

# Phila.'s multipronged fight against poverty

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When we talk about poverty in Philadelphia, let's keep one basic concept in mind: We are all in this together. The effects of poverty ripple out beyond those directly affected to everyone who lives and works in this city.

Poverty means fewer people have money to spend on goods and services in local businesses, and therefore fewer dollars flow through the economy. It means an increased burden on city services, and therefore a higher burden on city homeowners and taxpayers.

But this isn't all about dollars and cents. There is another cost to poverty - lost human potential. Lost potential that could transform our city, nation, or world if it were developed.

A lot is going right in Philadelphia these days. The city has become a magnet for young professionals, a welcoming venue for entrepreneurs, and a cutting-edge center of innovation, technology, and learning.

At the same time, we've seen a decrease in manufacturing and factory jobs, limiting opportunities for thousands of low-skilled but hardworking Philadelphians to build better lives for their families. We have thousands of children whose poor nutrition and health make learning difficult.

Philadelphia is a thriving, growing city, but it won't remain that way if we don't address the devastating problem of poverty and break the intergenerational cycle that passes poverty from parent to child.

At a staggering 28.4 percent, Philadelphia has the highest poverty rate of the nation's 10 largest cities: 440,000 of our 1.5 million citizens live below the federal poverty line; nearly four out of every 10 children in Philadelphia live in poverty; and thousands more of our neighbors hover just above it.

The federal poverty level ranges from \$11,490 for a single person to \$23,550 for a family of four. Many people who are technically above the federal poverty line lack even the barest of necessities. Worse still, about 200,000 Philadelphians are mired in "deep poverty," measured at half the official poverty line.

The incidence of poverty strongly correlates with race: African American Philadelphians are twice as likely to be poor as whites. Hispanic Philadelphians are more than twice as likely to be poor as whites. Poverty disproportionately affects households headed by single mothers (42 percent) and people with disabilities (40 percent).

These numbers are unacceptable. The persistent and debilitating problem of poverty has reached a tipping point in Philadelphia.

We can change this devastating trend, and we must. The City of Philadelphia has a plan to coordinate and expand our antipoverty efforts and add initiatives. Called Shared Prosperity Philadelphia, this plan is the result of an intensive five-month process, with input from more than 200 stakeholders and experts, including providers and consumers of a range of antipoverty services, academics, government experts, and officers of philanthropic foundations.

- Our plan, led by the Mayor's Office of Community Empowerment and Opportunity (CEO), will work to lessen the corrosive effects of poverty on individuals, especially children, by ensuring that everyone gets the public benefits and services for which they are eligible.

No one in the city should be without access to fresh and nutritious food, or live in fear of losing their home. We must do everything we can to ensure that children have access to high-quality child-care programs. At the same time, we need to increase job opportunities, while providing potential workers with the skills and education they need to take advantage of them.

Here's a short list of what we hope to accomplish: Add 25,000 jobs by 2015 through tax credits and other business incentives; establish four neighborhood outreach centers to help connect individuals with benefits and resources; increase enrollment in and enhancing child care and early-childhood education; assist with eviction prevention, home repair, and mortgage diversion to keep people in their homes; and strengthen financial empowerment centers that help with everything from debt management to saving for college.

- All of this requires maximizing the use of every antipoverty dollar that comes into the city. We need to harness the energy and expertise of the organizations and institutions working in this area, break down silos, and ensure that communication is constant. Collaboration is critical, and all of us can help.

We call our strategy Shared Prosperity Philadelphia because the good fortune our city is experiencing will be hollow if it doesn't make a serious dent in the lasting effects of poverty.

Of course, the problem cannot be solved with one program. Success will require a new way of thinking and working that weaves together current efforts, identifies gaps, and applies new resources where needed. In government, we will do all we can. We ask every Philadelphian to work with us

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