ADVANCING THE COMMON GOOD
UNITED WAY POLICY AGENDA
FOR THE 114th CONGRESS
Nearly 1,200 United Ways in the United States are building stronger communities by improving education, financial stability and health. We galvanize volunteers, donors, advocates into a national movement with a broader strategy for community change.

Real change requires tackling the source, not just the symptoms, of community challenges. We envision a safe, healthy community with a skilled workforce that builds the local economy and a younger generation that’s educated and equipped for the opportunities of tomorrow.

By 2018, America must:

• Cut by half the number of young people who dropout of high school
• Cut by half the number of lower-income families that lack financial stability
• Increase by one third the number of youths and adults who are healthy and avoid risky behaviors

Of course, United Way can’t do it alone. We must work collaboratively with our partners to elevate these issues, build coalitions to advance research-based strategies, invite individuals and organizations into meaningful action, and advocate collectively for lasting change.

That’s what our public policy agenda for the 114th Congress is all about. It’s part of our comprehensive effort – on the ground, with local and state policy makers, collaborating with diverse public, private and non-profit partners – to advance the common good. When we enlist individuals and organizations in our cause – whether that’s giving, advocating or volunteering – we’re providing opportunities to make a difference.

Making lasting change requires more of all of us. It requires United Ways to work in new ways with new partners including educators, health care providers, labor, the faith community, neighborhood and community groups, civic and fraternal organizations. And it requires all of us to raise our voices – in big ways and small – to make sure decision makers understand the community’s challenges and act accordingly.

While this policy agenda is organized around education, income and health, we know these issues are integrated in real life. It’s the poorest children who are struggling the most in school; kids who don’t eat well or exercise enough have a tougher time learning. Much of what influences our health happens outside of the doctor’s office – in our schools, workplaces and neighborhoods. The foundation of a family’s financial stability is education. At the end of the day, education, income and health are inextricably intertwined.

And our futures are intertwined as well. That’s why it’s important for everyone – every person in every community across America – to speak out. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said: “Life’s most persistent and urgent question is, ‘What are you doing for others?’”

Join us. Your community needs your help.

Stacey D. Stewart
U.S. President
United Way Worldwide
Because government is a critical decision-maker and the major provider and funder of health and human services, United Way must actively engage in public policy.

United Way Worldwide Standards of Excellence 1.4

In rural areas, towns and cities nationwide, local United Ways assess the needs of their communities and work on-the-ground, devising plans to meet local human needs. Through our assessments, work, and our close ties to community partners and to those we serve, United Ways gather accurate, detailed knowledge about local human needs. This information is a vital tool for policy-makers at all levels of government.

As the largest privately-funded charity in the United States, the United Way movement directs several billion dollars and hundreds of thousands of volunteer hours each year towards creating long-lasting community change. However, United Way recognizes that government spending in our primary areas of work totals in the hundreds of billions of dollars.

United Way engages in public policy advocacy because we recognize that it is our civic obligation to use our experience and knowledge to help inform policymakers’ decisions regarding policy and funding of government human services programs.

United Way is a policy leader in the non-profit community because it helps to craft practical long-term solutions to human needs. It remains non-ideological and non-partisan in its advocacy, urging lawmakers to set aside partisanship and to work together. United Way uses its convening power – bringing together all our partners: business, labor, non-profits, and advocates – to help find policy common ground to Advance the Common Good.

United Way Worldwide’s Policy Agenda for the 114th Congress helps fulfill our obligation to assist policy-makers in crafting the best possible governmental policies in the areas of education, income and health, and is an important component in United Way’s work to meet its 10-year national goals in these critical areas.

For additional information on United Way Worldwide policy engagement, please visit www.unitedway.org/publicpolicy.
United Way Worldwide’s policy agenda reflects the work and strategic direction of United Ways across the country in the areas of education, income, and health. Additionally, United Way Worldwide advocates for policies that will strengthen our communities’ capacity to advance the common good. Within each of these areas, based on United Way’s 10-year goals, United Way Worldwide has established its engagement strategies for each issue for the 114th Congress. The strategies fall into the following tier categories:

**TIER 1: Legislative Leadership Engagement**

United Way will assume a leadership role in advocacy on Capitol Hill, before the Administration, and with the human services sector, proactively lobbying and bringing visibility to our issues. United Way will devote resources to research, policy development, grass-roots organization, and advocacy on these issues.

**TIER 2: Legislative Advocacy Engagement**

United Way will proactively develop positions, advocate, and generate grass-roots support among local United Ways on an as-needed basis.

**TIER 3: Legislative Support Engagement**

United Way will monitor and respond to requests for support through such vehicles as “sign-on letters.” United Way will support the work of coalition partners who are the thought leaders on Tier 3 issues.

Additionally, recognizing that some policies are cross-cutting, please note the following symbols which are used throughout the agenda to indicate the areas where policies intersect:

- EDUCATION
- INCOME
- HEALTH
- COMMUNITY STRENGTHENING

When an asterisk (*) is used next to the symbol, the same policy or program can be found in another area of the agenda.
EDUCATION
HELPING CHILDREN AND YOUTH ACHIEVE THEIR POTENTIAL
Every year, over 1.3 million students drop out of high school in the United States. More than half are students of color, and most are low-income.¹ United Way is working to cut the number of students who drop out in half by improving educational opportunities and quality along the continuum of education, from cradle to career. Furthermore, a high school diploma is not sufficient in today’s knowledge economy; and United Way supports ensuring that our youth have the opportunity to receive an education beyond high school. In order to create opportunity in today’s society, every young adult should have the opportunity to pursue a quality degree or credential that enables them to obtain a good job, provide for themselves and their families, and improve their communities and our society.

In the U.S., United Way’s 10-year education goal is to cut by half the number of young people who drop out of high school.²

Based on consultation with United Way leaders across the network and content thought-leaders and experts, United Way Worldwide’s programmatic and policy priorities revolve around two focus areas: 1) school readiness and early grade reading proficiency 2) success in middle grades and on-time high school graduation.

United Way will work with policymakers, the business community, organized labor, and the nonprofit community to advocate for federal policies aimed at increasing school readiness, early grade reading proficiency, middle grade success, high school graduation and post-secondary success that enable young adults to obtain a good job in today’s economy.
TIER 1: Legislative Leadership Engagement

School Readiness

By age 3, a child’s brain has reached more than 85 percent of its adult weight. When young children have been surrounded by caring, nurturing adults and stimulating enriching environments, brain development is optimized, paving the way for children to enter school ready to learn. During this crucial developmental time, young children form the “wiring” needed to think, communicate, move and form attachments with those around them.¹

Young children without these skills, often from minority and low-income households, enter school at a disadvantage and are less likely to excel academically in the years to come. Research shows the preschool-age years are critical for cognitive and social development, laying a foundation for success in college, work, and life.²

A critical benchmark in the early years is early grade reading proficiency, which is built on the cornerstone of school readiness. Children generally are learning to read until third grade. By the fourth grade, they should be reading to learn. Research shows that children who aren’t reading at grade level by the third grade are four times as likely to drop out of high school.³

To effectively reduce the high school dropout rate, we must begin by improving access to quality and affordable child care, literacy enrichment activities, healthy child development and social-emotional wellness including after school and summer learning programs. This includes ensuring that families, caregivers, and other adults are equipped to foster the development and school readiness of young children and that systems are working efficiently together to ensure that children and families can access needed quality services.

United Way will strongly advocate for:

- **Early Head Start, Head Start, and Pre-K:** Ensuring all children have access to consistent, high quality, and affordable early learning and care opportunities, an environment that supports nutrition and healthy activity, and all families are trained on parenting skills and child development.

- **Home Visitation:** Promoting federal incentives for state programs for infant and toddler home visitation.

- **Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG):** Supporting funding and implementation of CCDBG Reauthorization, including requirements for healthy and safe care environments in every child care setting, licensed family child care, and Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) care; expanding mandatory funding for CCDBG to ensure parents have a range of child care services and reimbursement rates are no less than the 75th percentile of the current market rate; and improving infant and toddler care.

- **Early Learning Systems:** Incentivizing all states to develop high quality integrated early learning systems; better coordination between the early education and the K-12 systems; State Early Childhood Advisory Councils that align public, private and philanthropic investments in early learning; developmentally appropriate standards and benchmarks for children birth to eight; credentialing and compensation programs for early childhood educators; and data sets to ascertain healthy physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development that are compatible and comparable across states, including support for the Preschool Development Grants.

- **Comprehensive Literacy Programs:** Establishing federal incentives for states to create comprehensive state and local literacy programs, track chronic absenteeism and provide summer learning opportunities.
Middle Grade Success and On-Time High School Graduation

High School dropouts are more likely than high school graduates to experience chronic unemployment, poor health, a life of poverty, and reliance on public assistance. High school dropouts are more than eight times more likely than high school graduates to be incarcerated. According to national estimates, the U.S. government would reap $45 billion in extra tax revenues and reduced costs with crime, public health, and other public assistance payments if the number of high school dropouts among the nation’s 20-year-olds, which currently totals more than 700,000 individuals, were cut in half. The status quo is unacceptable and is undermining both our nation’s security and competitive edge in the world economy.

Therefore, United Way will support:

- **Early Warning and Intervention Systems:** Incentivizing school districts to identify students at risk of dropping out and connect those students with tailored school, family and community supports.

- **School Turnaround and Reform:** Strengthening and reforming schools to ensure student engagement, learning and preparation for a rigorous high school curriculum; including system-wide policies and supports regarding teacher quality, community schools, school leadership, curriculum, instruction, accountability, funding, discipline, scheduling, school absence, and alternative pathways to graduation.

- **Academic Re-Entry and Dropout Recovery:** Increasing opportunity for academic re-entry and high school completion for opportunity youth who have discontinued their education, including support for interagency dropout recovery systems.

- **Disadvantaged and Special Needs Youth:** Authorizing and appropriating supplemental supports targeted to youth in disadvantaged populations, including an increased share of Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Title 1 funding for grades 7–12 and an expansion of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

- **STEM Education:** Focusing funds towards proven science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) programs to prepare youth for these careers.

- **Wraparound Services and Supports:** Incentivizing the availability and use of federal funds for programs that provide wraparound services to students and their families to mitigate the effects of poverty, including the Full Service Community Schools Program and Promise Neighborhood grants.

- **Collaboration Time for School Staff:** Encouraging collaborative engagement between teachers and school administrators in developing, selecting, and implementing instruction materials, assessments, and approaches. This includes time for instructional collaboration among teachers and school staff embedded in the work week.
TIER 2: Legislative Advocacy Engagement

Parent and Community Engagement in Education

To successfully address the nation’s dropout crisis, policymakers must examine both academic and non-academic barriers to learning in education policies. While no government program can take the place of active and engaged parents, government should incentivize Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) to improve upon existing efforts to increase parental and community involvement in education. Schools should be centers of community activity to leverage existing resources and partnerships.

United Way is committed to support family and community engagement policies:

- **Parent and Community Engagement in ESEA:** Appropriating an increased share of Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Title I and Title V funding for effective, research-based parent and community engagement programs and services.

- **Public-Private Partnerships:** Encouraging the development of broad-based coalitions and partnerships between government, local educational agencies, nonprofits, labor communities, teachers and families committed to improving the conditions that support learning, including the Full Service Community Schools Program and the Promise Neighborhoods initiative.

- **Parent Information and Resource Centers (PIRCs):** Restoring funding for the PIRCs to disseminate and grow research-based best practices in parent and community engagement across Local Educational Agencies.

- **AmeriCorps:** Funding for AmeriCorps at the level authorized by Congress so that community-based programs may have access to these critical volunteers.
Out-of-School Time Programs

In communities across the United States, 11.3 million children are without supervision between the hours of 3 and 6 p.m. That number is down from 15.1 million in 2009 and 14.3 million in 2004, but 1 in 5 children still do not have someone to care for them after school. Not only do quality out-of-school time programs ensure the safety and well-being of these children during otherwise unsupervised hours, but they also enhance academic, social, and workforce development skills.

United Way will advocate for policies to enhance the nation’s network of out-of-school time programs, including such policies as:

- **21st Century Community Learning Centers:** Maintaining authorized funding levels and appropriations for programs that connect students with community-based out-of-school programming, including trained tutors, that complements school curricula and instructional methods.

- **Title I:** Supporting funding to help meet the educational needs of students in the highest-poverty schools and encouraging these schools to spend a portion of Title I funds on afterschool and summer programs.

- **Out-of-School Time Program Quality:** Promoting consistent out-of-school time programming standards that ensure accountability and enhance quality to produce desired results for children, including ensuring out-of-school providers complement in-school instruction and align with school outcomes.

- **Definition of Out-of-School Time:** Expanding the definition of Out-of-School Time to recognize the importance of a continuance of care, including nights, weekends, and summers.
TIER 3: Legislative Support Engagement

Broad-Based Accountability Framework

Families, Local Educational Agencies, communities, and government share in the accountability for yearly student achievement. United Way supports the development of an educational accountability model that includes multiple measures of academic achievement in combination with measures of student engagement, attendance, community involvement and social, emotional and ethical competencies.

United Way supports:

- **Adoption of Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate Calculation:** Ensuring that states and local educational agencies (LEAs) calculate and report a uniform graduation rate, creating more consistent data from one state to the next.

- **Annual Disaggregated Reporting by All 50 U.S. States, the District of Columbia, and All territories:** Continuing disaggregated reporting of student achievement by subgroups.

- **State and Local Education Reform and Innovation:** Sustaining federal funding for state education reform and local innovation that meets the needs of students and schools and increases educational opportunity for all.

- **College-and-Career Ready Standards:** Incentivizing states to align standards with college-and-career expectations, through common core or individual state action, and providing the resources so that the standards can be well-implemented in classrooms.

- **Effective Teaching:** Strengthening teacher recruitment, preparation, retention, and professional development programs to ensure that our educators can be most effective in the classroom.

Success in College, Work and Life

As we move into the second decade of the 21st century, the need to ensure that youth succeed in life after high school has become more pressing than ever before. While it’s clear that a high school degree is not enough for anyone who wants to earn a living wage, few students are graduating from high school prepared for college. According to the U.S. News and World Report, nearly one in three students are not ready for entry-level college courses in any subject. When considering all first-time undergraduates, studies have found anywhere from 28 percent to 40 percent of students enroll in at least one remedial course. The Alliance for Excellent Education suggests that reducing the need for remediation could generate an extra $3.7 billion annually from decreased spending on the delivery of remedial education and increased tax revenue from students who graduate with a bachelor’s degree.

To better prepare our young people for the global economy, United Way recommends the following policies and programs:

- **College Access and Affordability:** Supporting federal efforts to increase college access, persistence and completion, such as Pell Grants and the American Opportunity Tax Credit (AOTC), as well as strengthening programs and policies that minimize student debt and help families make more informed borrowing decisions.

- **Career and Technical Education:** Preserving federal support for programs that provide youth with alternative pathways to post-secondary education and the careers of their choice, through the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act and other federal programs.
INCOME
PROMOTING FINANCIAL STABILITY AND INDEPENDENCE
In the U.S., United Way’s 10-year income goal is to cut by half the number of lower-income working families who are financially unstable, as measured by the number of families that spend less than 40 percent of their income on housing costs.  

Over the past 20 years, the cost of living in the United States has increased by almost 65 percent, while median household incomes have only increased 4.7 percent. More than 9 million Americans work in jobs that pay low wages and do not provide basic health and retirement benefits and about 9 million individuals are actively seeking employment. At the same time, cuts at the national, state and local level have reduced supports that many low-income families depend on during difficult times.

Based on the cost of living and earning power in a middle income American community, a two-parent, two-child family must earn more than 2.7 times the federal poverty level to be considered financially stable. Fundamentally, for families to achieve financial stability they must have family-sustaining jobs and the ability to save and grow assets. Additionally families must have affordable and stable housing, manageable expenses, and access to the public and private supports that enable them to have enough income to make ends meet.

United Way will engage policymakers, business leaders, labor and the nonprofit community to craft and support federal policies that enable the nation’s lower-income families to secure family-sustaining employment, access income supports and affordable housing, and grow savings and assets which will ultimately lead to stronger communities.
TIER 1: Legislative Leadership Engagement

Income Supports

Income supports are valuable resources that help provide stability for lower-income families. There are over 80 federally-funded, need-based programs that provide cash benefits, food assistance, medical benefits, housing, education, childcare, job training, energy aid, and a variety of other services. These programs are designed to promote work by supplementing lower-wage earners’ income, making childcare and transportation affordable, as well as filling gaps for food, rent and utilities during challenging times.

Despite the large number of federal programs designed to support low-income families, many obtain only limited assistance because of cumbersome application and renewal procedures as well as limits on the number of eligible families that can be served. Further, asset limits and benefits cliffs – created when beneficiaries lose their benefits at a rate more rapid than their increase in earnings – prevent families from achieving a higher level of financial stability. In addition, budget challenges at every level of government have reduced funding for income supports at a time when families need them the most.

By ensuring that low- and moderate-wage workers can access the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), a refundable tax credit that incentivizes and rewards work, working families will have increased stability and entire communities will benefit.

United Way supports protection and full funding of critical income supports, and promotes policies that streamline access and enrollment while removing limits that diminish families’ progress toward financial stability.

Specifically, United Way supports:

- **Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC):** Making permanent the improvements for larger families and married couples, expanding the EITC for single workers and non-custodial working parents, and preserving and expanding the EITC in tax reform and deficit reduction discussions.

- **Child Tax Credit (CTC):** Preserving the CTC in tax reform discussions and making permanent expansions that raise the benefit to $1,000 per child and make it partially refundable.

- **Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program (VITA):** Increasing VITA appropriations and codifying the VITA grant program, which provides free tax preparation and filing services for lower-income individuals and families and promotes receipt of the EITC and Child Tax Credit.

- **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP):** Fully funding and protecting SNAP to maintain its counter-cyclical intent to help feed those struggling in today’s economy.

- **Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP):** Ensuring adequate funding and strengthening the program so that families can pay utility bills in challenging times.

- **Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP):** Fully funding EFSP to reflect the true need in local communities for short-term food, utility and housing assistance.

- **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF):** Ensuring that any legislation to reauthorize TANF strengthens the program and supporting full funding for TANF during the appropriations process.

- **Benefit Cliffs and Asset Limit Removal:** Protecting and strengthening federal programs and incentives that ensure families and individuals can access affordable transportation for jobs, school, and healthcare needs.
Family-sustaining employment is the foundation of financial stability. Families must have a steady source of income that covers the cost of basic necessities before they can make long-term financial decisions regarding savings and asset building. By increasing access to quality education, job training and workforce development programs and encouraging sector-based strategies that connect skilled workers with jobs in growing sectors, low-income individuals can obtain family-sustaining employment that offers the potential for career advancement.

United Way supports policies and programs which expand the capacity of low-income individuals to obtain family-sustaining employment and enable working families to make ends meet.

Specifically, United Way will focus on:

- **Funding and Implementation of Workforce Development Policies:** Ensuring adequate funding and effective implementation of quality workforce development programs and sector-based partnerships that lead to family-sustaining employment. Additionally, United Way will look for opportunities to strengthen workforce development components in the reauthorization of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins).

- **Sector-Based Partnerships:** Encouraging policies and investments that support sector-based workforce partnerships that identify promising growth sectors in the regional economy and labor market, and align education, training and workforce development programs to support these sectors.

- **Skill Development through Service:** Preserving and expanding service programs like AmeriCorps so that youth and adults can gain valuable skills and work experience while also contributing to their communities.

- **Youth Employment:** Encouraging policies and investments in programs that ensure more young people are on track to obtain a family-sustaining career, including the creation of more internships, work-study programs, and apprenticeships. Additionally, United Way supports strategies that help youth acquire the skills, training and mentorship necessary to successfully make the transition from school to work.
TIER 2: Legislative Advocacy Engagement

Affordable Housing

In the past decade, it has been increasingly challenging for households to secure affordable housing as incomes have not kept pace with housing and utility cost increases. In particular, the rising cost of housing places a greater strain on renters, as they generally have lower incomes than owners and are twice as likely to pay more than half of their incomes on housing. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition’s 2014 report, Out of Reach, a person with a full-time job would need to earn an hourly wage of $18.92 in order to afford a modest, two-bedroom rental at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s national average fair market rent.

The high cost of housing leaves working families particularly vulnerable to eviction or foreclosure if their income is interrupted. The limited supply of affordable housing stock, coupled with the long waiting lists and confusing application processes can make it difficult for low-income working families to obtain affordable housing.

United Way will support policies to improve the nation’s affordable housing options in rural and urban areas for median and low-income individuals and families, along with veterans, seniors and the disabled.

Specifically United Way supports:

- **Section 8 Housing Vouchers**: Adequately funding and protecting our nation’s largest rental assistance program to help low-income families secure affordable housing.
- **National Housing Trust Fund (NHTF)**: Securing permanent funding for the NHTF to provide communities with funds to build, preserve, and rehabilitate affordable rental homes.
- **McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Programs**: Protecting funding for the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance grants, which fund local, regional and state homeless assistance programs through the Continuum of Care process.
- **Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC)**: Ensuring the continuation of LIHTC to subsidize the development of affordable rental housing and supporting improvements that increase the supply of housing for low- and moderate-income Americans.
- **HOME Investment Partnership Programs**: Adequately funding the HOME block grant for the development of low-income housing.
TIER 3: Legislative Support Engagement

Savings and Assets

Savings and assets can help low-income working families avoid financial crises caused by emergencies or unexpected changes in income, while also helping them to realize long-term goals including homeownership, a college education, and retirement. Providing low-income working families with targeted financial education, appropriate financial products, and easy, low-cost opportunities to save will help them to build a financial foundation.

United Way supports policies and programs that enable and encourage low-income working individuals and families to save, increase use of long-term investment opportunities, and make saving easy and automatic.

Specifically, United Way supports:

- **Individual Development Accounts (IDAs):** Expanding use of IDAs, reauthorizing and increasing funding for Assets for Independence (AFI), exempting IDAs from public benefit assets tests, and incentivizing employers to administer and match contributions through tax credits.

- **Savings Bonds, Saver’s Credit, Saver’s Bonus:** Ensuring access to Savings Bonds, expanding the existing Saver’s Credit and making it refundable, and enacting a “Saver’s Bonus” to incentivize saving at tax time.

- **Automatic Individual Retirement Accounts (IRA):** Promoting retirement savings opportunities through automatic IRAs and incentivizing employer participation by providing tax credits to employers who utilize automatic IRA enrollment to cover administrative costs.

- **Financial Education:** Funding financial education in federally-subsidized public benefits and workforce training programs.
In the U.S., United Way’s 10-year health goal is to increase by one-third the number of youth and adults who are healthy and avoid risky behavior.

Good health is fundamental to a child’s ability to succeed in school, and adults’ ability to provide for their families, contribute to society, and live a full life. Although the United States leads the world in medical advancements, Americans are not as healthy as they could be.

The rate of the uninsured increased from 14.6 percent in 2008 to 15.5 percent in 2010, and then dropped between 2010 and 2013. From 2012 to 2013, the percentage of people who did not have health insurance fell by 0.2 percentage points to 14.5 percent. Despite the recent ups and downs, there are still 42.0 million Americans without health insurance. Chronic diseases account for seven of the ten leading causes of death and fifty percent of Americans live with at least one chronic illness. Chronic conditions account for more than seventy percent of the $2.2 trillion annual spending on medical care. Furthermore, certain racial and ethnic groups (African American, Hispanic, Native American and Alaskan Native adults) suffer disproportionately from chronic diseases and associated risks. Yet chronic diseases are largely preventable with systemic, environmental and social supports, and if early and consistent access to quality preventive care and treatment is affordable and available.

A comprehensive approach is needed so that the people of this country are healthy through every stage of life. Families need to be able to access consistent, quality preventive services and episodic care, and not be blocked by cultural, linguistic, financial, or logistical barriers. Since our health is greatly affected by where we live, learn, work, and play, policies can improve conditions in neighborhoods to support healthy lifestyles that help people stay healthy in the first place.

Based on consultation with national health experts and United Way leaders across the network, United Way’s priorities for health in the U.S. focus on access to health care, healthy eating and physical activity, with a strong prevention foundation. United Way is committed to advancing health outcomes by mobilizing the public sector, private sector and individuals to advance the common good.
TIER 1: Legislative Leadership Engagement

Access to Health Care

Having health care coverage is associated with longer, healthier lives. If individuals have the financial means, knowledge of the health care system, and can access needed health services, they receive more preventive services and screenings, identify sickness earlier when it is more treatable, and alleviate some of the strain on emergency services. And small strategic investments in chronic disease prevention can yield significant savings to the nation's health care costs.

Most of those served by public health care insurance are children, the elderly, or individuals with disabilities. The majority of the remaining people receiving services are from working families. Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Programs (CHIP) serve U.S. citizens, are means-tested, and are jointly funded and administered by states and the federal government. Without these important programs, millions of children, elderly, and working Americans would go without health care, often until it is too late or until their care becomes astronomically expensive – not only for their families, but for society as a whole. Children learn better, individuals are more productive at work, and families are more financially stable when they have quality, affordable care.

Specifically, United Way will focus on:

- **Medicaid and CHIP**: Expanding access, and increasing and maintaining investment in these vital health care programs, as well as connecting Americans to coverage, particularly at the state level.

- **Community Health Centers**: Maintaining public and private funding to serve medically underserved areas and populations, or communities that have too few primary care providers, high infant mortality, high poverty, and/or a high elderly population.

- **Implementation of Health Care Laws**: Partnering with states and the federal government in public education campaigns and activities to connect millions of Americans without health insurance to coverage in both the new marketplaces and public health insurance. United Way will also advocate that the law be implemented in a manner friendly to children and families, labor and our partner companies.
Prevention

Small strategic investments in chronic disease prevention can yield significant savings to the nation’s health care costs. For too long, the country has focused on treating people after they become sick instead of preventing diseases before they occur. A study from the Trust for America’s Health concluded that investing in disease prevention is the most effective, common-sense way to improve health – helping spare millions of Americans from developing preventable illnesses, reduce healthcare costs and improve the productivity of the American workforce so we can be competitive with the rest of the world.

Tens of millions of Americans are currently suffering from preventable diseases such as cancer, heart disease and diabetes. And, today’s children are in danger of becoming the first generation in American history to live shorter, less healthy lives than their parents.21

United Way supports federal funding for coordinated prevention strategies that have a record of delivering cost saving to the health sector and our nation's budget.

Specifically, United Way supports:

- **Prevention and Public Health Fund (PPHF):** Fully funding the PPHF to reorient the country toward wellness, while also restraining cost growth driven by the high prevalence of chronic disease. This includes community prevention, clinical prevention, job training and opportunities to build the health workforce of the future, strengthening public health infrastructure for the public’s health and safety, and research and tracking to improve health outcomes and reduce health disparities. The Community Prevention Grants and the REACH (Racial and Ethnic Approaches Toward Community Health) grants are notable investments to support locally-designed and community-based interventions to address chronic diseases and advance health equity.

- **Healthy Start:** Fully funding grants of the most at-risk communities to help improve health care access and quality for low-income, high-risk pregnant women, mothers and newborns, in geographically, racially, ethnically and linguistically diverse communities with exceptionally high rates of infant mortality, resulting in reduced federal expenditures elsewhere.

- **Other Prevention Programs:** Promoting transportation policies that support neighborhood and street improvements for safe, active transportation (e.g. walking and biking) and public transit serve to improve access to health services, support healthy lifestyles and people’s capacity to manage and prevent chronic disease.
HEALTH: IMPROVING PEOPLE’S HEALTH

Healthy Eating and Physical Activity

During the past 20 years, there has been a large jump in obesity in the United States and rates are still high. About 17 percent (or 12.7 million) of children and adolescents ages 2–19 years are currently obese.\textsuperscript{22} From 2008 to 2011, obesity among low-income preschoolers actually declined in 19 of 43 states and territories.\textsuperscript{23} While there have been signs of progress, there is still a considerable amount of work to be done. Federal child nutrition programs provide a large number of children, most from low-income working families, with a substantial portion of their daily nutritional needs. As such, they can be vital tools to help children learn, and help fight obesity. Physical education programs in school can also serve these purposes, yet an alarming number have been reduced or eliminated.\textsuperscript{24} Federal nutrition programs are also vital to keeping American families fed and financially stable, particularly during tough economic times.

Children and adults are healthier and more productive, and communities are more vibrant when their environment is conducive to healthy eating and physical activity. United Way supports policies that improve access to affordable healthful food and beverages and create opportunities for physical activity in schools and neighborhoods. United Way advocates for funding to remain adequate to meet the need, and for policies to help fight the hunger and obesity epidemic in this country.

In addition to the prevention policies noted earlier, successful programs and policies include children’s nutrition programs, school and childcare standards, and expanding healthy food and physical activity options in neighborhoods.

Specifically, United Way supports:

- **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP):** Fully funding SNAP to prevent food insecurity for families and promote healthy choices within their limited budgets.

- **Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC):** Fully financing this program that provides supplemental foods, healthcare referrals and nutrition for low-income pregnant, post-partum, and breastfeeding women, and to infants and children up to the age of five who are at nutritional risk.

- **National School Lunch Program (NSLP), the School Breakfast Program, the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), and the Summer Food Service Program:** Ensuring adequate funding for nutritionally-balanced, low-cost or free meals for children in public and non-profit private schools, formal and family-based child care settings and residential child care institutions.

- **Other Federal Grants and Programs that Promote Healthy Eating:** Strengthening the Healthy Food Financing Initiative to improve the availability of healthy foods in underserved communities, and the USDA Fruit and Vegetable Program to provide fresh fruits and vegetables to children in elementary schools in low-income neighborhoods.

- **Other Federal Grants and Programs that Promote Physical Activity:** Supporting funding for the Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity State programs, and provisions in the Child Care Development Fund, Head Start and other programs and policies to improve physical activity and fitness initiatives in schools and communities.

TIER 2: Legislative Advocacy Engagement
TIER 3: Legislative Support Engagement

Healthy and Independent Aging

By promoting good health, preventing or delaying chronic disease and supporting economic independence, older adults will be able to be productive citizens and live healthy, vibrant and independent lives in their homes and communities longer.

Today’s aging population is growing at an unprecedented rate. By 2030, one in five Americans will be 65 years or older, totaling 72 million older persons. With such a significant increase in older Americans and a more modest increase of younger ones, this demographic shift will affect the nation’s economy, workforce, health care, and social service system in every community. Despite this demographic shift, few public policies directly supporting older adults have changed.

Americans living longer is a celebration of improved public health, nutrition, education, medicine, economics, and living conditions and although additional health and social services will be necessary, if we continue to advance our policies, the nation will continue to benefit from this generation and it’s economic influence, innovation, and community service.

Specifically, United Way supports:

- **The Older Americans Act (OAA):** Reauthorizing OAA to better serve the growing number of older adults through coordinated services and supports including nutrition, preventive health, employment and training programs, family caregiver support, transportation, and protections for vulnerable older adults that are evidence-based and allow for local customization.

- **Medicare:** Ensuring Medicare remains a program that can provide health security to all older Americans and people with disabilities.
Mental Health and Violence Prevention

Healthy mental and physical development ensures that young people are positioned for success in school and life. Today, more than 80 percent of children who need mental health services and psychological support do not receive treatment. Mental illnesses are treatable, and individuals with these illnesses can and do recover with appropriate services and supports. Yet sadly, these services are frequently not available when youth need them the most.

Some youth experience untreated mental illnesses and psychological deficits from child abuse, unstable home environments, chaotic and unsafe neighborhoods, lack of meaningful access to out-of-school time activities, social isolation, and bullying. These risk factors, particularly when several are present, can increase the likelihood of delinquency and violence. Youth violence sometimes causes significant loss of life, devastating families, and tearing at the very fabric of communities.

Most youth who experience these risk factors do not become violent. These youth have the benefit of a combination of protective factors that help guide them in making healthy choices. Prevention strategies must seek to treat youth violence as a public health issue, not simply as a criminal justice concern. The solution to youth violence requires interventions through multiple systems, including legal, public health, public safety, education, and healthcare.

United Way supports federal public policy that ensures young people have the counseling, mental health and crisis intervention services and supports they need—including programs that promote social inclusion and the development of educational and social skills necessary to lead full and productive lives.

Specifically, United Way supports:

- **SAMHSA Programs:** Strengthening and supporting mental health and youth violence prevention programs administered by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

- **Mental Health Parity Coverage:** Protecting funding for programs that increase access to mental health services, such as the Mental Health Parity coverage in the Affordable Care Act.

- **In-School Programming:** Promoting coordinated school-health programs, including school-based mental health services provided in partnership with community organizations to help elementary and secondary students succeed in school, including support for the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative.

- **Federal Legislation to Minimize Acts of Violence Resulting From Mental Illness:** Supporting policies that prevent isolated acts of violence associated with untreated mental illness across American communities.
COMMUNITY STRENGTHENING
BUILDING COMMUNITY CAPACITY TO ADVANCE THE COMMON GOOD
United Way will strongly support policy initiatives that seek to strengthen communities by enhancing the non-profit sector’s capacity to serve through tax policy, expansion of the 2-1-1 system, protection of human rights, and policy incentives and regulations that encourage philanthropy, volunteering and innovation.

**TIER 1: Legislative Leadership Engagement**

**Charitable Giving in the Federal Tax Code**

The recession and slow economic recovery have resulted in significant cuts to federal and state funded human service programs. At the same time, poverty and unemployment are at record highs. The demand on nonprofits continues to rise because of the increased human need and reduced ability of government to respond.

The need for a robust nonprofit sector and government recognition of the sector’s vital role in our society is now more apparent than ever. Government tax policy should reflect our nation’s values and philanthropic traditions.

In addition to maintaining current tax incentives for charitable giving, policymakers should consider expanding tax incentives for giving.

Specifically, United Way supports:

- **The Charitable Deduction**: Preserving the current charitable deduction ensuring that tax-payers who itemize their taxes are able to fully deduct their charitable contributions at a rate equal to their tax rate. Preserving the deduction will enable nonprofits to continue to fund and provide services that advance the common good.

- **New Charitable Giving Incentives**: Expanding charitable giving incentives in the federal tax code. About two-thirds of taxpayers do not itemize their taxes and cannot claim the charitable deduction. The deduction should be expanded to non-itemizers by creating a special deduction for them (similar to the provision that expired in 1986) or by moving the deduction “above-the-line.”

- **The IRA Charitable Rollover**: Extending and expanding the IRA Rollover Through 2014, the IRA Charitable Rollover Provision allowed individuals aged 70½ and older to donate up to $100,000 from their Individual retirement Accounts (IRAs) and Roth IRAs to public charities without being taxed on the contributions. United Way supports a permanent and expanded IRA Charitable rollover provision in the federal tax code.

Marianne Fishler, former Chair of the United Way of Central Maryland’s Women’s Leadership Council, speaking on Capitol Hill.
Tier 1: Legislative Leadership Engagement

2-1-1 Partnership with the Federal Government

2-1-1 is an easy to remember telephone number that connects callers to information about critical health and human services available in their community. 2-1-1 is free and confidential and has proved invaluable in the aftermath of disasters. In 2013, 2-1-1 services in the United States answered more than 15.6 million calls, including connecting people to education, financial stability and health resources. Reaching approximately 270 million people (90 percent of the total U.S. population), 2-1-1 is in all 50 states. Yet, millions of Americans still need to be connected.

United Way advocates for policies and approaches that strengthen and expand 2-1-1.

Specifically, United Way supports:

- **Universal Access to 2-1-1:** Expanding access to 2-1-1 so that every American can connect to this vital service anytime and anywhere—regardless of whether the person uses a landline, cell phone or computer.

- **2-1-1 as the Central Source of Information and Referral for Health and Human Services:** Promoting 2-1-1 as the hub for health and human service information for resource databases, directories, disaster information and special campaigns. In spite of fiscal constraints, state and federal governments continue to duplicate efforts with too many 1-800 numbers, referral databases, services and ineffective outreach programs. 2-1-1 can increase government efficiency with its proven track record of success.

- **A Public-Private Partnership to Fund and Sustain 2-1-1:** Investing in 2-1-1 means getting more for the taxpayer with a common sense program that gives a positive return on investment. United Way supports identifying ways federal agencies can shift existing funds to 2-1-1 for increased effectiveness and streamlined access, opportunities to insert 2-1-1 supportive provisions into appropriate federal legislation, and opportunities for federal grants for 2-1-1.
Combined Federal Campaign

Americans give back to their communities through a variety of methods, from dropping change into a church collection plate to texting for disaster relief to setting up a personal foundation. Millions of Americans choose to donate through “workplace giving campaigns” at thousands of private employers across the U.S.

Hundreds of United Ways work with local employers to operate the workplace campaign for the benefit of the community. Typically, for a week each fall, the local United Way works with a committee of employees in any given workplace, which leads the effort to engage fellow employees to support the private charitable work taking place locally. Individual employees pledge a small part of each paycheck to charity, which add up to billions of dollars to advance the common good each year.

For more than 50 years, government employees have had charitable giving opportunities similar to those in the private sector. The federal government employees’ charitable workplace campaign is called the “Combined Federal Campaign” or “CFC”. While the CFC takes place in the federal workplace, it is fundamentally a private charitable endeavor in which individuals give a little bit of the money they have earned to private charities.

Unfortunately, due to increasing regulations, the CFC has been trending downward for a decade. The latest regulations, finalized in 2014, would shift control of the program from local federal employee committees to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). Additionally, tens of thousands of small local charities will be required by OPM to pay a fee up front to participate in the CFC – driving many of these charities out of the CFC. These additional costs are expected to have the biggest impact on small charities.

Combined, the regulations could negatively impact the relationship between the charities and federal workers. In this already tough economic climate, communities cannot afford to lose the hundreds of millions of dollars given to charity by federal workers.

Therefore, United Way will advocate for Congressional intervention to codify the CFC in federal statute in a manner that engages and benefits federal employees and allows local private charities to do the work that they do best.
Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery

Human trafficking is one of the greatest under-addressed issues of our time. Almost 30 million people around the globe are trapped in what amounts to forms of modern day slavery.\(^\text{30}\)

Human trafficking victims are children and adults, men and women, foreigners and U.S. citizens. They are girls as young as 10 or 11 kidnapped and sold to brothels, entire families caught in debt bondage in Indian brick kilns, young boys forced to work in dangerous conditions on fishing boats and homeless youth tricked into prostitution on streets across America.

Human trafficking cases have been reported in every country in the world, including all 50 states and U.S. territories. The International Labor Organization estimates that traffickers make more than $150 billion profits annually.\(^\text{31}\)

Modern slavery fundamentally undermines United Way’s vision of opportunity for all. Current U.S. investments in combatting human trafficking are anemic at best, totaling a little over $100 million a year for both domestic and international programs.\(^\text{32}\) In order to combat this global crime, we need to advocate for increased U.S. leadership to elevate, prioritize and fund proven interventions to combat human trafficking at home and abroad.

Therefore, United Way’s primary efforts on this issue will focus initially on collaborating with national human trafficking organizations on federal and international policies.

Specifically, United Way supports:

- **Adequate Resources for Anti-Trafficking Efforts:** Supporting efforts to dramatically increase U.S. investment in anti-trafficking initiatives, including adequate funding to support and empower survivors to rebuild their lives, increase victim identification, train and equip law enforcement, prosecute and convict traffickers and pursue strategies to prevent trafficking in vulnerable communities. In particular, United Way supports U.S. funding for the Global Fund to End Slavery.

- **Diplomatic Leadership:** Ensuring that the U.S. Department of State Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons has the resources and profile needed to exert U.S. leadership to combat human trafficking around the world.

- **Survivor Support and Empowerment:** Ensuring victims of human trafficking are treated as victims, not criminals, by supporting state and federal laws that protect trafficking victims from criminal prosecution for crimes committed while they were trafficked, including Safe Harbor laws. Supporting comprehensive, victim-centered, trauma informed social services for survivors that help them rebuild their lives and an elevated role for survivors in advising government policy and program development.

- **Address Slavery in Business Supply Chains:** Incentivizing businesses to identify and address slavery and human trafficking in their operations and supply chains.
TIER 2: Legislative Advocacy Engagement

Service and Innovation

With federal, state and local governments facing budget crises and families and individuals reeling from the economy and job market, the non-profit sector is being called upon to play an expanded role in meeting the housing, food, and health and human service needs of our communities. Non-profits are nimble and well-equipped to adapt and innovate to efficiently provide help.

Federal programs provide America's non-profits with the volunteers and support needed to develop innovative solutions to some of the country’s most pressing problems. Key programs increase opportunities for students, working adults and retirees to either create or participate in service projects designed to meet community needs and provide funds to support innovative social entrepreneurs. Through federal service programs, tens of thousands of young people do a “service year” to help develop communities across the nation, and at the same time they gain valuable work and leadership experience.

Congress must invest in critical support for national service and non-profit innovation, without burdensome requirements that reduce the programs’ overall effectiveness.

Specifically, United Way supports:

- **AmeriCorps**: Funding for AmeriCorps at the level authorized by Congress.
- **Social Innovation Fund**: Funding to help leverage new nonprofit initiatives that have proven results in low income communities.
- **Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS)**: Funding to support national service programs administered by CNCS, including Senior Corps and the Volunteer Generation Fund.
TIER 3: Legislative Support Engagement

Community Supports

Across the U.S., states and local communities face common challenges to which solutions may be best derived from tailored local investment. To best meet needs and optimize on the strengths and opportunities present in communities, flexible federal funding can be a highly-valued support. These funds can be customized for a range of use in communities to meet the employment, community infrastructure, housing, economic development, nutrition, energy assistance, child care, adult literacy, domestic violence prevention and health needs, among others, of families and communities.

United Way advocates for the availability of core supports that strengthen and sustain communities.

Specifically, United Way supports:

- **Community Development Block Grant (CDBG):** Fully funding CDBG which enables communities to designate dollars for a range of purposes such as the construction of affordable housing or neighborhood centers, to provide services to the most vulnerable or to create jobs through economic development projects.

- **Community Services Block Grant (CSBG):** Fully funding CSBG which provide states flexible dollars to alleviate the causes and conditions of poverty in local communities.

- **Social Services Block Grant (SSBG):** Fully funding SSBG which gives states flexibility to invest in services that help people, be it child care or community-based care for the elderly.

- **Social Impact Bonds:** Incentivizing innovative public financing models designed to expand effective human service programs.

- **Transportation Supports:** Protecting and strengthening federal programs and incentives that ensure families and individuals can access affordable transportation for jobs, school, and healthcare needs.
Nonprofits as Employers

The nonprofit sector employs ten percent of the nation’s workforce. Yet, regulatory policies intended for the for-profit sector can place unintended and sometimes dramatic burdens on nonprofits. Or, at times, policy benefits intended for employers or workers can leave out nonprofits altogether.

United Way will work to increase the visibility of charities as employers in U.S. Congress and the Administration to ensure employer benefits are distributed fairly and policy burdens do not reduce the sector’s capacity to help people in need.

Specifically, United Way supports:

- **Fair Treatment of Nonprofits:** Ensuring regulations and requirements for pension funding, health coverage, and workplace issues treat nonprofits fairly.

- **Tax Credits and Incentives:** Advocating parity between nonprofits and businesses in federal tax credits and incentives.

NFL Players, United Way leaders and youth meet with members of Congress on United Way Day of Action.
NOTES


2. Note: Since setting United Way’s 10-year goal in 2008, the nation has succeeded in achieving a high school graduation rate of 80%.


13. Note: United Way’s 10-year income goal was set before the economic recession.


18. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2011). Healthy Communities: Preventing Chronic Disease by Activating Grassroots Change, Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion.


20. Ibid


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