



# One Door to Work: Myth vs. Fact



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# Introduction

The “One Door to Work” reform integrates and streamlines workforce development, job training, and public assistance programs to achieve a single goal: provide a viable avenue for more people to transition from government benefits to work and self-sufficiency. One Door to Work reform does this while mitigating government waste and inefficiencies plaguing states throughout the nation. Utah’s generational reforms, first implemented in the 1990s, provide a blueprint that other states, most notably Louisiana, are now aggressively exploring. In Utah, services are provided in a rational, cost-effective manner focused on measurable outcomes such as employment, earnings, and long-term labor force participation.

One Door to Work gives taxpayers a system that is leaner, more transparent, and less vulnerable to waste, fraud, and duplication. It integrates service delivery, casework, eligibility systems, and financing so states can replace bureaucratic fragmentation with clear lines of responsibility and stronger oversight. As with any major administrative reform, integration must be designed and implemented well.

The defining feature of One Door to Work is an integrated state agency that oversees workforce development, job training, and public assistance programs while instilling a work-first culture rather than the typical culture of benefits eligibility and maintenance. Utah is the first state to fully implement this model, as part of the overwhelmingly successful welfare reform movement of the 1990s. A major first step was the creation of the Utah Department of Workforce Services (DWS) in 1997. Numerous states are now beginning the multi-year work of pursuing similar reforms as governors seek solutions to the long-term workforce delivery dysfunction that worsened during the COVID-19 era.

Critics on both the left and the right often mischaracterize what One Door to Work is designed to do. Opponents claim it is a backdoor attempt to slash the government and push vulnerable people off assistance. Other critics argue that it simply expands the welfare state by enrolling more people into more programs. Both arguments completely miss the point. The real choice is not between integration and program integrity. It is between a broken status quo of fragmented bureaucracies that hide failure, waste, and dependency, and a better model built on integrated systems, strong verification, real work expectations, and clear accountability for results.

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# One Door to Work Misconceptions

## **Misconception 1: Welfare lobbyists for “No Wrong Door” and “One Door to Work” are advocating for the same policies.**

Opponents of One Door to Work deliberately create a straw man version of the model for political convenience. They try to equate it with progressive “No Wrong Door” models that function mainly as a one-way on-ramp into public benefits, with little emphasis on work, upward mobility, or long-term independence. “No Wrong Door” models have also served as a “fall back” policy position rather than undertaking the hard work of One Door to Work reforms that upset traditional program silos defined by special interests.

### **That is not what One Door to Work is.**

One Door to Work is a work-first reform of state workforce and safety net systems. In most states today, workforce development and public assistance programs operate in separate program silos that serve customers poorly and lack the comprehensive structure to better match labor demand and supply. They have different intake processes, separate caseworkers, disconnected data systems, different offices, and separate agency leadership.

Both businesses and customers interface with “program representatives” focused on eligibility for programs instead of accessing services needed to make a positive employment connection. For example, under this fragmented status quo, a Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipient who is connected to employment and training services through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) is more the exception rather than the norm.

The One Door to Work model is a foundational system change: it asks state leaders to take a hard look at that siloed, fragmented structure that is serving businesses and workers poorly and intentionally reform it to be a work-focused, integrated system.

The current federally-funded program structure has become so difficult to rationalize that many states now spend additional state taxpayer dollars on education and training services layered on top of existing workforce and public assistance systems. The result is duplication, inefficiency, and wasted resources across a web of more than 80 programs. The cost of this fragmented system likely exceeds even the direct fraud policymakers often focus on. Allowing that waste and duplication to continue is negligent.

One Door to Work is supported by more than [46 conservative and small business organizations across 17 states](#), including institutions like the [Heritage Foundation](#), the [American Enterprise Institute](#), and the [America First Policy Institute](#). Support for this model also includes state leaders such as [Louisiana Governor Jeff Landry](#), and [West Virginia Governor Patrick Morrisey](#). The Alliance for Opportunity’s One Door to Work initiative even received a [Heritage Foundation Innovation Prize](#).

Critics who conflate a true One Door to Work model, such as Utah’s, and progressive “No Wrong Door” initiatives misunderstand the significant differences between the two. No Wrong Door is a benefits-access model. One Door to Work is a work-first governing reform focused on integrating systems so states can move people in need toward long-term employment, self-sufficiency, and accountability.

## Misconception 2: Integrated eligibility systems always amplify fraud.

First, it is important to define “integrated eligibility.”

Integrated eligibility (IE) systems are technology platforms that allow states to process applications and determine eligibility for multiple public programs—such as Medicaid, SNAP, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)—through a single application and a shared backend system. When designed well, these systems improve administrative efficiency, reduce duplication, prevent dual participation, accurately verify the person’s eligibility, and give states a more complete view of how individuals are served across programs.

Integration is not the cause of fraud; weak controls are.

Properly designed IE systems reduce fraud and errors rather than increasing them. They do this with:

- common data
- shared verification processes
- unified program controls

These features can eliminate the issues associated with disconnected systems that often contain conflicting or incomplete information.

For example, when a state assigns a master individual index number to each beneficiary, it becomes much harder for the same person to receive duplicate benefits under multiple names or records. Integrated systems can also build in program integrity controls to identify suspicious activity or prevent improper payments before they go out—for instance, flagging duplicate issuances, detecting conflicting information across programs, or stopping transactions that require staff review.

But these outcomes do not happen automatically. Like any technology reform, IE reflects the quality of the underlying policy and management. If a state builds a weak system with poor staff training, inadequate verification, inadequate controls like self-attestation, and weak oversight, integration can magnify weaknesses. But in a state with strong controls, solid cross-checks, and well-trained staff, IE lowers administrative costs, reduces error rates, and strengthens program integrity.

### The facts about Utah:

- Utah has one of the lowest SNAP error rates. [It is one of only eight states that is under the error rate threshold.](#)
- It is one of the few states in the union that does not take advantage of the broad-based categorical eligibility loophole, which allows applicants to bypass asset limits.
- Utah has led the country in Unemployment Insurance accuracy, timeliness, and quality and was one of only nine states to receive the [National Association of State Workforce Agencies’ Diamond Award](#), which recognized Utah’s “dedication to reducing fraud and promoting unemployment insurance integrity.”
- In 2020, during the height of COVID-era unemployment, Utah received the [U.S. Department of Labor’s State Employment Excellence Award](#) across multiple categories—including program integrity.

## What about the study that critics use to say that fraud is multiplied in an IE system?

Opponents lean on a [LexisNexis fraud-cost study](#) to imply that integration itself is the problem. However, the study more accurately shows that states with IE systems that both share information across agencies and cross-train staff have lower fraud losses than the overall average. The risk is not integration; the risk is integration without appropriate data sharing and trained staff.

Integration without real safeguards does increase fraud risk and is not what we support. States do need a plan to address the sources of fraud: incorrect identity, inaccurate eligibility data, dual participation, account takeovers, and trafficking of benefits. To tackle these issues, states must both have access to solid cross-program data about identity, income, assets, household composition, and to reject self-attestation for any of those categories. LexisNexis found these agencies, where IE systems are combined with effective data integration, robust cross-program coordination, clear eligibility criteria, and consistent identity verification, have [“significantly lower fraud costs.”](#)

The same study also concludes that agencies with more advanced modernization; stronger integration across programs; and access to accurate, complete data are more likely to reduce payment errors and improve the beneficiary experience. In other words, the evidence does not show that integration is inherently dangerous.

**It shows that integration without safeguards is dangerous, while integration with strong safeguards is a major advantage.**

## What role does IE play in One Door to Work?

IE is one component of a true One Door to Work reform, but it is not the defining feature. The defining feature is [integrated administration and service delivery](#)—bringing workforce development, job training, and safety net programs under a single state agency so leaders can reduce bureaucracy, create clear accountability, build a work-first culture, and create a cost-efficient and outcomes-based service delivery system.

Once a state has a unified agency and accountable service delivery system, it follows naturally that features of this approach include integrated intake, data systems, and eligibility technology. One Door to Work goes beyond eligibility systems alone. It also includes integrated service delivery, case management, oversight, and financing.

When implemented properly, One Door to Work makes it easier for states to:

- Identify and prevent fraud
- Reduce enrollment of ineligible individuals
- Disenroll beneficiaries when they are no longer eligible
- Connect eligible recipients to work and opportunities for upward mobility rather than leaving them trapped in disconnected programs

IE does not create fraud any more than a better accounting system creates embezzlement. Bad controls create fraud. Good integration, paired with strong verification and oversight, is one of the best tools states have to prevent it.

### **Misconception 3: Legislators across the nation are hearing pitches for IE.**

States are actually hearing from a broad coalition representing more than [46 different conservative institutions](#) that are calling on them to fix a broken system that keeps people trapped in government dependency. This large coalition is asking their leaders to build a statewide strategy focused on empowering chronically out-of-work and low-income individuals to move up the ladder of social mobility as quickly and efficiently as the government is able. These legislative champions across the states have tired of the status quo of a broken system, compounded over decades, that focuses on program eligibility management instead of person-centered upward mobility. And state leaders are responding.

**See, for example, Governor Jeff Landry’s Executive Order from Louisiana, the leading state on One Door to Work reform:**

“WHEREAS, research has shown that an integrated system of workforce and social services more effectively supports Louisiana’s most vulnerable citizens in escaping poverty through targeted supports and work to achieve dignity and self-sufficiency, which not only lifts individuals but also strengthens Louisiana’s economy.”

**Or West Virginia Governor Patrick Morrisey’s WorkFIRST announcement:**

“WorkFIRST is about restoring a culture that values work and opportunity. By aligning job training, employment services, and assistance programs, we can help more West Virginians enter the workforce. The WorkFIRST model is built on a simple premise: government services should prioritize pathways to employment. The Taskforce will examine ways to consolidate employment, training, and social service programs into a more integrated workforce system that positions services like SNAP, Unemployment Insurance, and [the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children] as short-term bridges—not long-term endpoints—on the path to self-sufficiency.”

**In fact, a 2022 paper about removing [Florida’s barriers to work](#) appears to call for the very thing the Alliance defines as One Door to Work:**

“Bureaucrats admit that taxpayer-funded programs related to job training tend to overlap and provide similar services to similar populations. Needless overlap wastes taxpayer resources, fosters inefficiency, and creates administrative barriers to work. A 2017 study published by the U.S. Department of Labor found that filling out redundant paperwork for multiple programs frustrated job seekers, which exacerbates other administrative problems.... To remove administrative barriers to work, Florida requires state and local bureaucrats to use a common intake and case management system. This facilitates coordination across levels of government, helping to streamline job search and placement. States should take steps to implement a common system for job training programs in order to help people move forward toward self-sufficiency and businesses to fill open jobs.”

## **Misconception 4: One Door is not needed to move people from welfare to work.**

A false choice is often created between work requirements and One Door to Work. That is the wrong frame. States need both. Work requirements and strong anti-fraud measures are essential reforms, and they should both be enforced.

It is important to note that current work requirements only apply to able-bodied adults without dependents under 14 years old (ABAWDs) on SNAP and, starting in 2027, on Medicaid. This leaves the majority of an average state's population who rely on safety net benefits not subject to a work requirement for Medicaid or SNAP.

- In the [Medicaid](#) program nationally, 26% of beneficiaries are expansion adults. The rest of the Medicaid population does not have a work requirement: 36% are children; 19% are parents, caretakers, or pregnant women; 9% are people with disabilities; and 10% are elderly people.
- Under [SNAP](#), 9.8% of recipients are ABAWDs; 38.9% are children; 19.5% are elderly; and 9.9% are non-elderly disabled adults.<sup>1</sup>

Failure to improve the system and provide opportunities for upward mobility is a disservice to these populations. Those who are struggling need short-term stabilization, coordinated case management, and a clear plan to move toward greater independence. A single mother fleeing domestic violence, for example, does not need to be sent from office to office, forced to repeat her story to multiple caseworkers, and buried in separate application processes. She needs a system that can respond quickly, coordinate services, and help her regain stability with work as the long-term goal.

An effective One Door system does not create an environment in which our most vulnerable neighbors are navigating multiple offices in their counties, telling their story to multiple people, filing out numerous stacks of paperwork, lingering on the safety net for years, and falling into the cycle of intergenerational poverty.

## **Misconception 5: Utah does not actually focus on returning safety net beneficiaries to work—its system is just an on-ramp to welfare.**

One Door to Work is not a wider on-ramp to welfare. The opposite is true: Utah's model is built to connect people to work quickly, coordinate services efficiently, and ensure that long-term dependence is the exception rather than the norm. In fact, Utah offers the prime example of how we should measure the outcomes conservatives want: a small, focused safety net and a thriving economy.

The goal is to move people toward employment, self-sufficiency, and positive exits from assistance. Utah is able to ensure that only those who absolutely need help receive assistance.

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<sup>1</sup>U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Evidence, Analysis, and Regulatory Affairs Office, Characteristics of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Households: Fiscal Year 2023, by Mia Monkovic and Ben Ward. Project Officer, Aja Weston. Alexandria, VA, 2025, Table 3.7. Available online at: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/research/snap/characteristics-fy23>.

**The most important measure of success is the decrease in the utilization of Utah’s safety net programs. Utah has the lowest percentage of any state population enrolled in Medicaid and one of the lowest percentages of the population enrolled in SNAP:**

- Utah has the lowest percentage of any state population (including non-expansion states) enrolled in Medicaid/CHIP —at 9.5% for September 2025. No other state has a percentage lower than 10%.<sup>2</sup>
- Utah has the second lowest SNAP enrollment as a percentage of the population in the nation (after Wyoming). In Utah, SNAP participation has remained steadily low since 1997 while national enrollment ballooned. Utah’s participation rate was 4.8% in 1997 and was 4.7% in November 2025.<sup>3</sup>
- For context, the U.S. participation rate in SNAP, less Utah and Washington, D.C., [increased](#) from 8.5% of the population in 1997 to 12% in November 2025.<sup>4</sup>

### **Utah’s job training outcomes:**

Misunderstandings of One Door to Work outcome metrics in Utah could be attributed to an incomplete understanding of the financing integration that is key to the One Door model. As a result, critics may be looking for outputs in the wrong places. When a state truly blends its WIOA funds with its TANF and SNAP Employment and Training funds, it does not capture outputs in programmatic silos. Utah can provide job placement services and training services to any SNAP- or Medicaid-eligible customer who walks into any DWS office—or to customers of any of the other nearly 50 programs consolidated in the department. Utah also offers job-seeker services to anyone who comes into an employment center or engages online, regardless of whether that customer is a recipient of any public assistance program.

In Utah, a caseworker’s initial interaction with customers involves developing a plan for employment and education. This creates an immediate culture of work and reduces the number of clients who need the second step: determining eligibility for programs.

Additionally, understanding Utah’s program data requires an understanding of Utah’s unique cost allocation model and the way in which customers of individual programs are “counted” and allocated against federal and state funding sources. This allows DWS to focus on serving the whole person rather than offering only siloed programs to participants. This is the differentiator and the core strength of the One Door to Work model.

### **Key facts about Utah’s workforce services:**

- **Utah does not separate the people they place in jobs by program. Instead, anyone who walks into a DWS office or applies for any program is served by workforce services, regardless of the program.**
- **[In 2025, Utah’s DWS served 872,677 job seekers. For the same year, it had 43,716 average quarterly job placements.](#)**

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<sup>2</sup> Final Report enrollment data for September 2025, State Medicaid and CHIP Applications, Eligibility Determinations, and Enrollment Data, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, and U.S. Census state population estimates for July 1, 2025.

<sup>3</sup> SNAP program data for Federal Fiscal Years 1997 and 2026, Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and U.S. Population Estimates for July 1, 1997 and July 1, 2025.

<sup>4</sup>Idem

## Utah's Medicaid enrollment and work referrals:

Opponents claim that Utah does not refer Medicaid recipients to work at all. But again, any DWS customer or job seeker, regardless of whether they receive public assistance and irrespective of which program they are on, has access to the DWS labor exchange and work-related activities. Further, Utah did not have the federal authority to require Medicaid recipients to participate in work, training, or education before this year, despite past efforts to do so. When Utah expanded Medicaid, the state also submitted a community engagement waiver to the federal Department of Health and Human Services, requesting the ability to apply work requirements to their able-bodied adults on Medicaid. Unfortunately, as the Biden Administration took office, [state work requirement waiver requests were denied](#). When President Trump returned to office, Utah [again pursued](#) a Medicaid work requirement waiver. Federal obstacles to Medicaid work requirements will change in 2027 because of H.R.1, which applies work requirements in Medicaid to able-bodied adults without dependents under the age of 14. Unlike other states that are scrambling to update their technology systems to track work requirement implementations, Utah's integrated system is ready to capture work activities easily.

Importantly, for individuals on Medicaid who may not be required to work before 2027, if that individual is also participating in another program with a work component, they can be required to work, train, or volunteer. It's important to repeat here that in Utah, even before a caseworker determines someone's eligibility for Medicaid, job placement services are offered first.

## TANF enrollment in Utah:

One Door to Work critics also try to argue that TANF funding for work, training, and education in Utah has been cut in half since 2015. While it is strange that conservative groups would request more government spending, these critics neglect to mention that:

- The TANF caseload declined by 47% in the same time period, from 8,876 recipients in 2015 to 4,683 in 2025.
- Critics may stress that only 12% of TANF families are engaged in work while enrolled, but Utah focuses on positive exits from the program. Its [2025 positive closure rate was 70.2%](#). This means that recipients earn enough that they no longer qualify for the program.
- The vast majority of Utah's active TANF caseload is child-focused: [72% child-only cases](#). These cases usually arise when a child is in foster care or living with relatives or a parent who is ineligible for TANF due to a disability.

## Misconception 6: Utah's labor force participation rate lags behind the national average.

It is hard to find anyone who maligns Utah's historically strong labor force participation rate (LFPR). The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics started publishing state LFPR data in 1976, and for every year since, Utah's rate was higher than the national LFPR. While the LFPR is a helpful economic indicator, it is also imperfect. A higher LFPR is considered to be better than a lower LFPR because it shows a greater percentage of the population engaged in the labor force. However, the number does not account for differences in demographics among the states, such as the number of people who are retired, the number of people age 16 or older who are still in school, or the number of stay-at-home parents. For example, having more retired individuals in a state would lower the LFPR, which by itself is not a bad thing.

Some critics of One Door to Work have chosen to measure from Utah's peak LFPR in 1994 and compare it to the national LFPR, which peaked in 1997. But the Utah DWS was not established until 1997. Therefore, it is essential to make an accurate comparison.

- From 1997 to 2026, Utah has outpaced the national LFPR by an average of 5.3%, and in 2025, Utah's LFPR was 5.6% above the national average.
- The [Heritage Foundation](#) reported on Utah in 2024: "The state's employment-to-population ratio is currently 67.4%; for the entire U.S., it's 60.1%."

## Conclusion

One Door to Work is what common-sense reform should look like: pro-work, anti-fraud, and focused on upward mobility.

States can choose both integration and program integrity. The One Door to Work model rejects the failed status quo of bloated bureaucracies, fragmented programs, and weak accountability that keeps our neighbors on the sidelines and leaves taxpayers footing the bill. Instead, it creates a leaner, more disciplined system that expects work, strengthens oversight, reduces waste, and helps people move from government dependence to opportunities to experience the dignity of work. Utah proved this model is effective. Other states now have a chance to do the same.

The real question is whether leaders will defend an existing system that just manages poverty or build one that helps more Americans escape it.

## ABOUT THE ALLIANCE FOR OPPORTUNITY

The Alliance for Opportunity is a multi-state coalition advancing state and federal policy reforms that help people move from dependence to the dignity of work and a flourishing life.



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