



COALITION ON HUMAN NEEDS

Public Policy Priorities Calendar Year 2007

Overview

The Coalition on Human Needs (CHN) is an alliance of more than 100 national organizations working together to promote public policies that address the needs of low-income people and other vulnerable populations. Members of the Coalition include civil rights, religious, labor and professional organizations and those concerned with the well being of children, women, the elderly, immigrants and people with disabilities.

Categories of Priorities

On December 14, 2006, the Coalition Board of Directors adopted the following public policy priorities for the Coalition. The Board has divided priorities into two categories. The first category consists of three issue areas for which CHN staff will play a *leadership* role in advocating on Capital Hill and engaging the CHN network to do advocacy. The three leadership issue areas are: ensuring a federal budget that provides adequate resources to address critical human needs; promoting a responsible and equitable tax system that brings in sufficient revenues to meet human needs; and increasing the minimum wage and indexing it to keep workers from falling further behind. These three areas were identified as top priorities in the survey of CHN's network conducted in November. The second category consists of issues where CHN will play a *supportive* role to other organizations and expand their advocacy capacity. These issues are ones relating to efforts to strengthen the safety net and expand access to federal programs for low-income people.

Criteria for categorizing issues include: timeliness of the issue, the breadth of interest in the issue among members, whether sufficient leadership is already being provided on the issue by member organizations or other organizations, the expertise of CHN staff and member organizations on the issue, and the extent to which the Coalition could affect a related public policy outcome.

The Coalition may reevaluate priorities during the year and change them as circumstances warrant. This insures that the priorities will accurately and realistically reflect our concerns.

Coalition Mission

The Coalition works to build a national community that embraces the American values of opportunity and compassion, with particular attention paid to the needs of the most deeply poor. Although the goal of the Coalition is to seek long-lasting solutions that strengthen families and to end hunger, homelessness and poverty, this document reflects short-term goals.

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Public Policy Priorities

CHN Leadership Issues

Issues in this category are cross cutting and affect the entire human needs community. The Coalition will play a leadership role on these issues. Issues in this category will get the highest possible attention from CHN staff where appropriate and feasible. CHN will:

- Advocate for these priorities before Congress and the Administration;
- Organize and actively participate in lobbying visits;
- Hold strategy sessions;
- Initiate sign-on letters and circulate sign-on letters initiated by others;
- Host seminars and briefings;
- Educate the human needs community and its network on the issues;
- Highlight and provide information on the status of these issues in our emails, web site, and in *The Human Needs Report*;
- Update CHN members on their status at bi-weekly Advocates' Meetings.

The following public policy areas are identified as CHN Leadership Issues:

Ensuring a Fair and Responsible Budget that Meets Human Needs

The federal government commands vast resources that can be used to address critical human needs, such as health care, food, shelter, and basic income. Unfortunately, budget choices made by Congress often have not reflected human needs priorities. In addition, the pressure created by today's federal budget deficits and the debt is making it difficult to secure the funds necessary to meet these needs, while at the same time we are placing a growing burden of debt on future generations.

The Coalition on Human Needs supports a federal budget that gives priority to human needs, especially for low- and moderate-income people. This principle of attending to the needs of the most vulnerable should be adhered to not only in the President's budget and the congressional budget resolution, but also in individual appropriations bills, reconciliation bills, and other budget-related measures.

The Coalition on Human Needs opposes cuts in vital human needs programs that would hamper their effectiveness or their ability to serve eligible families, and **supports** ensuring that program funding is adjusted to address unmet needs and keep pace with inflation.

The Coalition on Human Needs opposes budget process changes or commissions that would make it more difficult to consider all parts of the budget in a careful and balanced way, including revenues as well as spending. CHN **opposes** a line-item veto and other measures that would provide too much power to the executive branch of government in budget negotiations.

Promoting a Progressive and Fair Tax Code That Raises Adequate Revenue

Over the last five years, a projected \$5.6 trillion ten-year surplus has turned into a \$3.2 trillion deficit. Tax cuts account for 49% of the legislation passed during this period that has contributed to the deficits. These tax cuts have overwhelmingly benefited the wealthiest and most privileged among us, while draining federal revenue needed to make the lives of all Americans better. Repealing the estate tax would provide \$1 trillion over 10 years to the richest one percent of estates. The poor and low-income have been especially hurt by the resulting deficits, as the deepest cuts in federal spending made in response to the deficits were shouldered by those Americans who were least able to bear them. Approximately 99 percent of all estates pay no federal estate tax.

The Coalition on Human Needs supports a progressive tax system that is fair and raises sufficient revenue for funding needed government investments. CHN **supports** closing loopholes that allow corporations and individuals to evade hundreds of billions of dollars in tax liability. CHN **supports** tax revisions that would expand help to low-income families and individuals, such as expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit, making the saver's credit refundable, and making the refundable Child Tax Credit available to more low-income families. The CHN **supports** rolling back recent tax cuts that predominantly benefit people with high incomes in order to address critical national priorities.

To ensure that resources continue to be available for critical needs and to avoid passing large debts on to our children and grandchildren, the **Coalition on Human Needs supports** a budget that brings in sufficient revenues and allocates them in a responsible and equitable manner. CHN **opposes** tax cuts that are not paid for by other revenue sources, and which do not make the tax system more progressive. CHN **opposes** using offsets from cutting human needs programs to pay for tax cuts.

The Coalition on Human opposes repeal or costly gutting of the estate tax, and the permanent extension of tax provisions that would lead to a loss in revenues and make the tax code less progressive. CHN **opposes** preferential treatment for investment income, wealth and the transfer of wealth.

Minimum Wage

The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 (FLSA) sets the minimum wage for over eighty million nonexempt workers in the United States. Congress last increased the minimum wage in 1996, to \$5.15 per hour. Today, a full-time minimum wage worker earns about \$10,700 a year -- \$5,900 below the 2006 poverty line for a family of three, and \$9,300 below the poverty line for a family of four. The real, inflation-adjusted value of the minimum wage in 2006 is at its lowest point in 50 years. Clearly, it is past time for Congress to give minimum workers a raise. Twenty-eight states and the District of Columbia have already established state minimum wages that are higher than the national minimum wage. Eighty percent of workers whose wages would be affected by an increase in the federal minimum wage are adults (age 20 and older).

The Coalition on Human Needs supports federal legislation to increase the minimum wage to at least \$7.25 per hour. CHN also **supports** indexing the minimum wage so that it will be adjusted annually, preventing low-wage workers from falling further behind each year.

CHN Supportive Issues

Issues in this category are those in which CHN will serve to “bridge” the gap between the human needs community and any other coalitions working on the identified issues. The Coalition will not take the lead on these issues but will support other leaders and expand their advocacy capacity. Should programs such as Medicaid or Social Security be threatened with fundamental changes to their structure, the Coalition will elevate these issues to a Leadership Issue. As resources permit, CHN will:

- Advocate on behalf of these issues before Congress and the Administration;
- Disseminate sign-on letters generated by other organizations to CHN member groups;
- Co-host briefings and forums on supportive issues;
- Identify member organizations to participate in advocacy efforts, but will not take primary responsibility for arranging meetings or actions on the issue;
- Track the legislation in *The Human Needs Report*; and
- Provide updates during the bi-weekly Advocates’ Meetings.

The following public policy initiatives are identified as Supportive Issues:

Promoting High Quality, Affordable Health Care

More than 46 million Americans are uninsured and the ranks of the uninsured continue to grow. Americans are increasingly concerned about the rising cost and instability of health insurance. More than nine million children are uninsured and millions more do not have adequate insurance. As a result, they are less likely to see a doctor, get dental or vision care, and prescription drugs, and less likely to get the care they need to stay healthy enough for school. Millions of moderate- and low-income seniors have difficulty paying for their prescription drugs.

The Coalition on Human Needs supports the goal of high quality, comprehensive, and affordable universal health care. CHN **supports** efforts to make health insurance more comprehensive and affordable for all Americans. Millions of low-income Americans rely on public health programs such as Medicaid, Medicare and the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) for their care. These programs should be strengthened so beneficiaries are able to receive all the care and medicine they need to thrive. Medicare’s cost-effectiveness should be improved by negotiating prescription drug prices with pharmaceutical companies. CHN **supports** adequate staffing requirements, patient bill-of-rights and other measures that will improve health care quality.

The Coalition on Human Needs supports comprehensive, affordable, high quality health insurance for all children. SCHIP and Medicaid should be improved and expanded

so that all children have health coverage. CHN **supports** efforts to ensure low-income seniors have access to needed prescription drugs and health care. CHN **supports** policies to improve access to quality mental health and substance use treatment for all Americans, including those in juvenile detention facilities and adult prisons and correctional facilities. Public health departments need funding for mental health and substance use services and CHN **supports** ensuring that Medicaid, Medicare and private insurance cover these services. CHN **supports** policies that give all patients greater choice through Medicaid, Medicare, and the private market in how and where they will receive necessary long- services and supports.

The Coalition on Human Needs opposes efforts to shift the costs of public health programs onto the beneficiaries who are least able to afford it. CHN **opposes** actions which cut Medicaid, SCHIP, mental health and other health programs that serve low-income individuals.

Immigration

Despite high rates of employment, immigrant families experience a wide range of preventable hardships that can have negative impacts beyond the immigrants themselves. For example, one in two immigrant children lack health insurance, frequently leaving them without access to the preventative care needed to address minor health problems that left untreated can exacerbate to serious problems requiring more intensive intervention from the health system. Immigrants – including those lawfully residing in the US -- are often shut out of basic safety net programs available to other taxpayers due to arbitrary eligibility restrictions that bear no relation to need. The broken immigration system leaves millions of immigrant workers without any recourse for obtaining permanent lawful status, regardless of their contributions to the places where they work and the communities in which they live.

The Coalition on Human Needs supports a comprehensive fix to our nation's immigration laws that includes a clear path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants living and working in the US. CHN also **supports** equal access to public services and benefits that meet basic human needs, including health insurance, nutrition assistance, income supplements, and employment benefits, ending the current bar for documented immigrants.

The Coalition on Human Needs opposes immigration proposals that marginalize or punish immigrants instead of integrating them. Many of these provisions are expensive and drain funds that are better spent meeting human needs.

Eradicating Hunger in the United States

Hunger in America is recognized as the recurrent and involuntary lack of access to sufficient food due to poverty or constrained resources, which can lead to malnutrition over time. Based on USDA and Census Bureau statistics, one out of eight people in the United States faces a constant struggle against hunger.

The Coalition on Human Needs supports a 2007 Farm Bill that contains a strong nutrition title that reauthorizes and strengthens the Food Stamp Program. Congress must invest resources to make food stamp benefit allotments more adequate, to open eligibility to more vulnerable people, and to connect more eligible people with program benefits.

Adequate funding for all food and nutrition programs – including the Supplemental Feeding Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), school meals and child nutrition – must be assured during the annual appropriations process. CHN also **supports** efforts to strengthen and expand child nutrition programs through the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind legislation.

Employment, Education and Training

Over the past five years, low-income and middle class families have been falling farther behind. National median income dropped by \$1,273 from 2000 to 2005, and four million more people lived in poverty in 2005 than in 2001. Nationally, 27 million adults do not have a high school degree, making them over eight times more likely to be working poor than those with a college education, while the share of low-income, disadvantaged adults receiving training services declined by 14 percent from 2000 to 2003. Despite the serious deterioration in the economic status of working families and the importance of education and training, federal policies and funding to provide sufficient income replacement during unemployment spells, and to provide the education and training necessary to improve worker skills and help them find new jobs and start new careers have fallen behind the growing need since 2001. The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) changes included in the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 limits states' flexibility to blend work, education, training and job search to tailor programs to meet the individual needs of welfare recipients.

The Coalition on Human Needs supports labor market interventions and a revitalized workforce that will enable workers to secure living wage jobs. These include a strong education and job training system designed to meet the demand for skilled workers and serve job seekers who face barriers in securing living wage jobs; stronger unemployment insurance and trade adjustment programs covering more workers; financial aid to enable low-income students to attend college; and a strengthened labor exchange system for matching employees and employers. These efforts must include and be responsive to the needs of individuals with disabilities, those receiving TANF assistance, and those re-entering the community after incarceration. CHN **supports** improving TANF by rewarding states that place parents in jobs with above-poverty pay and benefits, and giving states more flexibility to meet work participation rates through education, training, and other activities that help parents overcome barriers to employment, including those arising from disabilities. CHN **supports** EITC, child care, and child support policies to help low wage workers maintain employment and support their families.

The Coalition on Human Needs opposes policies that would block grant and cut existing programs, privatize workforce programs that are currently operated by public

agencies, or replace existing programs or services with individual accounts. CHN **opposes** policies that treat rapid reemployment or work first policies as a higher priority than needed wage replacement for jobless workers or receiving education, training and placement help for good jobs. CHN **supports** restoring lost funding, and opposes further funding cuts, in workforce programs. CHN **supports** reinstating child support enforcement funding eliminated in the Deficit Reduction Act of 2006 and eliminating other child welfare cuts due to the DRA.

Work and Family

America lags far behind every other developed country in offering basic workplace benefits and protections like paid maternity leave and paid sick days. The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) is the only significant federal family and medical leave protection passed in the last 13 years. The FMLA only provides unpaid leave for specific events like birth, adoption, or a serious illness. It only applies to 60% of the workforce. Forty percent of the workforce has no access to job-protected leave. Forty-seven percent of the private sector workforce has no paid sick days. The lack of this basic worker protection impacts low-income workers, mostly women, the hardest. Eighty-six percent of food service workers lack even one paid sick day a year.

The Coalition on Human Needs supports paid leave and paid sick days for families struggling to work and meet family obligations. Workers should not have to go to work sick or choose between a paycheck and their family needs.

The Coalition on Human Needs opposes any proposals to scale back or diminish the limited protections offered by the FMLA or any other proposals to undermine workers' rights to minimum standards for family and medical leave.

Workplace Protections

Working families face unprecedented economic insecurity, much of it rooted in the workplace itself. The post-World War II model of a male family wage-earner with one lifetime employer, widespread unionization, and employment-based, secure health and retirement benefits no longer exists. Today, workers are employed by numerous employers during their working lives, most women work outside the home, and many employers no longer offer and/or pay for health insurance and pensions. Unions currently represent only 12.5% of workers, mostly in the public sector, even though unionization is a proven anti-poverty strategy, with union workers' wages 29 percent higher on average than their nonunion counterparts. Employment has also become more tenuous as American jobs are being exported abroad. And recent efforts have weakened the government agencies that were intended to protect workers, including the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

The Coalition on Human Needs supports the freedom of workers to form unions and bargain collectively, including card check recognition and removing barriers to reaching first contracts. CHN support policies that guarantee and enforce workplace protections

such as the right to overtime pay, equal pay, prevailing wages in federal contracting, healthy and safe workplaces, and equal treatment on the job. In addition, CHN **supports** the repeal of incentives in federal tax law that encourages the export of American jobs overseas.

The Coalition on Human Needs opposes any federal action that would erode worker protections, including the right to unionize, to receive fair wages, to work in healthy and safe workplaces, and to be free from discrimination.

Protecting and Improving The Well Being of America's Children

Children have the highest rate of poverty of any age group in America (17.6 percent in 2005 compared to 11.1 percent for 18-65 year olds), but assistance to families to overcome poverty falls far short of the need. Fewer than half of families with children poor enough to qualify receive help from Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Only half of eligible poor children are served by Head Start and only one in seven eligible families receives help paying for child care so children can learn and their parents can work. More than 14 million school age children (25 percent of all school-age children) are on their own after school. Every year nearly 900,000 children are the victims of child abuse and neglect and over 500,000 are in foster care at any given time. There is a lack of adequate services to prevent abuse and neglect, to reunify the children who can return home safely, and to recruit adoptive parents. Child welfare caseworkers often have overwhelming caseload sizes, inadequate training and supervision, and high turnover rates. When children don't get the **supports** they need, they are at greater risk. More than 2 million teens are arrested each year. Despite proven programs to help prevent crime and reduce recidivism, there are insufficient funds for prevention and recidivism reduction rates for adults and youth.

The Coalition on Human Needs supports increased cash assistance for families with children when parents are low-earning or out of work, through policies including improvements to TANF, greater access to unemployment compensation, and the use of refundable tax credits.

The Coalition on Human Needs supports increased funding to expand and improve early childhood education programs like Head Start and child care. CHN **supports** expansion of after-school programs and other proven prevention and intervention programs, such as those that will be reauthorized through the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act and Second Chance Act.

The Coalition on Human Needs supports programs that help strengthen vulnerable families and safely engage both parents in helping their children succeed. CHN **supports** updating the current fixed eligibility standard for Title IV-E foster care and adoption assistance while maintaining the entitlement and extending this financial commitment to kinship families. CHN calls on Congress to fund the prevention and intervention programs including CAPTA (Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act) and PSSF (Promoting Safe and Stable Families) programs that continue to be well below their

authorized funding level. CHN **supports** legislation that would assist in addressing the needs of the child welfare workforce. CHN **supports** eliminating child welfare cuts due to the 2006 Deficit Reduction Act.

The Coalition on Human Needs opposes a block grant that would convert Title IV-E foster care and adoption assistance into a fixed allocation that will never adequately address the needs of abused and neglected children and will fail to advance their well being.

Affordable and Accessible Housing and Homelessness

Nationwide, 68% of renters with incomes below 30% of area median pay more than half of their incomes for housing. While renters in this income group represent only 25% of all renters, they represent 70% of all households paying more than half of their income for rent. For all populations, homelessness is increasing across the country. In no rural county or metropolitan area will working full-time, year-round at the minimum wage provide sufficient income to afford a modest one-bedroom unit. The nation has lost more than 500,000 federal subsidized units since 1995 and today is producing very few units to address the housing needs of the lowest income households.

The Coalition on Human Needs supports enactment of a National Housing Trust Fund to produce and preserve 1.5 million units of affordable and accessible housing over the next ten years and **supports** the preservation of all federally-subsidized affordable housing. We also call on Congress to adequately fund all HUD programs as they are necessary to meet the range of housing needs in the United States, including assistance to persons who are homeless. CHN **supports** increased funding for homeless service programs and improved policies focused on ending homelessness for families, individuals and youth.

The Coalition on Human Needs opposes any proposals that would reduce the number of federally-subsidized housing units available to people with the lowest incomes and opposes any proposals that would weaken income targeting in any federal housing program.

Promoting Inclusive Policies for People with Disabilities

There are over 50 million people with disabilities living in America. They are roughly twice as likely to live below the poverty line, and approximately half of working age people with disabilities are unemployed. Across the board, people with disabilities continue to face substandard experiences and outcomes in employment, education, housing, transportation, and health care because of inaccessible and inadequately-funded state and federal programs, outdated public policies, as well as persistent fears, myths, and stereotypes surrounding disability.

The Coalition on Human Need supports policies which increase the availability of affordable and accessible housing as well as transportation. CHN **supports** policies that provide access to affordable, quality health care and long-term care **supports** in the

community through Medicaid, Medicare, and the private market. CHN **supports** policies which seek to improve the disproportionately high unemployment rate of adults with disabilities by means of workplace **supports**, job training, education to workforce transitions programs, work incentives programs, Medicaid buy-ins, and enforcement of civil rights laws. CHN **supports** policies which allow people with disabilities to build assets. CHN also **supports** policies which provide opportunities for people with disabilities to have greater control over resources that provide for their long-term care and which would allow Medicaid dollars to follow the person into home or community-based care.

The Coalition on Human Need opposes policies which have the effect of cutting back on housing subsidies, accessible transportation, Medicaid, Social Security, and other critical supports for people with disabilities.

Ensuring Financial Security for the Aging and People with Disabilities

The "three-legged retirement stool" upon which most workers depend in their twilight years is changing dramatically. Pensions, Social Security and personal retirement savings are all inadequate for today's longer life spans. Most workers no longer have access to pensions through their employer. Half of all Americans are not covered by any retirement plan at their job. Our nation's level of personal savings is the lowest since the Great Depression. More than 48 million people were receiving Social Security benefits at the end of last year, including 33 million retired workers and their dependents, 7 million survivors of deceased workers, and 8 million workers with disabilities and their families. For one-third of people over the age of 65, Social Security makes up at least 90 percent of income. Supplemental Security Income (SSI) serves as a safety net for people who are elderly or have disabilities and are very poor (either because they do not qualify for Social Security or because their Social Security benefits are extremely low).

The Coalition on Human Needs supports proposals that protect and improve benefits while ensuring the long-term solvency of Social Security. CHN **supports** opportunities for people both to work and receive Social Security and SSI. CHN **supports** strengthening the safety net provided by SSI by changing the inadequate resource limits and changing eligibility rules for refugees. CHN **supports** preserving and expanding defined benefit pensions for public and private employees. Finally, CHN **supports** federal incentives that encourage personal savings and asset building by low-income people through progressive savings matches and strengthening and expanding employer-based programs.

The Coalition on Human Needs opposes replacing some or all of Social Security benefits with private accounts. CHN also **opposes** any proposal that would lessen the progressivity of Social Security or cut back or erode the financial security provided by Social Security and SSI. Finally, CHN **opposes** any attacks on defined benefit pensions and regressive savings incentives that do not result in net personal savings.

Preserve and Restore High-Quality Data on Human Needs and Services

As budgets have been cut and resources reallocated, many agencies have ceased collecting or releasing critical data on how their programs meet the needs of the individuals they are intended to serve. In addition, the Census Bureau is facing budget cuts that may limit its ability to field the Decennial Census in 2010, and could result in the elimination of other surveys that measure the well-being of American families.

The Coalition on Human Needs supports efforts to restore funding to make large-scale, independent data available to researchers in all sectors so that they may assess the effectiveness of government programs, and propose policy changes based on facts rather than their preconceptions about the merits of these programs. CHN **supports** funding adequate to fully implement the American Community Survey and Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP).