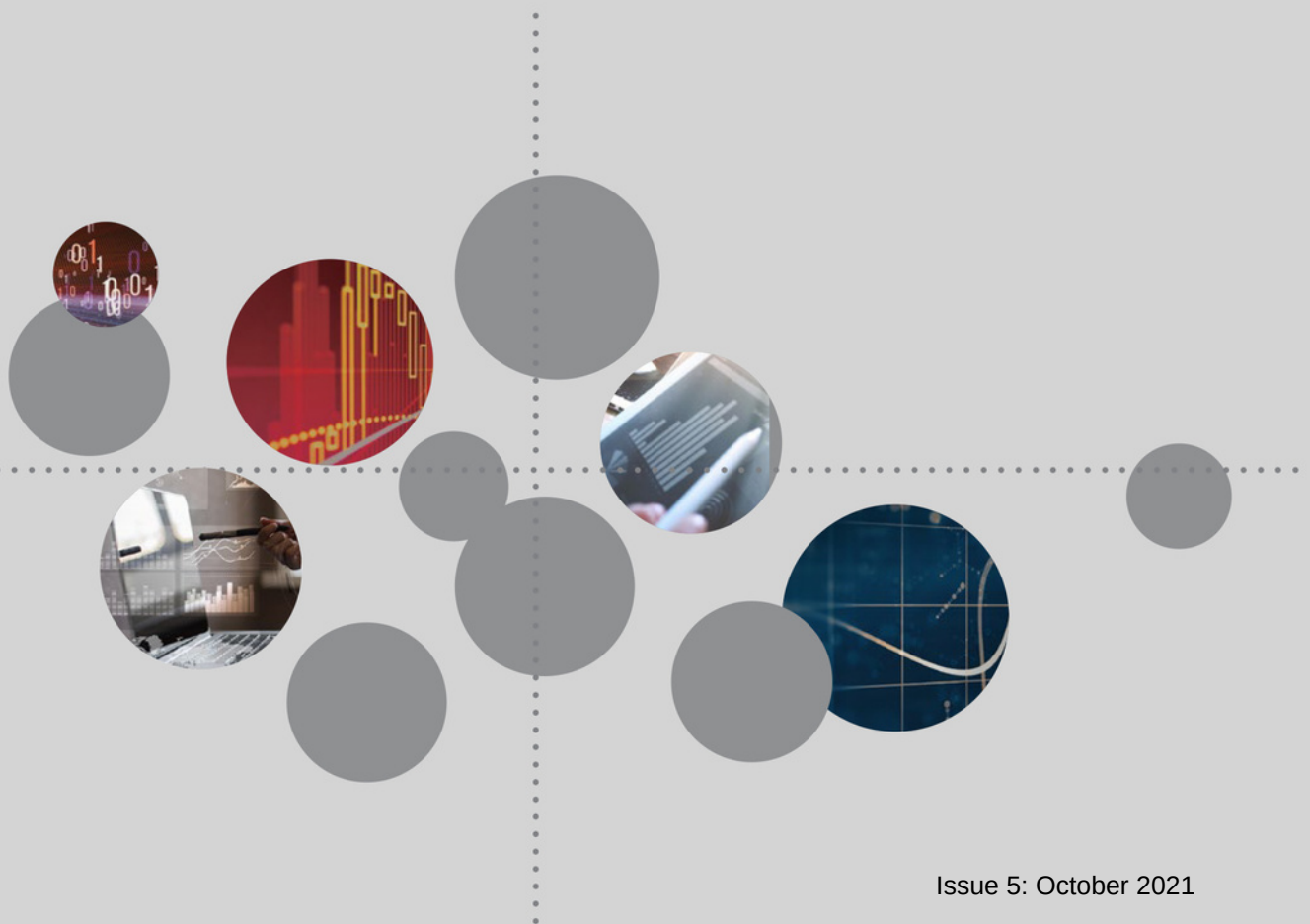


Policy Tracker



THE INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



Issue 5: October 2021



FAST
FACTS

STATE BRIEFINGS

- Bipartisan Election Administration Bill Introduced in Senate
- Proposals Would Expand Legal Sale and Use of Cannabis
- State Allows for Distance Education in Professional Licensing
- New Bills Expand Role of Physician Assistants
- Controversy Surrounds COVID Mitigation in Schools
- Legislators Consider Lobbying Reform Measures

State Legislative Briefing

A curated briefing of state legislative proposals and recent legislative actions

Bipartisan Election Administration Bill Introduced in Senate

State Senators David Argall (R-Schuylkill) and Sharif Street (D-Philadelphia) have introduced a bill that would keep the current system of mail-in voting in place. The bill would also address county commissioners' requests for time to pre-canvass mail ballots received before election day and reduce the time to apply for a mail-in ballot. The proposal also provides guidelines for use of drop-boxes and satellite election offices to collect mail ballots. This bipartisan proposal represents a compromise and includes several priorities of both parties, and comes after Governor Wolf's veto of HB 1300, a previous election administration bill advanced by Republicans.

Proposals Would Expand Legal Sale and Use of Cannabis

While dispensaries have legally provided medical-use cannabis in Pennsylvania since 2018, Pennsylvania has so far not joined other states in providing for legal recreational use for adults. Earlier this year, State Senators Dan Laughlin (R-Erie) and Sharif Street (D-Philadelphia) announced they would co-sponsor legislation legalizing cannabis for adult use, and recently State Senator Mike Regan (R-Cumberland/York) and State Representative Amen Brown (D-Philadelphia) also announced that they were pursuing a legalization proposal. While numerous Democrats, including Governor Wolf, have signaled support for legalization, these proposals represent a new shift toward bipartisan work on this issue. However, there is not yet an indication of broad support among Republican party leaders. Furthermore, outstanding issues to be resolved include social equity, DUI enforcement, and whether home growing of plants would be permitted.

State Allows for Distance Education in Professional Licensing

HB 1182 and HB 1183, signed by Governor Wolf in October, expand distance learning in certain professions that require state licensure. Licensed barber schools and cosmetology schools may offer up to 50 percent of their curriculum through distance learning. Distance learning may only be used to earn study and training hours in theory-based subjects, and practical demonstrations may not be offered through distance learning.

New Bills Expand Role of Physician Assistants

Two recently passed and signed bills, SB 397 and SB 398, update medical practice requirements to allow expanded utilization of physician assistants in medical care. The bills revise the language of the Osteopathic Medical Practice Act and the Medical Practice Act to require that physician assistants must render care under the "supervision" of a physician, rather than the previous language which specified they must do so under the "supervision and direction" of a physician. The bills also increase the number of physician assistants a physician may supervise. These changes will likely expand the role physician assistants play in medical care, offering increased flexibility for providers and addressing critical workforce needs in healthcare.



FAST
FACTS

STATE BRIEFINGS

- Bipartisan Election Administration Bill Introduced in Senate
- Proposals Would Expand Legal Sale and Use of Cannabis
- State Allows for Distance Education in Professional Licensing
- New Bills Expand Role of Physician Assistants
- Controversy Surrounds COVID Mitigation in Schools
- Legislators Consider Lobbying Reform Measures

State Legislative Briefing (cont.)

A curated briefing of state legislative proposals and recent legislative actions

Controversy Surrounds COVID Mitigation in Schools

For the start of the 2021-2022 school year, universal face mask use has been ordered by the Governor and Pennsylvania Department of Health in all public schools. There has since been significant controversy around this decision. Senate Bill 846, currently under consideration, would allow parents to opt out of school mask mandates. In late September, the state House rejected an amendment that would have created a one-time grant for students to attend non-public or out-of-district schools in the event of COVID outbreaks or if parents objected to COVID mitigation measures such as universal masking.

Legislators Consider Lobbying Reform Measures

Several members of the State Senate have introduced proposals related to lobbying reform and government transparency. One bill introduced by Senator Bob Mensch (R-Montgomery) would require lobbyists to register clients who are seeking state funding. Another bill introduced by Senator Lisa Baker (R-Luzerne/Pike/Susquehanna/Wayne/Wyoming) would prohibit lobbyists from being registered political consultants and bar political consultants from lobbying elected officials they had consulted for. Other recently introduced proposals would require all registered lobbyists to complete ethics training, ban state agencies from hiring lobbyists to lobby any branch of government, and prohibit lobbyists who become employed by the legislature from being lobbied by their former colleagues for a period of one year. The package of bills, however, does not include a ban on lawmakers accepting gifts from lobbyists, a priority of some reform advocates.





FAST
FACTS

FEDERAL BRIEFING

- Debt Ceiling Controversy
- Continued Talks on Infrastructure & Social Spending
- Congress Takes Up Defense Spending
- Cannabis Finance & Legalization Proposals

Federal Legislative Briefing

A curated briefing of federal legislative proposals and recent legislative actions

Debt Ceiling Controversy

There has been a recent focus in Washington, D.C., on authorizing an increase to the debt limit. Failure to increase the debt limit would result in a national default in the event the Treasury Department could no longer pay bills. After several weeks of negotiations, an agreement to increase the debt limit was reached between Congressional Democrats and Senate Republican leadership. The bill will allow the Treasury to continue paying its bills through at least December 3rd, by which time Congress will need to act again or face the prospect of national default.

Continued Talks on Infrastructure & Social Spending

Interparty and intraparty politics have complicated the passage of two related bills covering infrastructure and social spending. Legislators reached an agreement on a \$1 trillion infrastructure bill that includes funding for roads, bridges, rail, broadband expansion, and water system upgrades, among other items. The bill has been approved by the Senate but plans to bring the bill to a vote in the House have been delayed due to continued discussions around the companion social spending bill. The larger bill, proposed at \$3.5 trillion, contains a number of President Biden's legislative priorities, including funding for climate action, universal pre-K, affordable housing, extending child tax credits, free community college, and expansions to public healthcare. The social spending bill would be advanced through reconciliation, likely without bipartisan support. Details of the agenda remain under negotiation between Democratic Party leadership and some Democratic Senators concerned about the size and specifics of the bill.

Congress Takes Up Defense Spending

In September, the House of Representatives made plans to debate amendments to the National Defense Authorization Act for the 2022 fiscal year. The bill provides annual reauthorization of defense spending, but amendments are often used to advance broader policy and programmatic goals of lawmakers.

The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) is one beneficiary of this year's reauthorization, as it is set to gain new authority in addressing cyber defense, a high priority area of defense spending. One provision includes allowing CISA to require private companies to report cyber-attacks in some circumstances.

Cannabis Finance & Legalization Proposals

A bipartisan bill, the Secure and Fair Environment (SAFE) Banking Act, would allow financial institutions to make investments in cannabis industry businesses and allow those producers, processors, and dispensaries better access to financial tools. This access is currently limited by the federal prohibition on marijuana.

Other proposals would bring an overall end to the federal prohibition on marijuana, decriminalize the substance, and/or provide social equity reforms (such as investments in communities impacted by the war on drugs and expungement of marijuana convictions). Democratic Party leaders in the Senate have indicated that the SAFE Banking Act would not be advanced without broader legalization, but have allowed for the possibility of cannabis finance reform if some social equity provisions were also included. It appears that legalization and reform advocates are continuing to gather support to advance federal legislation in this area.



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

FAST FACTS

GROWING PHYSICIAN SHORTAGE

There is also a growing physician shortage in Pennsylvania and within the United States overall. In Pennsylvania, many rural areas may face the consequences of closing health facilities, such as longer transit times to receive care and the possible inability to see a doctor quickly.

HOME HEALTH CARE JOB OPENINGS

Throughout the next decade, home health care jobs are expected to see a total of 13,713 openings in the two counties, including over 1,800 newly created jobs as home health care grows in prominence.

Meeting Workforce Needs for Healthcare Occupations

Healthcare occupations represent some of the fastest-growing jobs in Northeastern Pennsylvania, and they are expected to grow throughout the next decade in Lackawanna and Luzerne counties. There is a 10-year projected demand for over 9,200 healthcare practitioners and technical workers, and more than 20,800 healthcare support workers.[1] Demand is varied and includes doctors, behavioral health workforce, and home health workers. To provide for the health needs of the community, the region must work to skill, retain, and attract healthcare workforce – especially amid a tight labor market.

There is also a growing physician shortage in Pennsylvania and within the United States overall. In Pennsylvania, many rural areas may face the consequences of closing health facilities, such as longer transit times to receive care and the possible inability to see a doctor quickly due to the shortage of medical professionals.[2] In June 2014, it was reported that nearly 30 percent of active patient care physicians in rural counties were planning to leave those counties within six years.[3]

There has also been a marked increase in demand for behavioral health professionals across the nation. This includes individuals working in the mental health or drug and alcohol rehabilitation fields. Furthermore, there is a growing demand for home health workforce – particularly home health aides and personal care aides. Throughout the next decade, home health care jobs are expected to see a total of 13,713 openings in the two counties, including over 1,800 newly created jobs as home health care grows in prominence. The median annual wages of home health and personal care aides is \$26,600 – about 12 percent lower than healthcare support occupations overall and 45 percent lower than the median wage for all occupations.[4]

The region has the higher education infrastructure to develop the necessary workforce, but is not able to retain the graduates. After earning their degrees, many students return home or to markets where pay is higher. Many areas in Pennsylvania – especially rural communities – experience the same issue.

State Policy Opportunities for Action

In addressing shortages of behavioral health care, creating or expanding opportunities for loan repayment programs – specifically to encompass opportunities outside primary care offices – may motivate participation in the behavioral health workforce. Pennsylvania has limited loan repayment schemes through the National Health Service Corps. New possibilities may include correctional facilities and community or county behavioral/mental health centers. Additionally, two contingent loan repayment/training stipends are available for behavioral health training in Pennsylvania (CWELL and CWEB). These types of programs have been shown to effectively support the retention of behavioral health professionals in areas and specialties experiencing workforce deficits, such as county organizations. Through collaboration with institutions of higher education, expanded stipends to a broader range of disciplines and populations may offer a successful method of developing and retaining the behavioral health workforce in target areas.

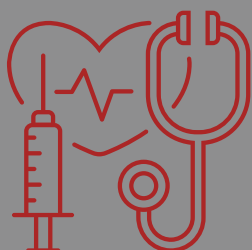
To grow the home health workforce, it is important for Pennsylvania to maintain competitive Medicaid reimbursement rates. Medicaid is the largest payer for home health services, and raising reimbursement rates for home health care may be helpful in making wages more attractive to potential workers. In turn, the region will be able to continue supporting older adults and people with disabilities while keeping them out of more costly congregate care settings.[5] It is particularly important that any future changes to minimum wage laws account for their impact on home health occupations, and that increases be accompanied by corresponding increases in Medicaid reimbursements.[6] Even barring a minimum wage increase, wage growth in industries like retail and warehousing could be creating an even more difficult environment to attract and retain home health workers.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

FAST FACTS

GROW THE HOME HEALTH WORKFORCE

To grow the home health workforce, it is important for Pennsylvania to maintain competitive Medicaid reimbursement rates. Medicaid is the largest payer for home health services, and raising reimbursement rates for home health care may be helpful in making wages more attractive to potential workers.



Meeting Workforce Needs for Healthcare Occupations (cont.)

Federal Policy Opportunities for Action

One helpful tool for addressing the medical workforce shortage, especially as it relates to primary care physicians, is the Teaching Health Center Graduate Medical Education (THCGME) program. The THCGME program is overseen by the Health Resources and Services Administration, and provides support for primary care residency training in community-based settings, like federally qualified health centers. There is evidence that the THCGME program effectively addresses medical workforce shortages and meets the needs of underserved communities. Since 2011, the program has trained over 1,100 primary care physicians and dentists who have graduated and entered the workforce.[7] The THCGME program received short-term funding in 2021 through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, which reauthorized THCGME and other health programs through November 30, 2020. The lack of permanent federal funding leads to uncertainty about the future of the program, however. In 2018, a delayed reauthorization resulted in the underfunding of teaching health centers, which in turn caused a decrease in resident recruitment and the closure of one program.[8]



1. JobsEQ, Chmura Economics, 2021.
2. Joce Sterman and Alex Brauer, "A nationwide doctor shortage is looming. Rural areas will take the hardest hit," WJLA, October 31, 2019, <https://wjla.com/news/spotlight-on-america/a-nationwide-doctor-shortage-is-looming-rural-areas-will-take-the-hardest-hit>.
3. Sterman, "Doctor Shortage."
4. JobsEQ.
5. David Totaro, "Health aides' low wages threaten home health care, a necessity for millions," STAT, April 9, 2019, <https://www.statnews.com/2019/04/09/home-health-aides-low-wages/>.
6. Bailey Bryant, "Home Health Care Agencies Threatened as Wages Rise, Reimbursements Lag," Home Health Care News, February 5, 2019, <https://homehealthcarenews.com/2019/02/home-health-care-agencies-threatened-as-wages-rise-reimbursements-lag/>.
7. Sterman, "Doctor Shortage."
8. "Teaching Health Center Graduate Medical Education (THCGME): A Call for Permanence," Council of Academic Family Medicine, 2018.



COVID-19, Vaccinations & the Delta Variant

In August and September, Pennsylvania saw a significant growth in COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations. Statewide, the number of new cases per week between the week of July 18th and the week of September 26th increased nearly eightfold, and the average number of patients hospitalized with COVID-19 in Pennsylvania increased by a similar proportion. This resurgence is believed to be due to the spread of the Delta Variant of COVID-19, particularly among unvaccinated people. However, in recent weeks, the rate of increase in new cases has begun to slow, with only small week-over-week increases or decreases in new cases since the week of September 12th.

In addition to viral spread among the unvaccinated, there has been an increase in breakthrough cases among those who are fully vaccinated. A recent report indicated that one in four new cases in Pennsylvania were in vaccinated individuals. However, this still means that in Pennsylvania three-fourths of recent cases are among unvaccinated persons, who make up only about 41 percent of the state's total population. Continued vaccination efforts, therefore, remain critically important, including booster doses for those for whom they are authorized and the anticipated rollout of the vaccine to children aged 5 to 11.

FAST FACTS

NEW CASES SLOWING

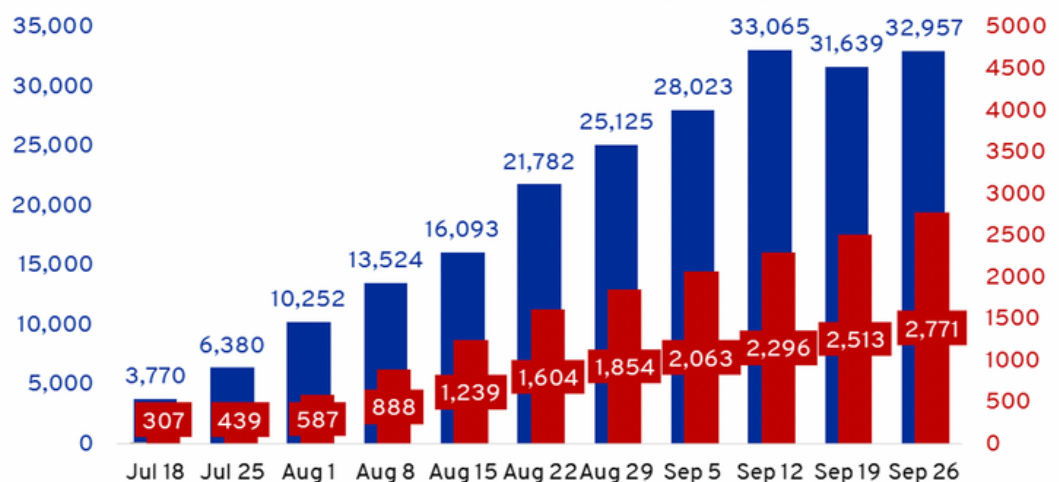
The rate of increase in new cases has begun to slow, with only small week-over-week increases or decreases in new cases since the week of September 12th.



UNVACCINATED MAKE UP 3/4 OF NEW CASES

In Pennsylvania three-fourths of recent cases are among unvaccinated persons, who make up only about 41 percent of the state's total population.

Statewide COVID-19 Trends
New Weekly Cases & Weekly Average Hospitalized



Pandemic Trajectory Key Driver of Economy

Since March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has been the largest factor shaping the trajectory of the regional and national economy. Programmatic and policy measures to control the spread of the virus can be expected to increase consumer confidence and help address short-term economic challenges related to workforce availability, supply chain constraints, and associated inflation pressures.

1. Marshall Keely, "Breakthrough coronavirus cases rising in Pennsylvania," WNEP, October 11, 2021, <https://www.wnep.com/article/news/state/breakthrough-coronavirus-cases-rising-in-pennsylvania-vaccinated-boosters-pfizer-moderna-johnson-and-johnson/523-caaa8ee8-1899-49f9-9450-215eb24e5100>.

EDUCATION & EMPLOYMENT

FAST FACTS

CHALLENGES FOR CHILDCARE

Remaining challenges include limited availability of space, copays even with subsidies, and ineligibility for subsidies when job searching or for families who have higher incomes but are still unable to afford market rate care.

Childcare and Economic Development

Childcare is a significant issue for many reasons. Of particular importance, it allows parents to enter the workforce and support their families. High-quality childcare and early childhood education are also important to the development of tomorrow's workforce. Anecdotal reports indicate that many people cannot work or are not returning to work after the pandemic because childcare is too expensive or unavailable. Parents must consider whether childcare is a worthwhile investment; often, parents fall into a cycle of working in order to afford childcare in order to work, but they cannot get ahead.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has set a standard of affordability for childcare of below 7 percent of household income.[1] Many families spend much more, however. Infant care is particularly expensive, at an average of \$11,000 per year – exceeding the cost of public college in many states.[2] In Pennsylvania, over a quarter of families are unable to afford infant care.[3] Government subsidies can help with affordability, but they do not reach everyone who needs them. Only one of six families eligible actually receives benefits.[4]

In addition to high prices, childcare centers lack available workers. This lack has been heightened by the pandemic. From March to September 2020, 260

child centers in Pennsylvania closed permanently.[5] These shortages mean there are fewer spots for children and longer waits to access remaining facilities. Furthermore, wages for childcare workers are often low and their employment packages rarely include benefits. Centers cannot raise wages for workers without raising their already unaffordable prices, forcing them to rely on additional funding for wage increases. As large businesses, such as Amazon and Target, raise pay during the pandemic, childcare centers may struggle to compete for workers.

Women tend to be primary caregivers, so they are especially susceptible to changes in the field of childcare. One study found a significant correlation between low childcare supply and higher unemployment, and an even stronger correlation between capacity of care centers and the maternal labor force participation rate.[6]

Currently, government subsidy is the primary vehicle for ensuring affordable care. Billions of dollars have been allocated to childcare providers, relief packages, and early education programs. Pennsylvania has received over \$100 million through the CARES Act to support providers.[7] This money helped centers reopen during the pandemic and allowed them to continue to support low-income families.



EDUCATION & EMPLOYMENT

FAST FACTS

THE NEED FOR CONSISTENT FUNDING

Programs cannot raise wages from one-time relief funding; instead, they need consistent funding over time, and sectoral wage scales could make this option feasible.



Childcare and Economic Development (cont.)

State & Federal Opportunities for Action

Subsidies such as Child Care Works have made a positive impact on childcare and employment, but there are still gaps in accessibility. Remaining challenges include limited availability of space, copays even with subsidies, and ineligibility for subsidies when job searching or for families who have higher incomes but are still unable to afford market rate care. Many parents opt out of the labor force rather than face these obstacles. The Child Care Infrastructure Act would fund improvements to facilities, offer a student loan repayment program for educators, and provide benefits to those pursuing childcare credentials.[8] Policies like these, which treat childcare as essential infrastructure, could be explored on the local level, as well.

Opportunities may also be enhanced through the expansion of pre-school and similar programs. Past research by The Institute has highlighted the potential benefits of expanding access to affordable, high-

quality pre-K – including greater ability of parents to participate in the workforce and stronger educational and economic outcomes for children in pre-K programs.

Policies and funding to increase wages in the childcare and early education industry will help struggling facilities stay open without raising prices, while building appropriate capacity for care. Programs cannot raise wages from one-time relief funding; instead, they need consistent funding over time, and sectoral wage scales could make this option feasible. A recently proposed scale in Minnesota would start entry-level childcare jobs at approximately \$18 per hour, with room to earn similar levels of pay offered to primary teachers.[9]

Finally, paid family leave could offer a short-term solution for families. Infant care is expensive, so expanding leave to allow parents to care for infants longer could help families avoid such costs. High-wage workers are likelier than low-wage workers to have paid family leave, so policies that expand its availability will also improve equity.

1. Ashley Fetter, "The Working-to-Afford-Child-Care Conundrum," The Atlantic, January 18, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2020/01/working-afford-child-care-so-you-can-work/605206/>.
2. Steven Jessen-Howard, Rasheed Malik, and MK Falgout, "Costly and Unavailable: America Lacks Sufficient Child Care Supply for Infants and Toddlers," Center for American Progress, August 4, 2020, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2020/08/04/488642/costly-unavailable-america-lacks-sufficient-child-care-supply-infants-toddlers/>.
3. Elise Gould, Lea J.E. Austin, and Marcy Whitebook, "What does good child care reform look like?" Economic Policy Institute, March 29, 2017, <https://www.epi.org/publication/what-does-good-child-care-reform-look-like/>.
4. Center for American Progress, "Costly and Unavailable."
5. Ed Mahon, "Hundreds of Pa. child-care centers have closed, and some fear it will get worse," WHYY, October 6, 2020, <https://whyy.org/articles/hundreds-of-pa-child-care-centers-have-closed-and-some-fear-it-will-get-worse/>.
6. Center for American Progress, "Costly and Unavailable."
7. "State Child Care Actions," The Hunt Institute, April 9, 2021, <https://hunt-institute.org/covid-19-resources/state-child-care-actions-covid-19/>.
8. Michelle Fox, "Billions of Covid relief dollars are going to child care. Here's why advocates say more needs to be done to fix the crisis," CNBC, March 18, 2021, <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/03/18/despite-billions-in-relief-advocates-say-more-needs-to-be-done-to-fix-the-child-care-crisis.html>.
9. Elliot Haspel, "There's a massive child-care worker shortage and the market can't fix it," The Washington Post, May 26, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2021/05/26/child-care-center-worker-shortage/>

SOCIAL SERVICES

FAST FACTS

STUDENT HOUSING INSECURITY

The number of students who said they experienced housing insecurity in 2020 increased from 35 percent in 2019 to 43 percent in 2020.



Housing & Basic Needs Insecurity Among Young Adults

During the pandemic, many households struggled to pay their rent after losing their jobs. Due to existing disparities, people from different populations were disproportionately impacted by the economic downturn. While research has shown that racial minorities, the LGBTQ+ community, and individuals with disabilities are populations that are particularly impacted adversely, young adults, including university students, have also seen significant financial and housing challenges during the pandemic.

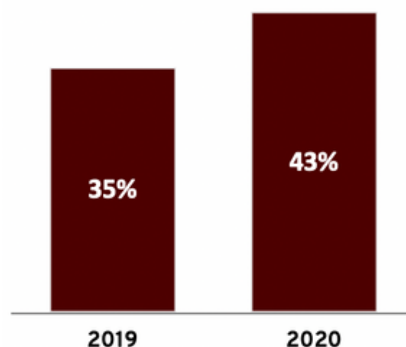
A yearlong survey conducted by The Hope Center for College Community and Justice, one of the nation's largest annual surveys on college students' basic needs, found that almost three in five college students experienced food or housing insecurity in 2020.[1] Inability to afford rent, mortgage payments, and utility bills was the most commonly reported challenge. The number of students who said they experienced housing insecurity in 2020 increased from 35 percent in 2019 to 43 percent in 2020. There are disparities within the student population, as well. More students of color reported insecurity – 75 percent of Indigenous, 70 percent of Black, and 64 percent of Latino students struggled to meet basic needs, compared to 54 percent of white students surveyed. Additionally, LGBTQ students were 10 percent likelier than non-LGBTQ students to experience basic needs insecurity.

Existing financial support programs for students include the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and institutional financial aid. SNAP is a federal nutrition assistance program that provides benefits to eligible low-income individuals and families through an electronic benefits transfer card. The card can be used like a debit card to buy eligible food in authorized retail food stores.[2] The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) can provide students access to federal, state, and even institutional grants that may cover student housing costs. Accessing these programs can be challenging, however. Various rules and regulations can be difficult for vulnerable students to navigate, resulting in their reluctance to apply or failure to successfully and correctly complete their applications. Those who miss out on these valuable resources can often be individuals who need these benefits most.

Federal & State Policies

At the peak of the pandemic in March 2020, the federal government enacted the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, a \$2.2 trillion economic stimulus bill.[3] Under the CARES Act, individuals qualified for up to \$1,200 in stimulus relief. A second stimulus payment was signed into law on December 27, 2020, which provided an additional \$600 stimulus. One of the eligibility criteria for the checks was particularly significant to young adults attending universities – an individual could not have been claimed as a dependent in the previous year on another taxpayer's return. As a result, many students were not able to claim their stimulus payments because they had already been claimed as a dependent on their parents' or guardians' tax returns in 2019 – even if they were not supported by their families in 2020.[4] The Department of Education later distributed \$6.19 billion in grants to 4,778 colleges and other institutions of higher education that had applied for emergency student aid from the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) established under the CARES Act.[5] Students can apply for these funds through their universities.

Percentage of Student Population Experiencing Housing Insecurity



SOCIAL SERVICES

Housing & Basic Needs Insecurity Among Young Adults (cont.)

The criteria for eligibility varies from institute to institute, with many universities using information from students' FAFSAs.

Governor Tom Wolf signed a bill allotting \$912 million in pandemic relief on February 5, 2021. An Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) was established to allocate \$570 million of that bill to help renters impacted by COVID-19.[6] This program helps tenants pay rent (including past-due balances), utility and home energy costs, and other housing-related expenses.[8] These other expenses include relocation costs, rental fees, reasonable late fees, and internet services for work, home schooling, telemedicine, etc. An eligible tenant can receive assistance for up to 12 months, with an additional three months if necessary, to ensure housing stability (depending on the availability of funds).[7]

Institution-Led Solutions

Universities in Pennsylvania have also been working on improving student access to the variety of resources that have presented during the pandemic. For example, the Single Stop office at the Community College of Philadelphia functions as a support center for students, where they can get help finding and applying for

financial assistance programs. This includes accessing SNAP benefits, childcare, health insurance, and legal aid for students having issues with their landlords. Many community colleges have also introduced an emergency fund program. Bucks County Community College's Student Emergency Fund allows students to request funding for unpaid expenses like medical, utility, or internet bills of up to \$500 per academic year. Other institutions have programs that help alleviate tuition burdens like the Community College of Beaver County's Tuition Assistance Initiative. This program waives all tuition costs for eligible students during their first semester. Students can also take advantage of ongoing food assistance programs — many universities and community colleges have a food pantry program for students who are facing food insecurity. Different colleges may have different requirements. Like the Single Stop office, Community College of Allegheny County also has a department of CCAC Resource Navigators who help connect students to on-campus and off-campus resources. In the face of the pandemic, universities and community colleges are developing new programs and strengthening existing services that help their students successfully graduate college.

1. Rizzo, E. (2021, April 1). College students in Pennsylvania are struggling to afford food, housing. WITF. Retrieved October 5, 2021, from <https://www.witf.org/2021/04/01/college-students-in-pennsylvania-are-struggling-to-afford-food-housing/>.
2. Welcome to benefits.gov. Welcome to Benefits.gov | Benefits.gov. (n.d.). Retrieved October 5, 2021, from <https://www.benefits.gov/benefit/361>.
3. Covid-19 economic relief. U.S. Department of the Treasury. (2021, September 16). Retrieved October 5, 2021, from <https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/coronavirus>.
4. Singletary, M. (2021, January 7). Perspective | here's how college students could collect \$1,800 in stimulus payments. The Washington Post. Retrieved October 5, 2021, from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2021/01/05/stimulus-payments-college-students/>.
5. Office, U. S. G. A. (2021, August 26). Covid-19: Emergency financial aid for college students under the CARES Act. COVID-19: Emergency Financial Aid for College Students under the CARES Act | U.S. GAO. Retrieved October 5, 2021, from <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-21-312r>.
6. (PHFA), P. H. F. A. (n.d.). PHFA coronavirus page. PHFA Coronavirus Resources. Retrieved October 5, 2021, from <https://www.phfa.org/news/covid19/>.
7. Emergency rental assistance program (ERAP). Department of Human Services. (n.d.). Retrieved October 5, 2021, from <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/ERAP/Pages/ERAP.aspx>.

The Institute

Turning Information into Insight

THE INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



Policy Tracker The Institute Contributors

Lead Editor

Andrew Chew, AICP

Senior Research & Policy Analyst

Research Interns

Lepakshi Poonamallee

Funding Support

Funding for the Policy Tracker has been generously provided by:



The Institute Staff

Teri Ooms

Executive Director

Jolene Carey-Pace

Research Analyst

Sarah Bender

Research Assistant

Kara McGrane

Research Assistant

Jill Avery-Stoss

Research, Data and Intern Coordinator