MORE YOU KNOW

Barriers to Nutrition Safety Nets in Tennessee Led to Decreased Participation

While food insecurity remains high across the state, enrollment in programs like SNAP, WIC, and TANF is down significantly. These programs are the first line of defense against hunger, however there are systemic barriers that seem to be preventing families from accessing these programs.

More than 400 SNAP participants from across the state completed our nutrition team’s SNAP Access survey to gather information about the barriers they’ve been facing when trying to access the nutrition assistance programs during the pandemic. Many of them said they’ve had difficulties submitting the necessary documents to apply for these programs and remain on them. Others said it’s been difficult to connect with caseworkers by phone for an interview, or they didn’t receive important notices from the state that required action on their part.

Tennessee families continue to struggle with hunger. Let us work together to ensure that barriers to the programs are removed so that eligible families can participate.

Want to help? You can take the following actions to help end hunger in our state.

- Share the SNAP Access Survey with clients or someone you know who has tried to participate in the SNAP program.
- Reach out to your legislators to let them know that you support expanding and strengthening the food assistance programs.
- Share resources about the food assistance programs and how to apply with your community.
- Join the conversation -- sign up for our Nutrition Note newsletter to receive updates on food assistance programs and how you can help.
IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

Hear Her Campaign

The CDC has launched this campaign to reduce pregnancy-related complications, which can happen up to a year after pregnancy. It’s critical for healthcare professionals to identify patients who are pregnant or were pregnant over the past year, so they can look for the urgent maternal warning signs that might indicate there’s a complication. Learn more here.

TJC’s Oral Health Equity Policy Brief

Did you know that more than a million adult Tennesseans don’t have access to dental insurance? That’s just one of the disturbing facts revealed in the TJC’s most recent health policy brief, Separate and Unequal: Policies to Promote Dental Care as Essential and Reduce Oral Health Disparities. The brief delves into some of the problems and solutions.

Child Opportunity Index Tool

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has created an easy-to-use tool that compiles national data on the key factors that affect a child’s well-being and health. The child opportunity index measures the resources available to children in different areas of the country and ranks them on a scale of very low to very high. You can also see the racial density of different areas. In Tennessee, neighborhoods with a higher density of Black people (such as North Nashville in Nashville and Whitehaven in Memphis) have lower child opportunity levels than neighborhoods with a higher density of white people (Green Hills in Nashville and Germantown in Memphis). These disparities in child opportunity levels persist both locally and nationally. This is a symptom of systemic racism that’s important to understand as we work towards change. The tool is meant to inform advocates, providers, and policymakers on the areas where more work needs to be done to enact systemic change.

COVID-19 Vaccine

Pfizer’s COVID-19 vaccine booster shot is approved for children ages 12 to 15 years old. Additionally, immunocompromised children ages 5 to 11 years are eligible for a third dose of the vaccine. For more information,
TJC in the News

- Parents of young adults with severe intellectual disabilities file lawsuit against TennCare
- How Tennessee lawmakers can increase mental health resources for children | Opinion
- New moms are quickly cut off Medicaid in much of the South. Why it matters that some states are considering a change
- Justice Center brief shows Tennessee ranks low in oral health

FEDERAL UPDATES

Build Back Better

Congress continues to discuss and negotiate provisions of a human infrastructure plan that has been referred to as the Build Back Better Act. Although the name of the package may change, Congress must keep negotiating to pass a version of Build Back Better that helps all families -- rural and urban, Black, brown and white, all over the country -- meet everyday challenges and deal with rising costs; strengthens our economy by creating jobs; and reduces racial disparities. Congress can and should pass legislation that achieves these goals.

Build Back Better will:

- Make CHIP Permanent
- Implement 12-month continuous coverage for children enrolled in Medicaid and CHIP
- Expand postpartum coverage for pregnant people on Medicaid and CHIP to 12 months
- Provide universal preschool for all 3- and 4-year-olds
- Temporarily fill the coverage gap in non-expansion states
- Extend the Child Tax Credit
- Invest in Black Maternal Health

The House has already passed this historic legislation, but the Senate is holding up much-needed health and economic supports. Find out how you can benefit if Build Back Better passes in the Senate by using the Build Back Better Calculator.
Black Maternal Health Momnibus

Black moms matter during Black History Month and every other month. Sadly, Black women are three times more likely to die from pregnancy-related complications than white women. Fortunately, there are some things in the works to address this maternal health crisis, including the Black Maternal Health Momnibus Act of 2021.

The Momnibus is a set of 12 bills; eight are included in Build Back Better. Those eight focus on addressing social determinants of maternal health and mental health as well as increasing the number of service providers and research funding for mothers. One of the 12 bills has been passed, the Protecting Moms Who Served Act, which requires the VA to implement a maternity care coordination program. The other 3 bills in the Momnibus focus on improving conditions for incarcerated pregnant individuals, creating a new CMS demonstration project, and improving maternal vaccination rates.

To stay up to date on the Black Maternal Health Momnibus, check out The Century Foundation progress tracker and sign our black health matters pledge.

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TN UPDATES

Governor Lee’s Proposed State Budget for 2022-2023 Fiscal Year

Last month, Governor Bill Lee gave an overview of his proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2022-2023. Although it falls short of what is needed, the $52.5 billion budget proposal includes funds for key investments in education and health. The next step is for the General Assembly to approve the budget. Key highlights include:

- $750 million to fund a change in the K-12 education funding formula
- $25.5 million to give adult TennCare enrollees dental benefits
- $55M to increase access to TennCare and Home and Community Based Services for Aged, Blind, and Disabled
- $50.4 million to expand a voucher program to more foster children and adoptive children
- $6.6 million to expand TennCare’s Health Starts Initiative, a pilot program that increased postpartum coverage from 60 days to 12 months for pregnant women on TennCare

2021 Child Care Improvements in Tennessee

In 2021, the state legislature enacted ten bills that sought to improve families access to childcare. The bills focus on the quality and administration of childcare, including the creation of a Child Care Task Force. Tennessee also improved its Child Care Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS) which is used to assess the quality of early care and education settings. Another bill allows the Department of Human Services (DHS) to update the methodologies used to set the annual day care reimbursement rate. This is a step in the right direction towards helping families access high-quality affordable childcare. The next step to improve childcare in Tennessee is to pass Build Back Better which includes funds to reduce the amount families pay for high-quality childcare. Tell your senators to support children and pass Build Back Better now.
JOIN US

The NEW TennCare Connect: What Advocates Need To Know

Thursday, February 17th
10 AM - 11:30 AM CST
CLE and CEU Approved

REGISTER

Common TennCare Enrollment Problems You Need to Know in 2022: A Medicaid Eligibility Master Class

Thursday, March 10th
10 AM - 12 PM CST
CLE and CEU Credits Pending

REGISTER

Rural Hunger in TN

Thursday, March 17th
2 PM - 3 PM CST
Volunteer Your Voice: How to Advocate for Health Justice

Thursday, March 31st
11 AM - 12 PM CST

Free Webinar

REGISTER

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