UNITING OUR COMMUNITY TO CHANGE LIVES

United Way of Dane County is committed to a vision of a Dane County where everyone can succeed in school, work and life.

Serving our community since 1922, we have worked for the education, health and financial stability of individuals and families across Dane County. Last year alone, we partnered directly with over 60 local community agencies and 150 United Way-supported programs to help over 140,000 people in our community meet their needs.

Through strategic partnerships, we bring together diverse communities from every sector to find common ground and identify positive solutions to local challenges, while providing individuals the opportunity to give, advocate and volunteer.

United Way of Dane County drives efforts to help Dane County children, youth and adults access opportunities and support to overcome adversity and reach their full potential. Our work focuses around six community impact goals, which together make up our Agenda for Change. Our investments in local programs across Dane County are outcome and data-driven and focused on achieving measurable results for families. From young children under five with potential developmental delays to older adults at risk of losing their independence, we build on the strengths of families across Dane County through equitable and consistent access to resources.

Our Community’s Agenda for Change

Education:
• Children are cared for and have fun as they become prepared for school.
• Students succeed academically and graduate high school, prepared for higher education, career and community.

Income:
• More people are on pathways out of poverty.
• There is a decrease in family homelessness.

Health:
• People’s health issues are identified and treated early.
• Seniors and people with disabilities are able to stay in their homes.

“United Way is working with our partners to ensure that Dane County is a place where everyone can succeed in school, work and life. We have developed this policy agenda so that we can better ask ourselves: Could there be a public policy solution that would enable us to scale up our important work so that “everyone” really means everyone? We have to understand public policy as part of the problem, and potentially part of the solution, to make good on our pledge to be the power of many working for all.”

Karen E. Timberlake
Chair, Public Policy Committee
Principal, Michael Best Strategies

The power of many. Working for all. | United Way’s 2019-2021 Public Policy Agenda
Racial and Structural Inequities Persist in Dane County at Alarming Rates

While Dane County is often cited as one of the nation’s best places to live, significant racial and socioeconomic inequities exist in almost every indicator of well-being in Dane County for people of color.

For example, according to 2017 Census data, 32% of Black residents and 27% of Latinx residents in Dane County lived below the federal poverty level, compared to 10% of White residents. The overall Dane County unemployment rate is 3.8%, but our community's Black residents have an 8.5% unemployment rate and Latinx residents have a 7.2% rate, compared to 3% of White residents. In the 2017-2018 academic school year, the Dane County graduation rate was over 92%, yet Black students have a 75% graduation rate, compared to 96% of White students.

Throughout history, public policies have disadvantaged communities of color, negatively impacting their well-being across multiple generations. The road to reducing racial and structural inequities in Dane County requires policy action and systems change that targets the root causes of the underlying drivers of community conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age.

United Way of Dane County is committed to using a racial equity lens in our policy work and centering the voices of communities of color. We support community-informed policy solutions that strengthen equitable public investments and advance racial equity throughout our community.

A New Strategic Focus on Family Stability and Public Policy

In 2018, United Way released a new five-year (2018-2022) strategic plan that sets forth an ambitious goal of increasing the number of Dane County families who are economically stable. To achieve this goal, we are focused on innovative ways of generating community resources as well as holistic, two-generational approaches to supporting family stability.

Our strategic plan also calls for United Way to increase our engagement in meaningful public policy efforts that support and advance our mission. We are conscious of how public policy impacts the lives of our neighbors and committed to using our knowledge of local issues to help educate, inform and engage decision-makers on policies at the local, state and national level. We will also lead community education and public awareness efforts and leverage our convening power to bring together diverse groups working to effect positive change.

Developed in consultation with community leaders and our partner agencies, United Way of Dane County’s 2019-2021 Public Policy Agenda reflects the strategic work of our Agenda for Change and our commitment to a Dane County where everyone can succeed in school, work and life.

Our policy priorities are nonpartisan, grounded in research and evidence-based principles, aligned to our community goals and support long-term solutions to local challenges.

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United Way of Dane County’s 2019-2021 Public Policy Agenda
We adopt a comprehensive approach to education, recognizing that quality educational experiences from early childhood through high school set the stage for lifelong success.

Our current education investments focus on supporting early childhood development so young children arrive at Kindergarten ready to learn, as well as school-based tutoring programs that support students’ academic success across elementary, middle and high schools.

To ensure children have the skills to succeed, we invest in:

- Early childhood development, education and quality care
- School-based tutoring, mentoring and academic supports
- Positive youth development programming

Policy Priorities:

- Expand access to affordable, high-quality childcare as well as local home visiting and other early learning opportunities for all children in Dane County.
- Support policies that close gaps in academic achievement particularly for students of color.
- Increase access to affordable higher education and post-secondary education programs to ensure Dane County students are prepared for college, career and community life.

We adopt a comprehensive approach to education, recognizing that quality educational experiences from early childhood through high school set the stage for lifelong success.

The beginning years of a child’s life are critical for nurturing the early foundation of health and wellness needed for success in school and later in life. Investments in early childhood also lead to improved long-term health outcomes, earnings and educational attainment. Earning a high school diploma increases lifetime earnings by 50%, increases the likelihood of employment and increases the likelihood that jobs will have retirement plans and benefits compared to those without a high school diploma. Addressing educational opportunity gaps in our community requires focusing on policies that strengthen the whole educational pipeline from birth through adulthood.

Dane County graduation rates by race/ethnicity 2015-2016

- White: 11 districts report 2,927 graduates of 3,131 in cohort
- Asian: 4 districts report 195 graduates of 213 in cohort
- 2 or more: 5 districts report 170 graduates of 212 in cohort
- Latinx: 6 districts report 344 graduates of 442 in cohort
- African American: 7 districts report 364 graduates of 573 in cohort

Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
Our current financial stability investments

focus on supporting housing, basic needs, job training and re-entry programs. We all have a stake in the economic well-being of our community and believe all families have the strengths, desire and self-determination to create an economically stable future for their children.

To ensure families reach economic security, we invest in:

• Family housing stability
• Education, employment and job training supports
• Reintegration services for former offenders

Policy Priorities:

• Strengthen access to job training and workforce development programs that align to jobs with family supporting wages, benefits and stable work schedules and provide opportunities for career advancement.
• Support tax and other public policies that promote income stability.
• Expand access to affordable housing and address disparities in homeownership rates which contribute to the racial wealth gap.

Individual and family economic security is not solely linked to employment. Social, physical and environmental conditions greatly impact a person’s ability to build their financial stability. When people live in stable housing in safe and prospering communities and are well-prepared and connected to employment opportunities, they are more likely to be economically secure. Creating these conditions, which will lead to improved economic outcomes, requires addressing the many structural inequities that have widened racial wealth disparities and perpetuated a cycle of financial instability, particularly for people of color. This includes supporting policies that remove barriers to economic security such as the Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit.
HEALTH

To ensure families have healthy lives, we invest in:

• Children’s mental and behavioral health
• Older adults’ safety and independence
• Access to affordable, quality health care

Policy Priorities:

• Protect and improve access to affordable, high-quality health care to ensure people’s health issues are identified and treated early.
• Ensure basic nutritional programs are available to vulnerable populations.
• Support the provision of culturally competent and linguistically responsive care.

Our current health investments focus on supporting children’s mental, dental and behavioral health, older adults’ safety and independence and individuals’ access to quality health care.

Access to quality medical care alone does not lead to long-lasting positive health outcomes. In fact, individual health behaviors only drive about 30% of health outcomes, while social, environmental and economic factors drive 50% of health outcomes.6

When people leave a hospital or clinic, they return to their homes, neighborhoods and communities. They may or may not have access to safe housing or healthy food. These social, environmental and economic factors, also known as the social determinants of health, are vital to building the health of whole families and communities. Improvements to individual and family health require changes to the community conditions that make people unhealthy in the first place. This includes policies that support a multisector approach to improving family and community health by addressing unmet social needs.
A thriving nonprofit sector relies on dynamic community partnerships and government policies that seek to strengthen both communities and nonprofits. United Way of Dane County is committed to growing our nonprofit sector’s capacity to support our community.

To ensure our communities thrive, we invest in:
- United Way 211 community resource information and referral services
- County-wide partnerships and nonprofit leadership and training
- Community and volunteer engagement

Policy Priorities:
- Protect and expand existing charitable giving tax incentives that provide support to nonprofits in Dane County and nationwide.
- Position and promote United Way 211 as our community’s most comprehensive health and human services information and referral resource.
- Support community partnerships that promote equity and social justice.

United Way of Dane County is uniquely positioned to support Dane County’s nonprofit capacity building and community strengthening efforts. We are a recognized convener of community partners such as the Law Enforcement and Leaders of Color Collaboration and the Immigration and Refugee Task Force. We are further called upon to provide opportunities for community members and our corporate partners to volunteer directly through our community-based partner agencies. Many people in our community also rely on United Way of Dane County’s 211 community resource directory, which offers 24/7 widespread access to a comprehensive ecosystem of over 5,000 agencies and programs that support people’s needs. This system connects individuals and families from seven southern Wisconsin counties to local resources in real time.

A thriving and well-supported nonprofit sector contributes to overall community health and well-being. This includes policies that support charitable giving incentives, funding for national service programs, the 211 network and nonprofits’ capacity to serve.
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Footnotes


For more information, please contact Hayley Chesnik at Hayley.Chesnik@uwdc.org • 608-246-4373 • www.unitedwaydaneCounty.org
Education:

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- **Support policies** that close gaps in academic achievement particularly for students of color.
- **Increase access** to affordable higher education and post-secondary education programs to ensure Dane County students are prepared for college, career and community life.

Financial Stability:

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Health:

- **Protect and improve** access to affordable, high-quality health care to ensure people’s health issues are identified and treated early.
- **Ensure basic nutritional programs** are available to vulnerable populations.
- **Support** the provision of culturally competent and linguistically responsive care.

Nonprofit and Community Strengthening:

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