt



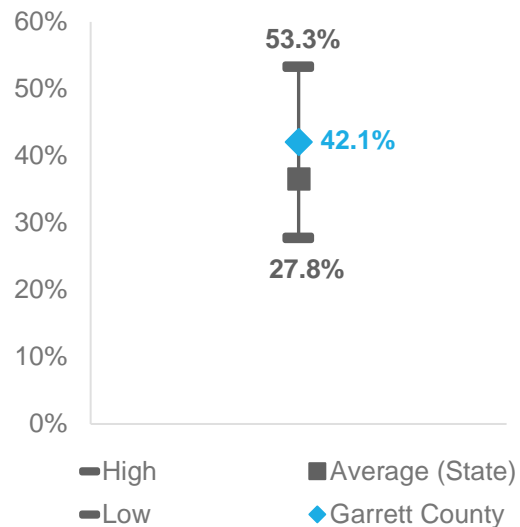
Note: *High* refers to the jurisdiction with the highest percentage. *Low* refers to the jurisdiction with lowest percentage. Valid percentages reported.

While these percentages provide useful information, it may also helpful to know how many quarters adult recipients worked in that year. Each year contains four quarters, so Figure 4 presents the percentage of employed adult recipients who worked all four quarters. About two in five (42.1%) employed Garrett County adult recipients worked four quarters in the year before TCA receipt, which is above the statewide average and is the fourth highest percentage in the state. Even still, the majority of employed adults worked in only one to three quarters of the year. There is considerable variation across the state,

however. In the jurisdiction with the highest percentage, over half of employed adult recipients worked in all four quarters, but the statewide low is 28%.

Knowing that slightly more than half of Garrett County adult recipients were employed in the year before receiving TCA—but that two fifths of those employed adults worked in all four quarters—provides some context on what these recipients may need in order to become self-sufficient. These findings indicate that a sizeable percentage of adults who work are able to sustain employment for the entire year. Still, about 60% of employed adults are unable to work consistently over the course of a year. Thus, while some adult recipients may need substantial assistance in finding a job, those who find jobs may need ongoing services, at least at first, to help them maintain work.

Figure 4. Percent Who Worked Four Quarters
Year before TCA Receipt



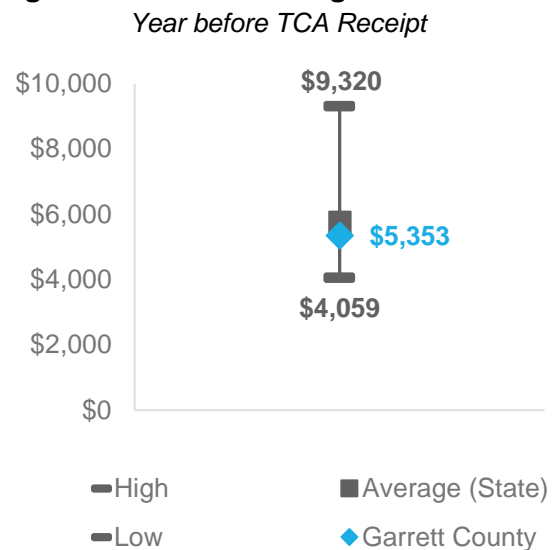
Note: *High* refers to the jurisdiction with the highest percentage. *Low* refers to the jurisdiction with lowest percentage. Valid percentages reported.

Another critical aspect of adult recipients' employment histories is how much they are able to earn. Figure 5 shows median earnings in the year before adult recipients began receiving TCA for Garrett County, the state, and the jurisdictions with the highest and lowest earnings. Even though these earnings represent what employed adult recipients earned in one year, it is important to remember that these earnings usually do not reflect full-time, full-year employment. As Figure 4 revealed, most employed adult recipients work less than four quarters in a year.

In Garrett County, and across the state, median earnings are very low. Employed adult recipients in Garrett County earned \$5,353 in the year before TCA receipt, which is slightly below the state median. It is still about \$1,300 more than the statewide low, although it is about \$4,000 less than the statewide high. Regardless, even in the jurisdiction with the highest median earnings (\$9,320), earnings were far below \$20,420, which is the 2017 federal poverty threshold for a three-person household (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2017).

These low wages add another piece to the puzzle. From earlier figures, we know that many adult recipients work before receiving TCA, but they often do not work in all four quarters. Low wages may be both cause and consequence of this inconsistent work. Adult recipients may be unable to earn enough to cover their job-related expenses, such as transportation, uniforms, and child care, which may lead to an inability to work. At the same time, being unable to work consistently is likely to drive wages downward.

Figure 5. Median Earnings



Note: *High* refers to the jurisdiction with the highest percentage. *Low* refers to the jurisdiction with lowest percentage. Earnings are standardized to 2016 dollars. One jurisdiction was excluded from this figure as it represented an outlier in the data.

One strategy to increase wages focuses on the industries in which adult recipients work. Some jobs can be performed in a number of different industries. For example, administrative assistants may work in healthcare settings, in schools, or in private firms, but each industry may compensate administrative assistants differently. Helping adult recipients find employment in industries that offer higher pay is one way to increase self-sufficiency.

Unfortunately, the number of adult recipients in Garrett County who worked in an identifiable industry in the year before receiving TCA was very small. Only 38 adult recipients had industry data. Industries were identified with three-digit North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) codes. As a result, we can only report that the two most common industries among Garrett County adult recipients are

restaurants and general retail.³ In fact, 40% of those who were employed in the year before receiving TCA worked in those two industries.

Prior research has found that working in the restaurant and general retail industries is not associated with high earnings. Individuals who left TCA and initially worked in these industries have below-average earnings, and they were more likely to return to TCA (Nicoli, Passarella, & Born, 2014). They were also less likely to realize economic stability after exiting TCA (James & Nicoli, 2016). In contrast, individuals who left TCA and initially worked in industries such as outpatient health care, nursing homes, hospitals, and education have above-average earnings (Nicoli et al., 2014) and were more likely to attain economic stability after exit (James & Nicoli, 2016). Thus, helping adult recipients work in industries that pay better than restaurants or general retail is one potential pathway to increase earnings.

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³ Restaurants (NAICS code 722) are defined as full-service or fast food restaurants as well as caterers and mobile food services. General retail (NAICS code 452) is defined as department stores and other general merchandise stores.

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