

Courageous Imperatives for Human Services

Realizing the American Dream: Increasing Economic Security and Mobility Through Career and Family Supports

APHSAs Transition Recommendations for the Administration and Congress



The following is part of APHSA's series, *Courageous Imperatives for Human Services*, which provides recommendations to the incoming Administration and Congress to help develop strategies that unlock the potential of human services. To learn more about this series and how we can work together to create a country where everyone thrives, visit our [Election Transition Recommendations page](#).



Courageous Imperative #1: Increase prosperity by building a continuum of career and family supports that remove barriers to work, improve access to family sustaining career pathways, and build toward an American workforce positioned to meet employer labor demands.

Outcomes

1. Increase economic security and mobility for millions of households living with low income that experience persistent barriers to stable employment.
2. Meet employer labor demands and help millions of families experiencing poverty increase their earnings and career prospects through evidence-based training and education programs accessed through the nation's workforce development system.

Why It Matters

Economic mobility for workers with low wages must improve for families across the United States to achieve economic security and well-being. In 2023, 36.8 million people (11.2 percent of the U.S. population)¹ lived below the official poverty measure and more than twice as many people are estimated to live in households that do not earn enough to meet the basic needs of food, housing, health care, transportation, and child care despite working full-time.²

Economic security and mobility advance the following desired outcomes:



Better Nutrition and Food Security: Families with economic security can afford more nutritious food, which is crucial for children's development and overall health and well-being.³ When benefits are increased, families consistently report that they are able to purchase healthier food items which support greater nutrition and reduce the risk of chronic illness.⁴



Improved Early Childhood Development: Children from households that are economically secure generally fare better than those experiencing poverty in areas such as school readiness, achievement test scores, and overall health.⁵



Access to Healthcare: With economic stability, families can afford health insurance and regular medical care, leading to better health outcomes and preventive care.



Increased Savings and Investments: Economic security enables families to save for the future, invest in assets like homes and education, and build a financial cushion for emergencies.⁶ A 2018 report⁷ from the Federal Reserve System revealed that 40 percent of adults cannot cover an unexpected 400-dollar expense, and over 20 percent struggle to fully pay their monthly bills.



Reduced Risk of Family Separation: Families with adequate and effective economic support can prevent family separation, decrease the time to permanency for children who have been removed from their home, and reduce the risk of subsequent abuse or neglect.⁸



Taking Action — Opportunities for Impact

An array of public benefits and work supports exist to help families advance economically. However, too often these programs operate in silos, failing to work synergistically to meet families where they are and comprehensively support them on their path to economic mobility. Households can also face steep benefits cliffs, outweighing wage gains when losing critical benefits like their healthcare, child care, and/or food assistance for accepting a minimal hourly increase in wages as they work to progress their career. Through strong leadership and intentional design, an incoming administration can effectively align systems and services that generate better results for families, communities, and the economy. **Key areas of focus for an incoming administration include:**



Removing Barriers to Work

Key Issues:

- Benefits cliffs that result in people abruptly losing benefits and being pushed off their path to sustainable earnings.
- Lack of focus on whole family approaches that invest in parents as both caregivers and providers.

Key Opportunities:

- **Cross-Agency Collaboration:** Establish an interagency council to examine the cliff effect for customers navigating benefits and services across programs and generate joint recommendations for federal policy reform and state and local implementation supports to navigate the cliff effect.
- **Customer Coaching:** Build off the work to date pioneered by the Fed Reserve bank to embed cliff counseling as a core strategy for helping families prepare and plan for their transition off public benefits.
- **Establish a Cross-Agency Federal Financial Resiliency Hub:** Advance whole-of-government strategies to promote economic security and well-being. This effort should explicitly prioritize exploring how economic assistance can be coordinated across programs and strategically leveraged to save money and improve outcomes for populations navigating critical life experiences such as child welfare, incarceration, early childhood development, and fatherhood.
- **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Redesign:** Build out from the successful roll-out of the bipartisan national TANF pilots to advance regulatory and policy reforms that preserve flexibility while building accountability around outcomes that measure family and economic well-being.



Improving Access to Family-Sustaining Career Pathways

Key Issues:

- Workforce programs such as Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), TANF, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment & Training (E&T), Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA), and Perkins Career and Technical Education too often operate in silos across funding and programming.
- SNAP E&T holds great promise, but requires continued support to meet the unique needs of families and providers.

Key Opportunities:

- **Develop a Federal Framework for Workforce System Alignment:** Further synchronize performance measurement strategies, co-location and service delivery, data sharing and system integration, and joint guidance and technical assistance.
- **Support SNAP E&T Agencies and Partners:** Provide flexibility in developing programs that are tailored to community needs and interest, allowing partners and non-merit staff to screen for appropriateness and refer them to programs, continuing to support agencies and partners in providing wraparound supports to ensure ability to participate, and focusing on those who are most interested in engaging.



Meeting Employer Labor Demands

Key Issues:

- Matching workforce competencies with labor market demands.
- Building capacity for experiential learning work opportunities that have proven effectiveness in generating positive employment and earnings outcomes.

Key Opportunities:

- **Establish a Public/Private Advisory Board:** Bring together state and local human services agencies; workforce and education agencies; private employers; and people who have participated in workforce development programs to advise on federal policy and incubate innovative public/private partnerships to co-inform on benefits cliffs challenges and meet labor market demands.
- **Invest in Targeted Strategies to Develop Skills:** Expand subsidized employment, apprenticeships, and on-the-job training that match labor market needs with high-impact work strategies.

APHSA and our members are committed to working with the Trump Administration to strengthen the nation's human services system so it continues to provide foundational support to families across the country. Through leadership, innovation, and executive action, human services programs can become an instrumental tool to attain our national priorities of health, well-being, and prosperity for all. To discuss our recommendations, please reach out to policy@aphsa.org. For media inquiries, please reach out to media@aphsa.org. Visit our [Election Transition Recommendations page](#) for additional publications.

APHSA is a bipartisan membership association representing state, county, and city human services agencies that improve outcomes for people nationwide through the administration of programs that build resilience and bolster the well-being of people through access to food, healthcare, housing, employment, child care, community support, and other key building blocks. [Learn more](#) about APHSA.



Endnotes

- ¹ Shrider, Emily A. *Poverty in the United States: 2023*. U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, P60-283, U.S. Government Publishing Office, September 2024.
- ² The official poverty measure, developed in the mid-1960s by economist Mollie Orshansky and adopted as the official poverty measure in 1969, does not account for differences in the cost of living across various geographic areas. Alternative measures like ALICE published by the United Way of Northern New Jersey and the MIT Living Wage Calculator include these factors.
- ³ Rabbitt, M. P., Reed-Jones, M., Hales, L. J., and Burke, M. P. *Household Food Security in the United States in 2023*. Report No. ERR-337, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.32747/2024.8583175.ers>.
- ⁴ U.S. Department of Agriculture. "USDA Invests \$46M in Efforts to Address Food and Nutrition Security." USDA, 18 Oct. 2024. <https://www.usda.gov/article/usda-invests-46m-efforts-address-food-and-nutrition-security>.
- ⁵ "Understanding Social Determinants of Health: Economic Stability." *MEDLIFE*, medlifemovement.org.
- ⁶ Collins, J. Michael, and Katie Lorenze. "Achieving Financial Resilience in the Face of Financial Setbacks." *Asset Funders Network Brief*, Policy Lab Consulting Group.
- ⁷ *Report on the Economic Well-Being of U.S. Households in 2017*. May 2018.
- ⁸ Casey Family Programs. "How Do Economic Supports Benefit Families and Communities?" February 2022.