



United Ways of Washington State 2020-2021 State Legislative Framework

United Ways of the Pacific Northwest represents 20 local United Ways in Washington committed to mobilizing the caring power of communities to advance the common good and improve lives. The COVID-19 crisis and its massive impact on our economy, communities, and families have made our mission even more relevant and essential.

As our [ALICE report](#) demonstrates, 43 percent of Washington households were already struggling to pay bills before COVID hit. Low and moderate family incomes have not kept up in the past decade with the costs of housing, child care, health care and the other life necessities. Racial inequality is strongly manifested across all elements of the ALICE research. ALICE families never really recovered from the great recession and the COVID crisis is profoundly making life worse. Moving forward in the next few years, we will strongly advocate for public and private investments that **ensure this next economic recovery strongly benefits ALL residents**. Here are our goals and strategies.

IMMEDIATE NEEDS

Ensure Equitable Economic Recovery and Support for Struggling Families and Individuals

The COVID crisis has exacerbated the economic instability of those without secure, protected jobs. Yet these people are performing critical jobs at the lower ends of our economy, raising families and often doing it without secure wages and benefits.

- Fund the working families tax credit. This credit will provide critical tax relief and put money directly into the pockets of workers who pay the largest percentage of their income to sales tax.
- Ensure strong state and local food distribution, SNAP benefits outreach and funding for those suffering from food insecurity.
- Ensure that the roughly 40 percent of Washingtonians who are renters have adequate consumer protections. Also continue supports in paying rent and mortgages during the recovery.
- Support the recovery and sustainability of child care and early learning businesses and their workforce with the resources needed to attract and retain talent and ensure provider availability for families.
- Fund the 211 call system to support the 50 percent service level increase on top of COVID-19 calls helping residents dealing with social, health and economic crisis.

MOVING FORWARD

As the [ALICE report](#) potently describes, the “old normal” pre-COVID economy was not working for our state’s low- and moderate-income families. We must take serious steps to ensure income and racial justice and equity. To change this trajectory, we must take these actions:

Increase Access, Affordability, and Quality of Child Care and Early Learning for Working Families

Before the COVID crisis, most middle and lower-income families struggled to find and pay for quality child care and pre-K education. Working parents and their employers depend on this care, and their kids require it to be successful in school and life. The COVID crisis has seriously impacted the feasibility of childcare businesses at a time when childcare is a critical strategy for reopening the economy. New investments on the relative scale of our K-12 system should create finally an early learning system that works for all.

- Re-imagine and properly invest in our child care and early learning system to ensure it is affordable and accessible for all working parents.

Increase Access to Affordable Housing and Invest in Solutions to the Homeless Public Health Crisis

Housing is the most expensive and important monthly household expense. Yet affordable housing was already in short supply before the virus hit. People and communities continue to suffer the ravages of homelessness. Racial inequity in home ownership is starkly different for white compared to black and brown families. More investment is needed by all sectors to solve this difficult challenge.

- Secure and increase funding for programs that prevent and end the crisis of homelessness.
- Provide policy and resource incentives to boost the creation of more affordable housing by public, private and nonprofit sectors.
- Ensure adequate permanent supported housing including resources such as behavioral health services for people impacted by chronic homelessness.
- Invest \$250 million in the Housing Trust Fund to build and preserve affordable housing across the state.

Ensure Efficient Access to Human Services and Resources by Fully Funding the 2-1-1 Call System

WA 211 has demonstrated its importance as part of Washington’s emergency response and in ensuring efficient use of our social service infrastructure. Early on during the pandemic crisis, WA 211 rapidly doubled service capacity and increased operating hours, handling over 50,000 COVID-specific calls in less than two months. Trained 211 agents give assurance and provide answers and direction to callers with questions and concerns on a wide range of issues and needs. They take the time to listen and link people to the most appropriate resource.

- Provide \$3 million funding for the statewide 2-1-1 system, which coordinates public and private, faith based and nonprofit services to connect people in need with the resources they require before costly emergencies develop, diverting calls to 9-1-1.