



Together **we**
THRIVE

Policy Agenda of
Philadelphia's Health and
Human Services Cabinet

Overview

***Together We Thrive: Policy* is the inaugural report on the policy agenda of the City of Philadelphia’s Managing Director’s Office, Health and Human Services (HHS). HHS includes the Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual disAbility Services (DBHIDS), the Office of Community Empowerment and Opportunity (CEO), the Office of Domestic Violence Strategies (ODVS), the Mayor’s Commission on Aging (MCOA), the Office of Homeless Services (OHS), and the Philadelphia Department of Public Health (PDPH).**

HHS agencies develop, advocate for, and implement policy change to ensure that Philadelphians are healthy, safe, economically mobile, and fully integrated into the life of the City. HHS agencies use qualitative and quantitative data to understand problems and design solutions, and we are committed to ensuring that community voices help to shape those solutions. We recognize that effective, sustainable policy change requires thoughtful, collaborative, and well-resourced implementation.

Together We Thrive: Policy is an extension of *Together We Thrive*, HHS’s annual report, and is a product of the HHS Policy Group’s work. The HHS Policy Group is committed to advocating for federal, state, and local policy change in alignment with the strategies and priorities described in *Thrive*. In that forum, policy staff from HHS agencies discuss the agencies’ policy goals and their cross-agency intersections, elevate policy priorities, share networks and resources, and identify new opportunities for collaboration.

We hope you will treat what follows as an invitation to engage with your communities and HHS agencies on the policy goals outlined here and other relevant policy work. Individual HHS agencies have dynamic policy agendas of their own, including policy goals and work not highlighted here.



Glossary

CEO	Office of Community Empowerment and Opportunity
CTC	Child Tax Credit
DBHIDS	Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual disAbility Services
EITC	Earned Income Tax Credit
HHS	Managing Director’s Office, Health and Human Services
HUD	U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
IDEA	Office of Integrated Data for Evidence and Action
L&I	Department of Licenses and Inspections
LIHEAP	Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program
MCOA	Mayor’s Commission on Aging
MDO	Managing Director’s Office
MPO	Mayor’s Policy Office
ODVS	Office of Domestic Violence Strategies
ODEI	Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
OHS	Office of Homeless Services
ORU	Opioid Response Unit
PACE	PA Pharmaceutical Assistance Contract for the Elderly
PACENET	PACE Needs Enhancement Tier
PDPH	Philadelphia Department of Public Health
PHA	Philadelphia Housing Authority
PWD	Philadelphia Water Department
Revenue	Philadelphia Department of Revenue
SSDI	Social Security Disability Insurance
SSI	Supplemental Security Income
TANF	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

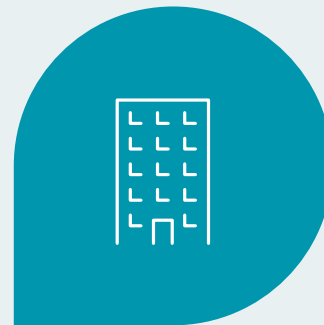
Organization of the Policy Agenda

Together We Thrive: Policy is organized into four themes: (i) economic stability and mobility, (ii) housing, (iii) health and health care, and (iv) safety and trauma prevention. Each of the four themes is organized into focus areas. Within each focus area, you will find brief descriptions of policy goals which may be pursued through at least one of the following mechanisms: federal, state, or local legislation, regulation, or executive order (or similar form of administrative policy change). HHS's current engagement varies by policy goal: for most, we are actively pursuing the policy goal through some combination of research, policy development, education, stakeholder engagement, and implementation, while for others our work is at an earlier stage. For a small number, we see value in stating our support now to draw attention to the benefits achieving the policy goal would have for the populations we serve, while we look for opportunities to engage further.

Each of these themes is deeply interconnected with and reliant on the others, a fact which mirrors the interconnection and mutual reliance HHS agencies share. For example, a Philadelphian experiencing domestic violence may struggle to become or stay employed, which could lead to housing insecurity and a diminished ability to access necessary health care services. With this in mind, it is easier to see how policy solutions addressing one form of crisis may help to prevent other crises from occurring in the first place.

ECONOMIC STABILITY & MOBILITY

Economic stability and mobility set people up for success and enhance individual, family, and community resiliency. These policies seek to develop, expand, and facilitate pathways for vulnerable Philadelphians to increase their economic well-being.



HOUSING

Safe, affordable housing is essential to the stability needed for individuals, families, and communities to thrive. These policies seek to keep people in safe homes they can afford.

HEALTH & HEALTH CARE

Public health and access to high-quality health care empower people to lead healthier lives. These policies seek to improve health and increase access to high-quality physical and behavioral health care.



SAFETY & TRAUMA PREVENTION

Safety is integral to healthy development, stability and productivity in adulthood, and community cohesion. These policies seek to prevent trauma and to ensure people impacted by trauma have the protections and resources they need to heal and thrive.

Commitment to Racial Equity and Strategic Data Sharing and Use

In addition to the themes that organize this policy agenda, there are two commitments of note that undergird HHS's work: a commitment to pursuing policies that move the City toward racial equity, and a commitment to sharing and using data to benefit Philadelphians. As Mayor Kenney noted in Executive Order No. 2-22, "thoughtful analysis of integrated, cross-systems data can reveal new insights and generate valuable knowledge, and can increase understanding of racial and social disparities in Philadelphia and help to identify concrete steps toward racial and social equity[.]" Mayor Kenney also restated President Biden's directive to use data to automatically enroll people in programs for which they are eligible, and to improve data sharing among federal, state, and local governments.

Racial Equity

HHS agencies seek to reduce and ultimately eliminate the disparities in health, well-being, and economic mobility burdening many people of color in Philadelphia, while achieving improved outcomes across metrics for all Philadelphians. A more equitable Philadelphia is a healthier, more prosperous Philadelphia.

Strategic Data Sharing and Use

HHS agencies share and use data to reveal and explain the needs and challenges of Philadelphians, and to inform and develop appropriate policy solutions. Strategic, judicious data sharing and use can make Philadelphians' lives healthier and more stable. HHS pursues policy change that facilitates such data sharing and use.

Case Study: Water Security for All Philadelphians

To demonstrate what committing to racial equity and strategic data sharing and use can look like in practice, we turn to our collaborative water security work. Water service shutoffs disproportionately burden the parts of the City with more Black and Latinx/o/a Philadelphians. MDO, HHS, IDEA, PDPH, CEO, ODEI, MPO, PWD, and Revenue have worked together to make progress toward the goal of avoiding water service shutoffs due to inability to pay, while ensuring we have sufficient revenue to maintain and improve the City's water infrastructure. Collectively, we have pursued data sharing and regulatory change opportunities to facilitate and increase customer assistance enrollment; we have shifted administrative policy to protect certain vulnerable populations identified using Medicaid eligibility and other data from water service shutoffs due to inability to pay; and we have used data to inform policy decision-making and outreach efforts.



ECONOMIC STABILITY & MOBILITY

FOCUS AREA		POLICY GOALS
<p>Facilitate access to benefits and expand available benefits</p>	<p>Hundreds of millions of dollars in benefits go unclaimed by Philadelphians every year. As President Biden noted in a December 13, 2021 Executive Order, government agencies should “reduce administrative hurdles and paperwork burdens to minimize ‘time taxes,’ [and] create greater efficiencies across Government.” HHS seeks to make it as easy as possible for Philadelphians to access the benefits for which they are eligible, and to expand benefits to meet the needs of Philadelphians.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Expressly authorize automatic enrollment and recertification for benefits programs, including authorizing data sharing → Expand availability and increase value of benefits, including increasing TANF grants, SSDI, and SSI; extending LIHEAP season for cooling costs; expanding CTC and EITC; and ensuring prescription affordability through PACE/PACENET and the Medicare Part D Low-Income Subsidy → Align income and asset limits across programs to reduce administrative burden and confusion around eligibility → Facilitate guaranteed income pilots, including by eliminating the consideration of such income in means-tested programs to avoid the “benefits cliff”
<p>Reduce the disparate impact of fines and fees on people with low incomes</p>	<p>Unpaid fines and fees can negatively affect a person’s credit, eligibility for services or employment, sentencing, and pardoning. HHS aims to reduce these negative consequences.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Ensure that ability to pay determinations are made before a fine or fee is assessed, so individuals are not assessed fines or fees that they are unable to pay → Ensure that ability to pay determinations are made consistently and with updated criteria → Ensure unpaid fines and fees are not an obstacle to an appropriate pardon → Eliminate fines and fees that have a disproportionately harmful effect on certain groups (considering race, ethnicity, geography, wealth, and income)
<p>Increase consumer protections</p>	<p>Consumer protections exist to protect people from predatory, unfair, and deceptive practices in the marketplace, many of which target vulnerable populations (e.g., seniors). In 2022, Mayor Kenney established the Philadelphia Consumer Financial Protection Task Force to assess and address these issues.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Require accessibility for important financial documents (e.g., a standard font size on reverse mortgage contracts and disclosures) → Implement recommendations of the newly established Consumer Financial Protection Task Force and ensure the Task Force has adequate resources

FOCUS AREA		POLICY GOALS
Enhance worker rights	Enhancing the rights of workers to ensure they can support themselves and their families, stay home when they need to (e.g., sickness, family emergency), and work toward a stable retirement makes our communities stronger.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Implement and expand paid sick and family leave, and support flexible work scheduling → Significantly increase the minimum wage to at least \$15 per hour and continually increase in accordance with the consumer price index → Support a publicly administered workplace retirement program offered to employees who otherwise would not have access (e.g., Keystone Saves)
Support people experiencing homelessness	People experiencing homelessness often need supports beyond housing, and they may face challenges accessing them. For example, childcare can allow someone to go to work or class, and youth need stable educational opportunities. HHS prioritizes not only access to shelter for families experiencing homelessness, but access to economic mobility.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Expand access to education, daycare, and early childhood services for children in families experiencing homelessness by removing barriers like work or education requirements → Ensure access to deeply affordable housing through full funding of programs, including the Housing Choice Voucher Program, McKinney-Vento, the Emergency Solutions Grant, and HOME



HEALTH & HEALTH CARE

FOCUS AREA		POLICY GOALS
Expand harm reduction and support contingency management	The City continues to struggle through a drug overdose epidemic, as fentanyl remains a significant driver of fatal overdoses and xylazine increasingly causes serious wounds. Stimulant-involved overdose deaths have also increased. Harm reduction services save lives and prevent disease and disability, and contingency management (providing incentives to reduce/eliminate drug use) can be an effective treatment for many patients.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ Facilitate expansion of harm reduction services and repeal laws or regulations to the extent they limit the provision of such services→ Establish one or more overdose prevention centers where people who use drugs can be protected from overdose and connected to treatment and social services, once a legal pathway for such centers is established→ Support funding for contingency management interventions for substance use treatment providers→ Support development of skill acquisition for substance use providers interested in implementing contingency management
Reduce smoking, vaping, and secondhand exposure	Tobacco products kill more than 3,000 Philadelphians annually, and the burden falls disproportionately on low-income and underserved communities. HHS is dedicated to reducing addiction to nicotine and exposure to secondhand toxins.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ Make cigarettes, other combustible tobacco products, and vape products less addictive by reducing nicotine content→ Prohibit manufacture of menthol cigarettes and flavored cigars→ Prohibit smoking and vaping in enclosed spaces where loopholes currently allow smoking and vaping (e.g., casinos)→ Support tobacco cessation efforts (e.g., nicotine replacement therapy)
Increase access to telehealth services	During the COVID-19 pandemic, telehealth became more widespread across physical and behavioral health services. HHS sees great value in ensuring that Philadelphians' physical and behavioral health care needs can be met flexibly and in a timely manner.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ Authorize health care providers to offer telehealth services when medically appropriate→ Require insurers to provide coverage for telehealth→ Establish telehealth (including phone-only appointments) as a standard practice for behavioral health care when accessible and appropriate

FOCUS AREA	POLICY GOALS	
<p>Increase access to health care</p>	<p>Health insurance can improve health outcomes and provide security to individuals and families. The end of expanded COVID-related Medicaid is expected to result in many Philadelphians losing Medicaid coverage.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Increase insurance enrollment and renewal, including through Medicaid case automation (“ex parte” renewals), expanded staffing and outreach, and Pennie navigation → Work with PA to submit a Section 1115 Medicaid demonstration waiver to expand and enhance coverage and services (e.g., continuous eligibility and funding of health-related social needs) → Expand prenatal CHIP to address the long-standing problem of newborns born to immigrants lacking insurance for months after birth because they do not receive presumptive eligibility → Improve access to primary care through the expansion of health centers → Support expanding coverage options for immigrants and dually eligible (Medicare and Medicaid) individuals → Enhance administrative flexibility (e.g., with respect to budgetary and procurement processes) to support emergency preparedness
<p>Pursue reproductive justice</p>	<p>Abortion is health care, but accessing the service can be challenging, especially for low-income people and people of color. Restrictive abortion laws make pregnant people less safe. HHS supports offering a broad range of reproductive services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Establish a constitutional right to abortion → Oppose policies that unduly burden the provision of reproductive health care services, including abortion → Oppose state funding, including current use of TANF funds, for crisis pregnancy centers, which are organizations that deceptively reach out to pregnant women to try to prevent them from seeking abortion services
<p>Expand peer support services</p>	<p>Peer support service providers, including certified peer specialists and certified recovery specialists, offer community-based supports for individuals experiencing behavioral health or substance use challenges. Peers with lived experiences in accessing behavioral health treatment and recovery programs are essential in empowering individuals to pursue treatment and access services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Eliminate differences in Medicaid reimbursement rates and processes for certified peer, certified recovery, and certified autism peer specialists → Increase overall reimbursement rates for certified peer, certified recovery, and certified autism peer specialists, in recognition of the important role these support service providers play in treatment and recovery



HOUSING

FOCUS AREA		POLICY GOALS
Prevent evictions	Philadelphia continues to experience an eviction crisis, which disproportionately impacts communities of color and women. Evictions deepen poverty and should be avoided whenever possible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Expand funding for and availability of rent assistance, a permanent eviction diversion program, and legal services for tenants, including Citywide expansion of Right to Counsel → Impose more significant consequences for illegal/self-help evictions, and improve tracking of confirmed and suspected illegal/self-help eviction → Implement more permissive policy for opening default judgments in eviction cases → Expand homelessness prevention resources for people without leases who are being displaced from their current living situations
Mitigate the harms of eviction	Many landlords refuse to rent to tenants who have had an eviction action filed against them, even if the filing did not result in a judgment against them. This reinforces an unfair power dynamic and can make it extremely challenging for renters to find a new home to regain stability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Require expungement or sealing of eviction records that either did not result in judgments or resulted in judgments favorable to the tenant → Allow for eviction filings that are automatically expunged or sealed upon successful completion of a post-filing eviction diversion program → Ensure at least one continuance is provided by right in eviction cases, given the significant negative consequences of a default judgment resulting in eviction
Expand alternative options when shelter is not appropriate	Some people experiencing homelessness have health conditions that cannot be managed in a typical shelter setting. These people are left with few options and often need additional support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Provide for Medicaid reimbursable payments for medical respite → Fund services for people experiencing homelessness who are medically compromised (but not in need of hospitalization) and need assistance with activities of daily living → Expand HUD support for Single Room Occupancy as a viable housing alternative for older adults and others who would choose this kind of supportive environment

FOCUS AREA		POLICY GOALS
Expand funding for housing and related services	Having access to safe housing is fundamental to health. Through administrative policy flexibility, Medicaid funds can be used to provide funding for housing and housing-related services. Other states have used Section 1115 Medicaid demonstration waivers to this end.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Work with PA to submit a Section 1115 Medicaid demonstration waiver to fund housing and related services, such as home health care, home accessibility adaptations, and housing transition and tenancy sustaining services → Expand access to safe housing for sexual violence and domestic violence survivors → Expand access to and utilization of housing vouchers → Follow a “housing first” approach, prioritizing rapid access to unconditional, permanent housing, particularly for behavioral health and recovery populations
Increase access to affordable housing	To address homelessness, we must address housing affordability. More affordable housing would keep more people in their homes and reduce the strain on homeless services and eviction prevention services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Rehabilitate vacant scattered site PHA units for immediate occupancy by people exiting homelessness → Allow roommates (unrelated adults) to cohabitate in publicly subsidized housing units to reduce costs and expand availability → Authorize shared housing models with an emphasis on the reuse of existing real estate (e.g., convents, rectories, schools, and former halfway houses), while limiting saturation within districts and ensuring quality administration
Improve housing quality	Philadelphia has a relatively old housing stock compared to other large cities, which combines with relatively high poverty to create widespread housing quality issues that negatively affect the health and safety of Philadelphians.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Support implementation of Eviction Task Force recommendation concerning strategic, proactive rental property inspections (e.g., focusing on repeat offenders), while ensuring tenant displacement is not increased → Increase stringency of requirements and enforcement resources related to rental property licensure → Expand resources available through assistance programs (e.g., the Basic Systems Repair Program and Senior Housing Assistance Repair Program), and support repairs for rental housing owners, particularly those who own 1-4 units



SAFETY & TRAUMA PREVENTION

FOCUS AREA		POLICY GOALS
Improve processing of sexual violence evidence	When a person reports to a medical facility after having experienced sexual violence, evidence is obtained by a certified sexual violence medical professional. However, sometimes evidence is not appropriately processed, trained professionals are not available, or evidence processing is not timely. Sexual evidence should be collected and processed respectfully, correctly, and promptly for the dignity of survivors and to pursue justice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Increase the number of Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners, including through funding support for training → Establish a statewide tracking system for all sexual assault evidence, allowing survivors to track their own kits → Require medical providers, law enforcement, or any other entity processing sexual assault evidence to comply with processing and tracking requirements
Protect immigrant and refugee victims fleeing abuse and assault	Immigrants who enter the U.S. fleeing abuse and assault must navigate the complex immigration process in the wake of recent, significant trauma, and experiencing abuse and assault in the U.S. can complicate immigration processes. These processes should be simpler and more protective to allow people to thrive.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Expand availability of and ease of access into the U and T visa programs, which will give victims and their families access to a critical safety tool that enables them to report violent crime and achieve stability while healing from sexual and other forms of violence → Provide funding for U and T visa education, including the certification processes → Enable long-term housing assistance provision without proof of citizenship or residency → Expand educational and training supports for immigrants and refugees to address behavioral health issues and trauma (e.g., the Immigrant and Refugee Wellness Academy)
Support early intervention through deflection and diversion	Individuals with behavioral health challenges and criminal justice involvement can often be triaged to treatment. Early-intercept interventions can result in individuals receiving treatment while avoiding formal charges and the negative consequences of those charges.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Support and expand early-intercept interventions, including Crisis 2.0, Crisis Intervention Training, Co-Responder Teams, 911 Call Center Triage, Police-Assisted Diversion, the Accelerated Misdemeanor Program, and pre-trial specialty dockets focusing on individuals with behavioral health challenges → Provide sufficient funding and support for programs to ensure transitions to treatment are facilitated successfully
Prevent and mitigate trauma of gun violence	Philadelphia continues to suffer from an epidemic of gun violence. In addition to loss of life, non-fatal shootings often result in short-term or long-term disability, and victims and communities suffer from persistent trauma from gun violence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Eliminate gun control preemption language and expressly authorize gun control legislation, allowing enforcement of existing gun laws and passage of other appropriate gun laws → Expand and facilitate access to and coverage for behavioral health supports for individual and community trauma related to gun violence → Enhance community connectedness through activities for youth and adults that address isolation and disengagement → Prioritize funding for social supports (e.g., housing assistance) and facilitate investment in neighborhoods with high burden of gun violence

Looking Forward: Climate Adaptation

HHS agencies often work with members of vulnerable populations in times of great need. While there are many examples of HHS work engaging Philadelphians broadly (e.g., mass vaccination campaigns), HHS agencies also ready themselves to meet people in crisis: people experiencing homelessness, domestic violence, addiction, behavioral health emergencies, and many other challenges. As a result, HHS is well-positioned to identify the human costs of increasing social ills, and to act to prevent and mitigate suffering.

Climate change has emerged over decades as one of the most pressing issues of our time. The negative environmental and social consequences of climate change will fall earliest and hardest on the vulnerable communities we serve, including children, older adults, communities of color, low-income communities, and people with physical or behavioral health challenges. For example, older adults are more prone to heat stress, but many low-income Philadelphians do not have air conditioning. Recognizing this, PDPH, MCOA, and PCA started a pilot project in 2022 to install air conditioning units for low-income older adults in ZIP codes prioritized by heat vulnerability.

HHS is committed to identifying policy mechanisms, including budget bills, that will help to make increasingly necessary climate adaptation for vulnerable populations a reality. We have a responsibility to invest in climate resiliency and to mitigate the harms of climate change on vulnerable populations. We see this work as a complement to the work of addressing the causes of climate change occurring at other levels of government and in other City agencies.

HHS will continue to work toward creative and bold policy solutions to ensure Philadelphians are healthy, safe, economically mobile, and fully integrated into the life of the City. For updates on previous policy and other work, see the annual *Together We Thrive* report which highlights recent achievements across HHS.



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2022-2023

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