The Universal Assessment Tool will be available in two formats:

A. Electronic Version: Completed on a personal electronic device (e.g., computer, tablet, laptop, or customer's phone).
B. Paper Version: Given to the customer to complete and submit to their case manager at the LDSS.

Both the paper and electronic versions of the Universal Assessment Tool are designed to ensure all customers receive an equitable and thorough evaluation of their strengths and potential barriers.

The Assessment is the road map to tell the case manager and the customer where the customer has been, where the customer is, and where the customer is going in the future. Assessing the customer's abilities, needs, interests, and goals is a vital step in helping her/him reach the goal of being independent from public assistance. The assessment should be clear and detailed.

204.1 Definitions That Apply to the Assessment and Family Independence Plan

1. Good faith effort means the customer has made every effort to meet the terms outlined for the customer in the Family Independence Plan (FIP).

2. Supportive services are services provided to the TCA family based on the assessed needs of the customer by the local department or through referrals to service providers (such as counseling, Social Services, vocational rehabilitation referral, education, training, other evaluations).

3. Work eligible individuals (WEI) are the individuals applying for or receiving TCA benefits that are required to be counted in the federal work participation rate.
    a. Long-term disabled customers are now counted in the federal work participation rate and should be offered supportive services to enable them to become self-sufficient.

4. **Good cause (child support noncooperation)** means circumstances exist in which the customer's cooperation with child support may be against the best interest of the child. The FIP determines whether a customer has good cause for child support noncooperation (see Section 205 of the TCA Manual).

5. **Adequate reason (child support noncooperation)** means circumstances beyond the customer's control that justify noncooperation with child support. The Child Support Administration determines whether a customer has adequate reason (see Section 205 of the TCA Manual).

204.2 The Assessment Requirements

1. The assessment begins the day the customer files an application for TCA and ends when the TCA case closes.
    a. The customer begins the assessment during the TCA application process. (This assessment is referred to as the "Initial Assessment".)
    b. The customer also begins the assessment before the customer is assigned to a work activity. The assessment first helps identify if the customer feels safe and/or in need of urgent assistance. This process helps you identify individuals with disabilities or barriers that may either exempt them from work activity requirements or present a good-cause reason for not participating. The assessment can also help identify who may need an accommodation to work or participate in the work program.
    c. Two-parent households are required to individually complete and sign the assessment.
    d. Long-term disabled customers are now counted in the federal work participation rate and should be offered supportive services to enable them to become self-sufficient.
    e. While long-term disabled adults remain exempt from work requirements under state law and COMAR, they have the right to participate voluntarily in TCA work activities.
2. If the applicant or customer is a caretaker relative who is not needy and is not financially responsible for the children, the focus of the assessment is on the needs of the children and the resources available to them.
    a. The needs of the caretaker relative should be assessed with respect to the caretaker's ability to care for the children.
3. The assessment includes:
    a. A safety and comfort check-in.

Reminder: *If a customer expresses discomfort or lack of safety at any time during the assessment, FIA recommends local departments should utilize the National Domestic Violence Hotline (1-800-799-7233) or local domestic violence support services in the event of an emergency. FIA will develop policy guidance and training regarding sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic violence, stalking, and literacy accommodations.*

b. Work participation and exemptions
c. Whether the customer has good cause or an adequate reason for not cooperating with child support (see Section 205 of the TCA Manual).
d. The reason the customer is applying for or continuing to rely on assistance.
e. Other resources and options available to the family.
f. Customer or family needs
g. Educational level, job skills, job readiness, and areas of interest for all work mandatory assistance unit members. You must determine:
    i. Literacy;
    ii. Health;
    iii. Housing Stability;
    iv. Transportation needs;
    v. Pregnant individuals and child(ren)'s needs;
    vi. Appropriate and available work programs;
    vii. Jobs which can be pursued now;
    viii. Available options if the person is disabled either temporarily or permanently;
    ix. Available options if the person has limited English proficiency;
    x. Available personal and family resources;
    xi. Support to retain, achieve, and maintain independence;
    xii. Needed and available medical care (Mental or Physical Impairments);;
    xiii. Needed and available child or adult day care;
    xiv. Availability of potential resources, such as:
        1. Unemployment Insurance;
        2. Supplemental Security Income (SSI); and
        3. Social Security Benefits.

xv. Is there a history of family or domestic violence?
1. Who is involved?
2. Who is the aggressor and who are the victims?
3. Is the individual or family in counseling?
4. Where?
5. What is the plan to protect and help the individual or family?
6. What resources does the individual or family have if they have to leave the home without notice?
7. How does the family situation affect the individual or family in achieving independence?
8. What, if any, program requirements are waived because of the individual or family violence? For how long?
9. What are the individual or family members expected to do?

Reminder: *The TCA time limit counter stops during any month(s) in which the customer has reported domestic or family violence.*

xvi. Family history of substance use disorder:
1. Is treatment needed?
2. If treatment was received, where and when?
3. Was treatment completed successfully?
4. What is the effect on employability?

xvii. Each local department will use the same universal assessment tool and adopt the standard operating procedures (SOP) included in AT XX.

4. Based on the assessment, the case manager and the customer:
   a. Determine the services and resources needed for the family to achieve independence and;
   b. Develop the FIP and;
   c. Develop an agreement with the applicant to define the FIP implementation steps.
5. All LDSS case managers, and others working with the family must frequently review and update the assessment and the FIP plan to ensure the family is progressing and all needed resources are available.

6. LDSS employees and their representatives (vendors) working with the customer must keep the lines of communication open and work as a team to help the customer. Whether the interaction is with the case manager or the employment specialist, all customer information must be shared with other members of the team.

   Example: Martha Johnson tells the case manager that she can't go to her activity because she is moving. There has been family violence, and she is afraid for her children and herself. The case manager does not forward the information to the employment specialist. A week later, the case manager receives a notice from the vendor that Ms. Johnson failed to attend her activity, and they have been unable to contact her. A Notice of Non-Compliance (NONC) was sent to Ms. Johnson's address and was returned by the Post Office.
   - Ms. Johnson advised the case manager she would miss her activity.
   - Ms. Johnson has good cause for missing her activity because of the incidence of family violence, which she reported.
   - She reported she was moving.
   - Had the case manager let the vendor know of the situation, the vendor would not have sent the NONC.

   Similar problems can occur when the vendor does not let the case manager know information.

204.3 Completing, Reviewing and Updating the Assessment

1. Ensure the customer completes the initial assessment at application.
2. Acceptable signatures can include a wet-ink signature, an electronic signature, a typed name as a signature, and a signature drawn using a mouse, stylus, or touch-screen signature.
3. To foster strong customer rapport and yield more effective FIPs, staff should integrate the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) six principles of trauma-informed care when conducting assessment reviews. They are as follows:
   a. Ensuring physical and emotional safety;

b. Establishing trustworthiness and transparency in care;
c. Allowing for peer support between beneficiaries;
d. Incorporating collaboration and mutuality into decision making;
e. Fostering empowerment, voice, and choice among beneficiaries and staff;
f. Practicing sensitivity to cultural, historical, and gender differences.

4. The case manager must review and upload the completed paper or electronic assessment to Eligibility and Enrollment (E&E) ECM Case Documents within three business days of receiving the signed document.

5. Update the assessment at redetermination, interim change, or whenever significant shifts occur within the household, such as the onset of a disability or a change in work activities and employment status. For additional examples of significant shifts refer to Section 0213 of TCA Manual.

6. Review and update the assessment when the customer/household reaches 42-48 months of TCA. This should be completed no later than the end of month 49 (see Section 313 of the TCA Manual).

7. Review and update the assessment when the customer/household reaches 58, 59, and 60 months of TCA (see Section 0313 of the TCA Manual).

8. Once a hardship exemption has been granted or extended, review and update the Assessment every six months. (See Section 0313 of the TCA Manual.)

9. The case manager may schedule interim appointments between recertifications that include a review and update(s) to the assessment.

10. Each local department must develop a SOP tailored to meet the needs of that jurisdiction and its customers.

204.4 Penalty for Non-Compliance With the Assessment

1. If a customer does not have a signed and completed assessment at application, deny the case 566. This does not preclude a customer from later receiving a

Hardship Exemption under Section 313.4 based on the absence of an initial Assessment.

2. If an active TCA customer is non-compliant and doesn’t have a signed assessment, close the case with the 566 code.

3. If a customer is non-compliant with the signed assessment, the active TCA case should be placed in conciliation and a sanction imposed if the customer does not have good cause or become compliant within the conciliation period. Close using code 566 Non-Coop with Eligibility process, and E&E will send a Notice of Adverse Action (NOAA) informing the customer of the date of TCA closure and reason.

4. If the customer had an active hardship exemption, close the hardship case 510 and 566 once the customer is determined non-compliant with the FIP.