

Group 3
Removing Barriers

Initiatives to eliminate obstacles and barriers to rising out of poverty

1. Eliminating racism and sexism

- Prohibit racial profiling

2. Meeting emergency health, housing and transportation needs

- Eliminate asset tests for public assistance programs (or raise them significantly so people have the opportunity to save and work their way to financial stability).¹
- Adopt measurable outcomes for the use of Emergency Assistance and Emergency General Assistance funds.
- Increase availability of emergency shelter
 - Support Governor's initiative to end long-term homelessness
 - Support equivalent efforts to address other homelessness
 - Continuum of care for people in crises
- Car repair programs and low income car loan or leasing programs.
- Food shelves
- Senior congregate dining and meals on wheels
- Soup kitchens
- Ensure adequate housing and supportive services is available to meet needs of people in crisis
 - Encourage and support activities of churches and non-profits
 - Fund transitional housing programs
 - Reinststate a statewide Emergency Assistance program that has uniform requirements in all counties and is funded separately from MFIP employment services, DWP, and county administrative expenses.²

¹ Affirmative Options Coalition.

² "A Hole in Minnesota's Safety Net." Legal Services Advocacy Project

3. Improving access to mental health and chemical dependency treatment

- Expand community-based mental health services to provide a complete continuum of care for people with MI throughout the state
- Provide “wrap-around” services that holistically serve the needs of people with MI/CD issues
- Require health insurers to cover mental health and chemical dependency treatment costs
- Provide positive alternatives to foster care when custodial parents go to treatment
- Ensure that all people in corrections facilities are screened and treated for MI and CD
- Fund court programs to assess all people in family court and criminal court for MI and CD, and require participation in treatment as part of court order
- Expand public treatment programs to ensure that all people needing CD treatment and MH care receive it, regardless of their insurance status

4. Providing affordable, quality childcare

- Fully fund BSF child care assistance.
- Guarantee access to child care for all working families
 - Set eligibility at 75% of State Median Income (SMI)³
- Pay competitive market rates to child care providers.
- Provide incentives for parents to choose quality child care
- Subsidize parents to stay home and care for children⁴
- Expand state dependent care tax credit to match federal credit
- Make federal Child and Dependent Care Tax credit refundable⁵
- Raise maximum credit rate of federal Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit from 35% to 50%⁶
- Raise maximum credit rate of state Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit from 35% to 50%⁷
- Encourage employers to provide on-site child care
 - Provide incentives to employers to provide on-site care

³ Chair, Early Childhood Learning Finance Committee.

⁴ Connecticut Initiative

⁵ “Tax Subsidies to Help Working Families in Cities.” Berube, Alan, Gale, William G., and Kornblatt, Tracy. Brookings Institution.

⁶ “Tax Subsidies to Help Working Families in Cities.” Berube, Alan, Gale, William G., and Kornblatt, Tracy. Brookings Institution.

⁷ “Tax Subsidies to Help Working Families in Cities.” Berube, Alan, Gale, William G., and Kornblatt, Tracy. Brookings Institution.

5. Enacting public policies that support families and keep them together

- Fund marriage and relationship education for both engaged couples and married couples. Some studies show these efforts are most effective 5-10 years into marriage.⁸
- Support programs in the non-profit sector that work with and mentor low-income families.
 - Example: Circles of Support.⁹
- Provide marriage and family counseling to struggling families who cannot afford help.
- Assess family members for MH and CD problems when family has contact with court system or when school counselor or social worker raises concerns about family situation

⁸ The Next Generation of Anti-Poverty Policies. The Future of Children/Brookings Institution. Chapter starts Page 117.

⁹ Circles of Support, Talking Points, May 13, 2008

6. Improving public awareness about the causes and solutions for poverty

- Encourage churches or non-profit groups to launch a public awareness campaign
- Create an anti-poverty day in Minnesota
 - Encourage all Minnesotans to take the food stamp challenge
- Encourage community development strategies that bring low-income and high-income residents together
 - Circles of Support
- Work with Chamber of Commerce and service clubs (Rotary, Kiwanis, etc.) to involve their organizations and their members in mentoring programs (like Big Brothers/Big Sisters/Circles of Support)

7. Engaging all sectors of society in enacting solutions for ending poverty

- Encourage businesses to pay living wages
- Provide incentives to businesses to provide education and training to their employees to meet workforce needs and to qualify workers for higher skill, higher wage jobs.

8. Improving language skills and cultural understanding

9. Improving rehabilitation and re-entry programs for those coming out of corrections and mental health and chemical dependency treatment.

- Provide opportunities for those coming out of corrections to gain tools to succeed after release
 - Certificates of rehabilitations for those leaving corrections.¹⁰
 - Paid work experience for those leaving the corrections system.¹¹
 - Job skills training in the corrections system and for those leaving the corrections system.¹²
- Provide incentives to employers to hire and work with people who have MH or CD problems or criminal histories.
- Strengthen court service programs so that probation officers are able to keep in close contact with people needed support and attention.
- Create seamless transition from correctional program health care to health care in the community, so that people on MH medications continue taking their meds.

¹⁰ Affirmative Options Coalition.

¹¹ Affirmative Options Coalition

¹² Affirmative Options Coalition

10. Insuring that welfare policies support families and create incentives to moving off of financial assistance

- Expand critical income support programs¹³
 - Increase TANF cash assistance monthly grant levels to an amount equal to 100% of the federal poverty guideline
 - Expand the state Working Family Tax Credit
 - Eliminate asset tests or significantly raise level of assets allowed for public assistance programs.¹⁴
- Provide guidance for residents who have recently left safety net programs.
 - “Northern Connections” follows up with former welfare recipients via telephone and plugs them into existing resources to help them stay off welfare.¹⁵
- Make public assistance more accessible and simpler for those who are eligible.¹⁶
 - Increase staffing levels at local offices and include bilingual staff¹⁷
 - Improve technology to streamline systems and reduce paperwork¹⁸
- Remove benefit “cliffs”
 - Undertake study to identify eligibility “cliffs” in state’s various assistance programs¹⁹
 - Raise exit levels for health insurance programs and child care assistance
 - More graduated benefit levels for all benefit programs
 - Consider tax policies and their impact in setting eligibility levels

¹³ 2007 Report on Illinois Poverty, Page 21

¹⁴ Affirmative Options Coalition.

¹⁵ Northern Connections, Inc. Board Report, May 9, 2008.

¹⁶ Affirmative Options Coalition.

¹⁷ 2007 Report on Illinois Poverty

¹⁸ 2007 Report on Illinois Poverty

¹⁹ Connecticut initiative