

No Child in Philadelphia Should Go Hungry or Live in Poverty

What Kids Need

Child poverty and food insecurity have a devastating impact on a child's health, well-being, and ability to learn. Research links child poverty with toxic stress that can contribute to chronic health issues and behavioral difficulties.

A wealth of evidence suggests that a lack of adequate economic resources for families with children compromises children's ability to grow and thrive. We need greater investments in these families, as well as better coordination and support to ensure families are connected to existing resources that are often difficult to navigate.

Without these steps, poverty and food insecurity will continue to threaten a child's ability to succeed in school and in life. The next mayor must

- Coordinate efforts citywide by establishing a senior policy position to facilitate a cross-departmental initiative, with clear goals and metrics, to reduce child poverty and hunger.
- Promote and support access to critical resources – such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and the Special Supplemental Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and ensure federally funded programs are being utilized to their fullest extent.
- Ensure city departments are trained and have the information they need to make cross-systems referrals connecting families with benefits and service providers that can help.
- Expand programming so that meals for all children are available for the full summer, as well as during school breaks, including recruiting additional sites in under-served areas and expanding outreach to communities whose first language is not English.
- Build upon models like BenePhilly that provide direct enrollment support and increase other innovative programs to address the root causes of poverty and hunger through collaborations with city departments and public-private partners, with focused efforts to address the needs of neighborhoods that are being left behind.
- Make ample early investments in children and their parents, which can significantly buffer young children from the effects of poverty.
- Increase the effectiveness of partnerships that help parents connect with work, education, and training and expand these opportunities so that more families can achieve financial stability.

Why This Matters To Kids, Parents and, The City

Child poverty costs the city millions of dollars in terms of lost adult productivity, increased costs of crime, increased health expenditures, and worst of all, robs children of opportunities. Research shows that growing up in poverty has effects that can reach far into a person's adulthood. Poverty can stunt educational outcomes, physical health, and even brain development.

To ensure Philadelphia kids can achieve bright futures that both generate more equity and grow our economy, the next mayor must lead an effort to lift children out of poverty and ensure they have the food they need to succeed.

The Details

Nearly one in three Philadelphia children live in poverty, and about 30 percent are food insecure. Yet, these are not all the same children. While some children are well-served by nutrition programs that support food security, such as the SNAP and WIC, others are not. Many families with children that have income that puts them above the poverty line, after paying for other basics such as housing, utilities, childcare, transportation, they cannot afford to put food on the table.

Because there are multiple safety net and nutrition programs with different applications, eligibility criteria, and rules, accessing and staying connected to available supports can be extremely difficult. The challenges can be even greater for underserved communities, including those who do not speak English as their primary language.

A big task for the next mayor is to ensure city departments are not only connected to each other – that is informed of the income and food supports available to children and families – but also connected to neighborhoods, starting with the ones with most need. We know the programs that make a difference: income supports, tax credits, and critical nutrition programs. Yet, whether or not families in need know about such resources depend on the City's coordination. City departments ought to be trained on the specific programs so that they can make cross-system referrals.¹ Outreach efforts must also be expanded with an eye to communities that are most in need and with special attention to hiring bilingual or multilingual staff who can communicate directly with families whose preferred language is not English.

A second task for the mayor is to expand the availability of food for children so that kids are not hungry. For one, the mayor can expand support to ensure afterschool and summer program providers are connected with federal nutrition programs. With the City facilitation and coordination, providers can offer meals beyond the times they are in school. Such support defrays food costs for families and better equips children to flourish.

Last but not least, the next mayor must be forward thinking when it comes to eradicating poverty and hunger. BenePhilly is a good foundation for the next mayor to build upon. The program currently offers free one-on-one support to apply for public benefits that help with prescription drugs, health insurance, food, property taxes, utilities, college, and disability. As of January 2021, BenePhilly operates at six sites in Philadelphia and has helped over 125,000 people unlock over \$1.6 billion in benefits.²

Yet, applying to public benefits is only the first step and the assistance BenePhilly and others provide can be broadened. For instance, services can address other stumbling blocks such as recertification paperwork to maintain supports and reduce churn or connecting with WIC, a crucial resource that only 46% of eligible young children in Philly receive.³ More can also be done to expand the accessibility of BenePhilly sites in neighborhoods with most need.⁴ In short, too few programs allowing families and children to escape the cycle of poverty exist, and the next mayor should continue building BenePhilly and/or innovate new programs that intervene in that cycle.

About The Kids Campaign

The Kids Campaign is a coalition of 60 plus child-serving groups in Philadelphia. Our coalition formed to make sure that the next mayor of Philadelphia is ready to do whatever it takes to ensure a **S.E.C.U.R.E.** future for every kid – a future with Safety, an Education, Careers, Uplift, Recreation, and a healthy Environment. A non-partisan effort, the Kids Campaign will share information parents and voters need to determine which candidate will make every day safer than the one before for children and youth. Organizations and individuals can learn more and join the Kids Campaign at www.thekidscampaign.org.