



2019 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

Advancing Excellence in Practice & Policy:

Meeting the Challenge of the Family First Prevention Services Act

HOT TOPIC

Congress Needs To Set The Goal: To Reduce Child Poverty in Half in Ten Years

ACTION

- Congress must pledge to take steps to reduce poverty in half in ten years!

In February 2019, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (the National Academies) released their two-year study, *A Roadmap to Reducing Child Poverty*. The study was the result of a congressional mandate that asked the National Academies to provide a non-partisan, evidence-based report that would provide its assessment of the most effective means for reducing child poverty by half in the next 10 years.

Using a high evidentiary standard based on the strength of research, the size of any poverty reduction, the policy or programs success in child poverty within high risk groups, the cost, and impact on work, marriage, opportunity and social inclusion, the 600-page National Academies study lays out two specific sets of federal policies that can reach the goal of cutting child poverty in half in ten years. The report offers critical information to Congress to make reducing childhood poverty a reality.

The tragedy of 9.6 million U.S. children living in poverty, combined with the growing evidence of the negative impact that living in poverty can have on the ability of children to thrive, is a call to action to the country to secure its future. The overall poverty rate of 13% is high for the general population of children and even higher for children who are Black (18%), children in families of immigrants (21%), children who are Hispanic (22%), children in single-parent families (22%), and likely children who are Native American—though precise rates are not available.

The National Academies committee concluded from its review that the weight of the causal evidence does indeed indicate that *income poverty itself causes negative child outcomes, especially when poverty occurs in early childhood or persists throughout a large portion of childhood.*

Rather than a reason to be overwhelmed and immobilized by its findings, the National Academies study clearly demonstrates that there are a significant number of programs and new research that can substantially reduce child poverty in a decade if we have the will and commitment to do so. The report identifies a number of issues and research needs that must be addressed in order to make long-term, sustainable change in the economic conditions of people in this country—especially among populations who are Black, Hispanic, and Native American and living with a chronic illness or disability, or those in rural or isolated communities.

These children and their families are also the most likely to be represented in the child welfare system, the juvenile justice system, and in failing schools.

As part of any strategy moving forward, we need to ensure that we maintain those programs that have shown results including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), and continued access to health care, especially for infants and children and their parents.

Four Options That Reduced Poverty

The National Academies study examined four specific policy packages that when combined reduced poverty significantly. The first two would reduce poverty by 18% and 35%, respectively, while reducing deep poverty by 20% and 41%, respectively.

The “Means-Tested Supports and Work Package” combined expansions of the EITC and expanded and revamped the Child and Dependent Child Tax Credit (CDCTC) along with expansions of two existing income support programs:

a 35% increase in SNAP and an increased housing voucher program, a reduction in poverty by over 50%, and a reduction in deep poverty by over 51% within ten years.

The fourth package, the “Universal Supports and Work Package,” enhances income security and stability, rewards work, and promotes social inclusion. This package includes a \$2,700 per child per year child allowance; a new child support assurance program, combined with the expansion of the EITC and CDCTC; an increase in the minimum wage; and elimination of the immigrant restrictions imposed by the 1996 welfare reforms. This combined set of policies aims to reduce poverty by more than 52% and deep poverty by more than 55% within ten years.

The high evidentiary standard set by the committee played an important role in determining which programs to include. The packages and policies must have met the target of reducing child poverty within the ten-year window. That means that other evidence-based programs, such as home visiting or other early childhood

programs, were not included because their longer-term, next-generation impacts—while leading to reduced poverty—were not included here. In these situations, Congress should review the National Academies study to inform ongoing child poverty reductions.

Conclusion

Estimates of the cost of poverty, based on estimates of loss adult productivity, increased cost of crime, and health care costs of children growing up in poverty, is between \$800 billion and \$1.1 trillion annually. But beyond that, the cost of pain, suffering, and loss potential is immeasurable. The negative impact that poverty can have on the ability of families and communities to support the well-being of their children, either due to the stress of living in poverty or to the lack of resources that can support and enhance the capabilities of children, is something that can and must be addressed. Congress has a roadmap forward, and must act as we enter the third decade of the 21st century.



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