

Meeting Essential Needs

May 2021

Executive Summary

The Junior League of Chicago believes that meeting the essential needs of Chicago's citizens is vitally important to the health & well-being of our community and supports efforts to address the multifaceted impacts of poverty on a person's physical and mental well-being in the following areas:

- a. Access to healthy foods
- b. Access to safe housing
- c. Access to clean clothing
- d. Access to education
- e. Access to healthcare
- f. Access to sanitation

Poverty is the lack of access to basic human needs such as food, clean water, health care, clothing, and shelter due to the inability to afford them. Poverty is often linked to poor health outcomes, lack of educational opportunities, income inequality, reduced access to safe/affordable housing, access to food, and more. Essential Needs are defined as the basic goods and services (food, shelter, clothing, sanitation, education) necessary for a minimum standard of living and attempts to define the absolute minimum resources necessary for long-term physical well-being, usually in terms of consumption of goods. The poverty line is then defined as the amount of income required to satisfy those needs.

As a League, we are committed to partnering with existing organizations working towards these goals and advocating on behalf of these issues. This will improve the quality of living for Chicagoans and reduce societal impacts resulting from these issues.



Who are the target populations/demographics the JLC hopes to serve?

In Chicagoland, it is estimated that some 20,779 children are experiencing homelessness. Chicago Public Schools (CPS) reported serving 16,451 homeless students during the 2018-19 school year.

In 2017, 1 in 4 children in Chicago lived below the poverty threshold. In Illinois, women, children, and people of color have the highest poverty rates, with women's poverty rates over 20% higher than men's poverty rates.

As of September 2020, some 50% of households in Chicago reported having severe financial problems due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The demand for meeting essential needs has increased substantially in the past eight months, and the current trajectory projects this need will continue to grow in 2021 and beyond.

Food & Hunger

Before March 2020, some 41 million people in the United States were food insecure. This means that 1 in 8 households had trouble getting food, a shortage of food in the house, or reduced food intake (i.e., there might not be dinner every night this week because payday is Friday).

By the end of April 2020, more than one in five households in the United States, and two in five households with mothers with children 12 and under, were food insecure.

Starting in April 2020, observed rates of food insecurity are meaningfully higher than at any point in the past twenty years. Looking over time, particularly to the relatively small increase in child food insecurity during the Great Recession, young children are experiencing food insecurity to an unprecedented extent in modern times.

In the Survey of Mothers with Young Children, 17.4 percent of mothers with children ages 12 and under-reported that since the pandemic started, "the children in my household were not eating enough because we just couldn't afford enough food." Of those mothers, 3.4 percent reported that it was *often* the case that their children were not eating enough due to a lack of resources since the coronavirus pandemic began.

The Survey of Mothers with Young Children found that 40.9 percent of mothers with children ages 12 and under-reported household food insecurity since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is higher than the rate reported by all respondents with children under twelve in the COVID Impact Survey (34.4 percent) but the same as women 18–59 living with a child 12 and under (39.2 percent.) In 2018, 15.1 percent of mothers with children ages 12 and under affirmatively answered this question in the FSS, slightly more than the 14.5 percent that were

food insecure by the complete survey. The share of mothers with children 12 and under-reporting that the food that they bought did not last has increased 170 percent.

Housing

The cost of housing in the U.S. has been steadily increasing in years, especially in major cities like Chicago. Those that do have housing often struggle to regularly pay utility bills, rent, and other necessary expenses. Despite programs like Housing Choice Vouchers (Section 8), millions of people are unable to find or stay in safe, accessible housing.

Most children facing homelessness, about 81 percent (according to the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless), are living in homes. They're just not in *their* homes. They're called "doubled-up," meaning they're staying with friends and relatives, typically until welcomes wear out. Although the federal definition of homelessness has included this perpetually couch-surfing population since 2001, they often don't make it into the official federal tally simply because they are more difficult to find. CPS has its own program for students who are homeless or in temporary living situations, which at the end of the 2018-2019 school year included 16,451 kids — or about 4.5 percent of its student body.

Education

Without access to essential needs, children cannot learn in school, families cannot be financially stable, and mental & physical health suffers. In addition to the negative physical & mental health impacts, the effects of poverty negatively impact an individual's long-term & educational opportunities:

- 30% of children raised in poverty do not finish high school
- Children who grow up impoverished complete fewer years of schooling and earn lower incomes than people who did not grow up in poverty
- Poverty reduces a child's readiness for school because it leads to poor physical health and motor skills, diminished a child's ability to concentrate and remember information, and reduces attentiveness, curiosity, and motivation
- Many children growing up in poverty enter school with a readiness gap, which continues to grow as time goes on
- Children can feel powerless and alienated from society as well as suffer insecurities because of their socioeconomic status
- Children from lower-income families are more likely than students from higher-income background to have lower test scores

Health Care

Many people struggle with expenses that go beyond food and housing. It can be difficult to access affordable healthcare, purchase necessary medications, or pay for transportation to and from a doctor's appointment, the grocery store, or a pharmacy.

Poverty is the primary driver of health inequities. Having less mobility and fewer resources in this pandemic can be a recipe for immense hardship. Studies have shown that chronic hunger and food insecurity are associated with poor outcomes for chronic conditions like diabetes and hypertension.

The World Health Organization declared poverty the most significant determinant of health for children and adults (Fitzgerald, Jakovljevic, & Miller, 2016). Poverty is a significant component of youth's physical and mental health, considering low-income adolescents are twice as likely to display severe mental health issues (Tucker, 2009). Low income prevents access to the resources necessary to treat mental health needs, such as adequate health care services.

The constant uncertainty of resources necessary for survival can create patterns of fear and worry in individuals who are struggling to stay alive.

Without access to basic needs such as food and shelter, one cannot focus on much other than the primary resources necessary for survival. The allocation of energy on needs essential for survival is explored by Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which states an individual must fulfill basic survival needs such as food, water, and safety before fulfilling requirements necessary for growth that achieve one's potential (McLeod, 2017). Maslow's hierarchy of needs demonstrates how failure to meet basic survival needs can prevent the desire to fulfill one's real potential and become "self-actualized." For impoverished youth, the constant requirement of securing basic survival needs can have a significant impact on mental, emotional, and behavioral health, in addition to the ability to realize potential and excel academically.

Opportunities for Involvement

In 2019, JLC's Strategic Plan was approved, and a key component of that plan was to align JLC's Signature Issues with the greatest needs of Chicagoland. The Community & Project Development committees will evaluate & explore current and potential partnerships to ensure our partners, programs, and projects align with meeting essential needs.

Within the JLC, we will work to enhance coordination between committees, including Advocacy, Marketing, Strategy, Project Development, and Community, enabling us to collaborate internally and with our external partners to offer resources and necessary support.

Closing

The Junior League of Chicago is committed to addressing and combating the various impacts of poverty on families suffering from a lack of access to essential needs. By partnering with local organizations working to meet essential needs, we will make strides to improve the lives of those impacted while reducing the short-term and long-term effects of poverty and homelessness in Chicagoland.

Relevant Legislation

A. **H.Res.1048** Expressing the sense of the House of Representatives that the Congress should enact the Poverty Bill of Rights to reaffirm the right of all Americans to live a life free from poverty and its impacts.

Sponsor: **Rep. Fudge, Marcia L. [D-OH-11]** (Introduced 07/16/2020)

Committees: House - Oversight and Reform

Latest Action: House - 07/16/2020 Referred to the House Committee on Oversight and Reform. (**All Actions**)

Link: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-resolution/1048?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22poverty%22%5D%7D&s=2&r=1>

B. **H.Res.985** — 116th Congress (2019-2020) Expressing the moral responsibility of Congress to end adult and child poverty in the United States. Sponsor: **Rep. Lee, Barbara [D-CA-13]** (Introduced 05/28/2020)

Cosponsors: (**23**)

Committees: House - Oversight and Reform

Latest Action: House - 05/28/2020 Referred to the House Committee on Oversight and Reform. (**All Actions**)

Link: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-resolution/985?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22poverty%22%5D%7D&s=2&r=6>

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