



2024 POLICY PLATFORM

United Way of the Greater Lehigh Valley envisions a community where every person belongs and every person thrives. Our **2030 Bold Goals** guide and focus our work toward that vision, with policy and advocacy central to reaching our targets in **education, healthy aging** and **community stability**.



Three policy objectives form the underpinning of the advocacy platform tied directly to the Bold Goals, including diversity, equity and inclusion; trauma-informed and culturally responsive practices; and support for ALICE households. United Way is committed to strengthening the regional nonprofit ecosystem by connecting partners to funding and advocacy opportunities.

United Way of the Greater Lehigh Valley



EDUCATION

2030 Bold Goal: Increase the percentage of students ready to learn and successful in school so they can graduate ready for life, college or career

UNITED WAY COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Schools have the resources and supports they need and can offer them in a coordinated manner so that students' academics and social well-being thrive.

United Way is centered around the Community School model and place-based investments in our highest-need neighborhoods. United Way Community Schools advance student success by meeting students' and families' basic needs and building trusting relationships. Over the past year, Community Schools reported:

- **Academic growth** in math and literacy across all grades
- 3,286 families served through United Way-funded **family stability programs** (74% reported improved stability)
- 124% increase in **family engagement**
- **Decrease in chronic absenteeism** (29% to 20% chronically absent)

■ WE SUPPORT:

- Increasing funding for full-service Community Schools
- Enhancing investments for state and local funding to expand access to high-quality out-of-school programs
- Legislation that ensures Pennsylvania schools use practices and instructional materials aligned with the science of reading

Our Partners

Coalition for Community Schools, Lehigh Valley Reads, Resilient Lehigh Valley, Resilient PA/Heal PA, Summer Learning Coalition, United Way Community Schools Network

19,814 STUDENTS
33 SCHOOLS, 5 DISTRICTS

2,872
STUDENTS AND FAMILIES
IMPROVED
FOOD SECURITY

1,049
STUDENTS AND FAMILIES
IMPROVED
HOUSING SECURITY

*100% of families in Bethlehem pilot program maintained stable housing



EDUCATION

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EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION/KINDERGARTEN READINESS

Children in our region have access to consistent, high-quality and affordable pre-kindergarten, childcare and early learning opportunities.

High-quality early learning opportunities are critical for kindergarten readiness and lead to improved math and language skills, healthy development and reduced grade repetition. Providing access to early learning opportunities to every child is a policy that's critical to also reducing racial inequity.

■ WE SUPPORT:

- Increasing funding for pre-kindergarten, Head Start programs and the childcare development block grant
- Increasing pay equity, access to continuing education and enhanced benefits for early childhood workers
- Increasing affordability of childcare by expanding child care subsidy eligibility for families and increasing subsidy reimbursement rates for providers

Our Partners

Early Childhood Coalition, Lehigh Valley Reads, Resilient Lehigh Valley, Resilient PA/Heal PA

1,725 CHILDREN
RECEIVED EARLY
EDUCATION PROGRAMMING

■ **81% READY FOR**
KINDERGARTEN

*(of those who participated
in early childhood
programming)*

11,500 FAMILIES
REACHED THROUGH THE
TALK, READ, SING EARLY
LITERACY CAMPAIGN



HEALTHY AGING

2030 Bold Goal: Increase the percentage of older adults connected with resources to improve their health and quality of life.

RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS FOR CAREGIVERS

The Greater Lehigh Valley is dementia-friendly and caregivers have the resources and information they need and those with dementia are supported.

United Way supports programs that provide safety measures for older adults with Alzheimer's, dementia or other cognitive impairments. **Project Lifesaver**, a search-and-rescue program, ensures individuals with dementia who are prone to wandering can be located and brought home safely. The program improves older adults' safety, gives caregivers peace of mind and ultimately increases the chances of a positive outcome when someone goes missing.

Silver Alert is a program that notifies the public when an older adult with dementia or other cognitive impairment is missing. Pennsylvania is one of 22 states that do not offer this program.

■ WE SUPPORT:

- Increasing state investments into Project Lifesaver to expand and sustain the program statewide
- Establishing a Silver Alert program in Pennsylvania

RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS FOR OLDER ADULTS

Older adults are connected to the resources and supports they need to improve their health and quality of life.

Over half of all older adults in our region are having trouble making ends meet. Improving access to resources also improves access to opportunities for social connection. Knowing these resources are available and how to access them can alleviate feelings of loneliness and anxiety. Strong social connections can boost a person's life span by 50%.

■ WE SUPPORT:

- Expanding access to SNAP, senior food boxes, housing and utility supports

Our Partners

Age-Friendly Lehigh Valley, Bethlehem Health Bureau, Dementia-Friendly Lehigh Valley

25,000 PEOPLE
IN THE LEHIGH VALLEY ARE LIVING WITH
ALZHEIMER'S
AND DEMENTIA

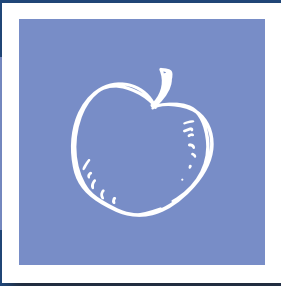
Expected to triple by 2050

12,556 SENIORS
CONNECTED TO RESOURCES

through United Way-supported solutions

98% OF SENIORS

served report increased social connectedness



COMMUNITY STABILITY

2030 Bold Goal: Increase community safety and stability through food, housing and mental health services.

ALICE HOUSEHOLDS

Those living under the ALICE threshold are financially stable, with access to safe and affordable housing, healthy food and are able to access resources and supports when needed.

In the Lehigh Valley, 41% of families experience serious financial instability on a daily basis. One in 10 people are food insecure, including one in every six kids in the Lehigh Valley. Thousands are at risk of homelessness or eviction. In addition, rising inflation and slow wage growth is putting additional pressure on household budgets.

ALICE stands for Asset-Limited, Income-Constrained, Employed and describes households who are above the federal poverty level, but who don't make enough money for their basic needs. They are working and paying taxes, but not earning enough to be financially stable.

WE SUPPORT:

- Enactment of a State Earned Income Tax Credit of at least 25% of the federal tax credit
- Enhanced investments of state funds to strengthen PA 211 and assure a consistent experience for every user in the state. PA 211 provides resources to alleviate barriers such as food or housing insecurity
- Increasing access to SNAP and WIC and enhancing benefits to keep up with rising costs
- Eviction prevention policies that afford representation to households facing eviction
- Continued investment and education in broadband and digital technology to build out infrastructure that prioritizes Pennsylvania's unserved and under-served communities
- Support for the federal AmeriCorps program, which enhances nonprofit agencies' ability to serve the ALICE households in our community

Our Partners

Age-Friendly Lehigh Valley, Lehigh Valley Food Policy Council, Lehigh Valley Regional Homeless Advisory Board, United Way of PA

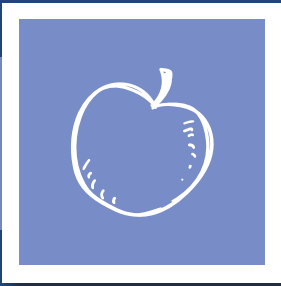
OVER 50%

of older adults in the Greater Lehigh Valley are

STRUGGLING TO MAKE ENDS MEET

35,297 CALLS AND TEXT MESSAGES TO PA 211

from residents in the Greater Lehigh Valley



COMMUNITY STABILITY

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MENTAL HEALTH AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Institutions in the Lehigh Valley are aware of the impact of trauma and have implemented policies and practices to enable healing, prevention and resiliency.

According to estimates from a recent Department of Health study, half of all Pennsylvanians have had at least one Adverse Childhood Experience. Over 19% have experienced three or more. In addition, 38% of all Pennsylvanians have experienced either emotional or physical abuse as a child.

Research shows that childhood trauma can have lasting negative effects on brain development, physical and behavioral health unless buffered by positive and protective factors, like a safe and supportive adult relationship and trauma informed care and systems. The solution is to build resilient people, resilient neighborhoods and resilient service systems.

■ WE SUPPORT:

- Trauma-informed and culturally responsive care, practices and resources throughout the education, health, human services and criminal justice systems
- Building awareness around mental health issues for youth, families and older adults
- Advocacy for Congress to pass the Resilience Investment, Support and Expansion (RISE) from Trauma Act
- Trauma-informed and culturally responsive care, practices and resources in Community Schools, including a statewide expansion of the Handle With Care program, a model of enhanced police-school communications to better support students exposed to traumatic events

over

4,200 PEOPLE

reached through trauma-informed training, workshops and community outreach in the past year

682 STUDENTS

supported through Handle With Care communication between law enforcement and schools

■ **18% INCREASE FROM PREVIOUS YEAR**

Our Partners

Age-Friendly Lehigh Valley, Campaign for Trauma-Informed Policy and Practice, Resilient Lehigh Valley, Resilient PA/Heal PA