

# Reducing Intergenerational Poverty

## Key Messages for State and Local Policy

At any given time over the past decade, about 10 million U.S. children lived in families with incomes below the poverty line. Their experiences with childhood poverty can compromise their health and welfare and also hinder their opportunities for economic mobility in adulthood. An intergenerational cycle of economic disadvantages weighs heavily not only on children and families experiencing poverty but also on the nation as a whole by reducing future national prosperity and burdening its educational, criminal justice, and health care systems.

A recent congressionally mandated National Academies consensus study on intergenerational poverty—a situation in which children who grow up in families with incomes below or near the poverty line experience low-income status in adulthood—examined the drivers of long-term, intergenerational poverty; identified potential policies and programs to reduce it; and recommended actions to address gaps in data and research.

There are a number of interventions, based on direct evidence, that can be advanced through state and local policymaking.

### EDUCATION

Intergenerational poverty is perpetuated through cycles where disadvantaged children face barriers to accessing quality education, which leads to reduced economic prospects as adults. Early education, K–12, postsecondary schooling, and career training are key factors in enabling individuals to escape from poverty.

- Increase K–12 school spending in the poorest districts
- Increase teacher workforce diversity
- Reduce exclusionary school discipline
- Expand effective financial aid programs for low-income college students
- Increase campus supports such as tutoring and case management
- Expand high-quality career and technical education programs in high school
- Expand occupational training programs for adults and youth
- Increase access to ethnic studies courses



## HEALTH

Research shows that poverty and poor health are inextricably linked. Families struggling financially are often the same families that have limited access to high-quality health care and are over-exposed to harmful environmental conditions like pollution and violence, leading to poor health and limiting economic prospects.

- Increase funding for Title X family planning programs
- Ensure that Medicaid beneficiaries have access to family planning services
- Expand access to Medicaid with continuous 12-month eligibility and 12-month post-partum coverage
- Support the Environmental Protection Agency in working with local partners to adopt and expand efficient methods of monitoring outdoor and—especially in schools—indoor air quality

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND NEIGHBORHOOD SAFETY

Public safety and the criminal justice system play a fundamental role in the cycle of intergenerational poverty, affecting the well-being, development, and mobility of children and families. Crime affects children in two primary ways—through victimization and involvement with the criminal justice system.

- Use juvenile confinement only for youth who pose a serious and immediate threat to public safety
- Improve school quality and reduce lead exposure
- Scale up programs that abate vacant lots and abandoned homes
- Increase grants to community-based organizations
- Expand funding for policing in high-crime neighborhoods
- Expand use of effective strategies like community policing
- Improve gun safety in ways that pass constitutional review
- Promote child access prevention laws and restrictions on right-to-carry laws, limit access to guns by domestic abusers
- Promote sentencing add-ons for violence involving firearms
- Scale up evidence-based therapeutic interventions such as the Becoming a Man program

Learn more and access the full report at <https://www.nationalacademies.org/our-work/policies-and-programs-to-reduce-intergenerational-poverty>.

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