

Group 1

Achieving Economic Self-Sufficiency

Initiatives to improve the capacity to earn income and meet family economic needs

1. Enhancing and Increasing Access to Early Childhood Education:

- Guarantee access to high-quality early childhood education
 - Target high-risk children and families (Example: Head Start)
 - Parent education component
- Ensure funding for Family Home Visits
 - Target high-risk children
 - Public health nurse visits

2. Improving High School Graduation Rates and Reducing Achievement Disparities

- Track students who are having problems (high truancy, poor scores, etc.) and intervene with targeted resources (Swat Team Approach).
- Increase teacher diversity
- Advocate for year-round school programming in for grades K-3 in low-income districts¹
- Utilize culturally appropriate curricula.
- Support extra-curricular programs to keep kids interested in school and out of trouble
- Connect disadvantaged youth with school and work.
 - Upward Pathway Program
 - Career Academies in high school that combine college prep work with career themes and partnerships with employers, the community and local colleges.²
- Focus on the middle grades to ninth-grade transition.³
 - Monitor behavior and success
 - Provide alternative school options
- Create classroom settings that have been shown to improve outcomes for low-income students
 - Increase teacher salaries to attract quality teachers and reduce turnover.⁴
 - Offer incentives to recruit and retain quality teachers in low-income districts (besides increased salaries)⁵
 - Reducing class sizes (greater impact among low-income students)⁶
 - Create small learning communities.⁷

¹ Connecticut

² Affirmative Options Coalition

³ 10 Strategies for Improving High School Graduation Rates and Student Achievement, Southern Regional Education Board, Page 5.

⁴ Smart Investments in Minnesota's Students. Growth & Justice

⁵ Connecticut

⁶ Smart Investments in Minnesota's Students. Growth & Justice

⁷ Smart Investments in Minnesota's Students. Growth & Justice

3. Ensuring the access and affordability of higher education.

- Provide tuition free access to state higher education facilities to all Minnesota residents.
 - Bring the Skills2Compete program to Minnesota: guarantees two years of post-secondary education.⁸
- Increase state and federal government tuition assistance through loans and grants.
 - Provide non-traditional students greater access to state and federal student loans
- Mandate career counseling, including a discussion of higher education, for all high school students.
 - Provide every child the opportunity and support to complete high school and to continue through college or technical training that meets his or her interests and capabilities⁹
 - Pay careful attention to closing the well-documented achievement gap that keeps poorer children from reaching the academic levels of their counterparts.¹⁰
- Increase access to groups that have low rates of higher education enrollment.
 - Provide training on getting into college that is relevant to cultural backgrounds¹¹
 - The Dream Act
- End predatory lending practices for higher education¹²
- Provide incentives to employers to offer tuition reimbursement programs

⁸ Affirmative Options Coalition

⁹ Rooting Out Poverty: A Campaign by America's Community Action Network (Page 10)

¹⁰ Rooting Out Poverty: A Campaign by America's Community Action Network (Page 10).

¹¹ Rooting Out Poverty: A Campaign by America's Community Action Network (Page 13)

¹² Affirmative Options Coalition

4. Providing continuing adult education

- Improve access to ABE
 - Eliminate waiting lists
 - Provide childcare on site.
 - Expand availability of classes to evenings, weekends, etc.
 - Encourage employers to provide on-site space for ABE, particularly in rural areas
 - Encourage churches and non-profits to provide on-site space for ABE, particularly in rural areas
- Foster partnerships between ABE and business community better link between educational skills and jobs and to provide greater incentives for students.
- Provide incentives to employers to offer tuition reimbursement programs

5. Encouraging the creation of higher paying jobs, developing a skilled workforce

- Increase access to education and training.¹³
 - Training programs must enable participants to find better jobs. Initial job quality is an important factor in sustaining employment.
 - Skill development cannot be considered a one-time event. Welfare recipients and low-income workers need a continuum of education and training service that begin with short-term training for jobs with career potential, followed by longer-term degree programs that can be taken in pieces that fit into a busy work and family life.
 - Even the most disadvantaged must be able to attain basic skills. Basic education should focus more on real work and life skills and be linked to future training and employment opportunities.
 - Successful programs have a focus on employment combined with a broad range of services to build job and basic skills.
 - Include problem solving skills in curriculum so participants can solve problems with child care, health care, transportation, and on-the-job issues.
 - Develop a “green collar” job corps that links low-income residents to clean energy and pollution abatement positions.¹⁴
- Raise and index the minimum wage.¹⁵
 - Raise minimum wage to half the current average hourly wage.¹⁶
 - Employers should assess pay scales and compare them with the cost of living in Minnesota.¹⁷
 - Increase minimum wage and expand earned income tax credits so that between wages and tax credits all workers can earn enough to meet basic needs for their families.
- Improve Minnesota’s competitiveness in the global market so jobs are available
 - Utilize investment and retraining strategies to help workers continue or upgrade employment.¹⁸
 - Help communities put into place systems that enable residents to get skills to secure and keep jobs they want.¹⁹

¹³ Poverty Despite Work in Minnesota (Page 18).

¹⁴ The Sun, Bridging the Green Divide (Page 5)

¹⁵ Poverty despite Work in Minnesota (Page 2)

¹⁶ From Poverty to Prosperity, A national strategy to cut poverty in half. Center for American Progress. (Page 26).

¹⁷ Close the Gap, A Business Response to Our Regions Growing Disparities (Page 9).

¹⁸ Rooting Out Poverty: A Campaign by America’s Community Action Network (Page 7)

- Encourage businesses to provide on-the-job training and help existing employees advance into more skilled positions (less expensive than high turnover for entry level positions.)²⁰
- Require businesses that receive economic incentives pay a wage equal to the area median-income level²¹
- Encourage businesses to pay living wages
 - Increase vocational training opportunities for populations that do not have high school diplomas or have limited English proficiency²²
- Provide additional incentives for businesses to locate in areas accessible to low-income individuals²³
- Provide resources to WIBs (Workforce Investment Boards-publicly funded board of business owners and workforce agency employees in each workforce development region) and strengthen employer-service components of WorkForce Centers as one-stop service providers for employers as well as job-seekers²⁴

¹⁹ Rooting Out Poverty: A Campaign by America's Community Action Network (Page 7)

²⁰ Mind the Gap, Reducing disparities to Improve Regional Competitiveness (Page 36).

²¹ Alabama

²² Connecticut

²³ Connecticut

²⁴ Connecticut

6. Supporting people as they seek and maintain jobs

- Creating public works programs and publicly subsidized jobs
 - Make time-limited and permanent work opportunities available for those whose personal challenges and whose regions make work unavailable in the competitive labor market.²⁵
 - “New Hope” (Milwaukee): combines job counseling services, a promise of paid community service jobs if a job in the competitive labor market is not available, and wage supplements to ensure earnings are living wages.²⁶
- Improve services at regional workforce centers
 - Improve/Expand job counseling services
 - Educate people in using labor market information
 - Improve partnerships between workforce centers and employers

²⁵ Affirmative Options Coalition.

²⁶ Affirmative Options Coalition.

7. Supporting entrepreneurs

- Expand programs that assist business start-ups by low-income residents
 - Metropolitan Economic Development Association (MEDA)
 - Individual Development Accounts (Example: FAIM)
- Provide training, opportunities and ongoing supports for new entrepreneurs²⁷
 - Mentorship programs of new entrepreneurs by business executives.
 - Greater outreach by professional associations.
- Use tax and economic policies to support and encourage small businesses formation²⁸
 - Targeted tax credits for small businesses
 - Publicly supported business incubators

²⁷ Rooting Out Poverty: A Campaign by America's Community Action Network (Page 8)

²⁸ Rooting Out Poverty: A Campaign by America's Community Action Network (Page 11)

8. Providing Tax Credits and Tax Refunds

- Expand the Earned Income Credit (federal)
 - Change federal phase out rate²⁹
 - Create a 3rd tier for families with 3 or more children³⁰
- Expand the Minnesota Working Family Credit (state).³¹
 - Extend the EITC/WFTC to single earners and second earners in a family.³²
- Expand tax credits related to housing development
 - Provide housing credits for low income families to make home ownership possible, funded out of a cap on mortgage interest deduction.
 - At the federal level, expand the Low Income Housing Tax Credit program³³
 - Enact a national housing trust fund.³⁴
 - Expand tax credits related to home ownership.
 - Convert mortgage interest deduction to a fixed percentage credit and make it refundable so that more families with little/no tax liability can benefit.³⁵
 - Convert mortgage interest deduction into a flat, refundable credit based on the home value with a cap³⁶
 - Replace property tax deduction with refundable tax credit based on a percentage of property taxes on the primary residence³⁷ Replace the mortgage deduction and property tax deduction with a refundable tax credit equal to the lesser of 100% of property taxes paid or \$1400 (intended to be revenue neutral)³⁸
- Revamp Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit

²⁹ “Tax Subsidies to Help Working Families in Cities.” Berube, Alan, Gale, William G., and Kornblatt, Tracy. Brookings Institution.

³⁰ “Tax Subsidies to Help Working Families in Cities.” Berube, Alan, Gale, William G., and Kornblatt, Tracy. Brookings Institution.

³¹ From Poverty to Prosperity, A national strategy to cut poverty in half. Center for American Progress. (Page 27).

³² The Next Generation of AntiPoverty Policies. The Future of Children (Brookings) (Chapter starts Page 17).

³³ From Poverty to Prosperity, A national strategy to cut poverty in half. Center for American Progress. (Page 26).

³⁴ From Poverty to Prosperity, A national strategy to cut poverty in half. Center for American Progress. (Page 26).

³⁵ “Tax Subsidies to Help Working Families in Cities.” Berube, Alan, Gale, William G., and Kornblatt, Tracy. Brookings Institution.

³⁶ “Tax Subsidies to Help Working Families in Cities.” Berube, Alan, Gale, William G., and Kornblatt, Tracy. Brookings Institution.

³⁷ “Tax Subsidies to Help Working Families in Cities.” Berube, Alan, Gale, William G., and Kornblatt, Tracy. Brookings Institution.

³⁸ “Tax Subsidies to Help Working Families in Cities.” Berube, Alan, Gale, William G., and Kornblatt, Tracy. Brookings Institution.

- make credit refundable and expand to cover 50% of allowable expenses
 - Increase state refundable dependent care tax credit amount to match federal non-refundable credit amount.³⁹
- Expand and simplify the Saver's Credit to encourage savings for education, home ownership, and retirement.
 - The federal tax code should encourage and promote savings among low-income households by simplifying and expanding the federal Saver's Credit. The credit is, in essence, a government match for voluntary contributions to retirement plans.
 - Make federal Saver's Credit refundable
 - The match structure should be simplified and liberalized.
 - Broaden credit to apply to other appropriate savings vehicles
- Make federal Child Tax Credit refundable⁴⁰

³⁹ The Next Generation of AntiPoverty Policies. The Future of Children (Brookings)

⁴⁰ "Tax Subsidies to Help Working Families in Cities." Berube, Alan, Gale, William G., and Kornblatt, Tracy. Brookings Institution.

9. Supplementing Income for those with lower earning potential

- Undertake programs to ensure existing income support benefits are used to their fullest.⁴¹
 - Implement universal eligibility testing software (Example: Benefit Bank)
- Examine and modify means-tested benefit programs to ensure consistency and fairness.⁴²
 - Simplify application paperwork and process for benefits.
 - Benefit rules should be structured to ensure that families always benefit when a parent pays child support.
 - Public benefits and workforce programs should be fully responsive to needs and circumstances of individuals with disabilities
- Raise grants of families on MFIP Family Stabilization Services.⁴³
- Provide support income for those on SSI and MSA when earnings decline.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Mind the Gap, Reducing disparities to Improve Regional Competitiveness (Page 35)

⁴² From Poverty to Prosperity, A national strategy to cut poverty in half. Center for American Progress. (Page 49).

⁴³ Affirmative Options Coalition.

⁴⁴ Affirmative Options Coalition.

10. Reducing costs of necessities (heat, food, health care)

- Strengthen the Food Stamp program⁴⁵
 - Improve benefits, eligibility and access.
 - Base benefit levels on a food plan that better reflects the costs of a basic but adequate diet.
 - Make available to people currently not covered, e.g. childless adults.
 - Expand outreach to eligible recipients. Eliminate unnecessary paperwork.
- Support programs and projects that reduce heating costs
 - Retrofit existing housing to ensure maximum possible “green” construction and energy conservation.⁴⁶
 - Ensure that housing for lower-income families is properly weatherized against high heating and cooling costs.⁴⁷
 - Ensure that people with limited resources have access to affordable energy supplies.⁴⁸
 - Develop a major initiative to equip homes (rented and purchased) of low-income families with sustainable energy sources that could cut utility bills.⁴⁹
- Ensure families and individuals can access quality, comprehensive, affordable health care⁵⁰
 - Provide effective, accessible, affordable treatment for alcohol, drug and other dependencies.⁵¹
 - Provide State Children’s Health Insurance Program coverage to the children of working poor (up to 300 percent of Federal poverty level) and their parents.⁵²
 - Reduce the four-month loss of coverage penalty for families who pay their MinnesotaCare premiums late.
 - Create seamless transitions between public health care programs
 - Improve and shorten the application form for health care assistance programs.
 - Help families’ access employer-based health care. Currently, families are ineligible for MinnesotaCare if the employer pays at least 50% of the cost.

⁴⁵ From Poverty to Prosperity, A national strategy to cut poverty in half. Center for American Progress. (Page 51)

⁴⁶ Rooting Out Poverty: A Campaign by America’s Community Action Network (Page 15)

⁴⁷ Rooting Out Poverty: A Campaign by America’s Community Action Network (Page 15)

⁴⁸ Rooting Out Poverty: A Campaign by America’s Community Action Network (Page 7)

⁴⁹ Affirmative Options Coalition

⁵⁰ Poverty despite Work in Minnesota (Page 16)

⁵¹ Rooting Out Poverty: A Campaign by America’s Community Action Network (Page 15)

⁵² Rooting Out Poverty: A Campaign by America’s Community Action Network (Page 15)

This means that families who cannot afford health insurance offered by an employer also lack access to public health insurance.

- Adopt a more uniform income standard for MA.
- Create an Earned Income Health Credit (EIHC) for families based on taxpayer earnings and family structure.⁵³
- Universal health care coverage⁵⁴
- Universal health care coverage for the poor.
- Expand access to dental care for low-income adults and children⁵⁵
- Ensure that all Minnesotans have access to affordable healthy foods
 - Fund installation of refrigerated produce displays in neighborhood convenience stores for fresh fruit and vegetables to be available.⁵⁶
 - Incentivize development of grocery stores in urban neighborhoods (seed funding).⁵⁷
 - Encourage development of full-scale grocery stores in low-income urban neighborhoods and rural communities.⁵⁸
 - Discounts or incentives for food stamp users to buy fresh produce.⁵⁹
 - Tax abatement for grocery stores and/or farmers who sell in areas with limited access to fresh produce.⁶⁰

⁵³ The Next Generation of Anti-Poverty Policies. The Future of Children (Brookings)(Chapter starts Page 97)

⁵⁴ Affirmative Options Coalition

⁵⁵ Washington Initiative

⁵⁶ “Diet Deserts, States Address Supermarket Shortages in Low-Income Communities.” The Council of State Governments.

⁵⁷ “Diet Deserts, States Address Supermarket Shortages in Low-Income Communities.” The Council of State Governments.

⁵⁸ Affirmative Options Coalition

⁵⁹ “Diet Deserts, States Address Supermarket Shortages in Low-Income Communities.” The Council of State Governments.

⁶⁰ “Diet Deserts, States Address Supermarket Shortages in Low-Income Communities.” The Council of State Governments.