

UWSM Policy and Advocacy Priorities for 2022

Laws and policies have the power to strengthen or harm individuals, families, and entire communities. Recognizing this, United Way of Southern Maine (UWSM) engages in public policy and advocacy to address barriers and inequities faced by vulnerable populations across Cumberland and York Counties to improve education, financial stability, and health outcomes in our community. This policy agenda includes reactive and proactive strategies. The decision to direct resources toward local, state or federal policies will depend on the issue and the most efficient and effective path to affect positive change. A guiding principle will be engaging in policy with a racial equity lens, and specific actions will be data-informed to ensure vulnerable populations are being supported.

A. Every child has quality early learning experiences beginning at birth.

- Ensure children and families have quality early learning settings, including quality early childcare and childcare subsidies, early Head Start, and Head Start, timely access to intensive supports, and support for teacher preparation and development.
- Ensure all children have the support they need to read proficiently by the end of third grade, including access to and support for quality education, resources to increase student attendance, and support for families to meet their basic needs.
- Ensure children and families have quality, basic services that proactively promote and support health, including stable housing and adequate health care, home visiting, strengthened connections between community resources, families and schools, support for families in crisis, and resources that aid in the prevention of and response to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).

B. Individuals and families have the education, employment opportunities, and resources to achieve financial stability.

- Ensure individuals and families have a financial safety net, when needed, by supporting strong investments in critical needs programs, such as General Assistance (GA), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).
- Ensure individuals and families have safe shelter and stable, affordable housing, including Housing First models.
- Ensure youth and adults receive support to graduate from high school or complete a high school credential, and have the support to complete post-secondary degrees, certification and/or training to meet their career needs.
- Ensure individuals and families have the support they need to access and remain in the workforce, like childcare, transportation, student-debt mitigation, and broadband network access.
- Ensure individuals and families have the earnings/income and assets to be financially stable while supporting individual and employer incentives like the Earned Income Tax Credit.

C. Children, adults and communities have the resources and opportunities to achieve optimal health status.

- Ensure vulnerable individuals and families have affordable, quality health care, and support efforts to expand Medicaid and maintain services provided by the Affordable Care Act.
- Ensure everyone can address their physical and behavioral health needs, including restoring or strengthening funding for health initiatives to support health prevention and early prevention activities, such as the Fund for a Healthy Maine.
- Ensure youth and adults receive mental health and substance use disorder treatment services.

In addition to these priorities, UWSM will continue to educate policymakers about the importance of 211 Maine, the charitable deduction, and public policy efforts led by United Way Worldwide.