

# WITH ONE VOICE



A VISION FOR ECONOMIC EQUITY IN NYC

## [Executive Summary](#)

While New York City has been a national leader in implementing progressive anti-poverty policies, 42% of New Yorkers still struggle every day to meet their basic needs. This economic insecurity is a result of systems of oppression--including racism, sexism, heterosexism, xenophobia, and capitalism--which bar people of color, women, LGBTQ people, immigrants, and low-income New Yorkers from accessing economic security and stability.

The human services sector must stand with our allies in social justice to name and identify how different systems and institutions have colluded to create economic inequity in order to build the transformational policy reforms required to dismantle it.

In order to achieve this, FPWA undertook a year-long project in partnership with our member organizations to develop a shared vision for advancing economic equity in New York City. We examined the systems that maintain economic inequity, policy advancements made over the past four years that move New York City towards equity, and key areas where transformational policy change still is required in order to build an economically stable and secure city.

In this effort, it is critical to not simply focus on moving people out of poverty, but rather on creating true economic security and stability, and reducing the gap between the highest and lowest income New Yorkers. Because of this shift in our analysis, we draw on the Self-Sufficiency Standard to better define what is needed for economic security and stability rather than the Federal Poverty Level, which simply measures what is required to move people out of crisis.

FPWA and our members developed the following framework to build our vision: We believe that economic equity is achieved through an economic system that enables people to sustain themselves, their families and their communities, and eliminates the injustices and disparities that create and perpetuate poverty.

In this document we highlight key areas for reform, including the social services sector, income security, criminal justice, housing, health and mental health, workforce development, and education, as well as promising policies that aim to rectify historical injustices and inequitable systems.

## Part 1: Re-envisioning Economic Equity

*If this is really a city that is welcoming of all, how do we live up to that, and how do we hold our institutions accountable when they are being discriminatory or causing harm to our communities?*

Building on the 2017 local election as a flashpoint, FPWA embarked on a year-long project in partnership with our member organizations to develop a shared vision for advancing economic equity in New York City. Throughout this process, we centered an intersectional analysis of the current and historical impacts of racism, sexism, homophobia, slavery, colonization, and xenophobia on marginalized communities. In borough-based focus groups, organizational site visits with staff at all levels, and a survey, our member agencies identified community needs and systemic trends. During these meetings, we assessed recent policies that have advanced economic equity and contributed to inequity. Finally, we identified key areas where transformational policy reform is required to build a more economically equitable city, and examples of promising policies that work towards that end. This document, harnessed by the experiences and on the ground work of FPWA and our member organizations, lays out a shared vision for economic equity and transformative change in New York City.

### The Most Inequitable City in the Country

Under the de Blasio administration, New York City has been a leader in fighting poverty, implementing the most ambitious affordable housing program in the country,<sup>1</sup> and advancing equal access to basic needs such as Universal Pre-Kindergarten and the ThriveNYC mental health initiative, and increasing funding for the vast network of nonprofit human service organizations that blanket the city and support our communities. Additional anti-poverty measures have also been implemented at the State level, such as raising the minimum wage and expanding access to college for some New York families through the Excelsior Scholarship. Despite these advances, the poverty rate has remained largely

*What does economic equity look like? To me, it's the fair distribution of resources--but I have never seen it in my life.*

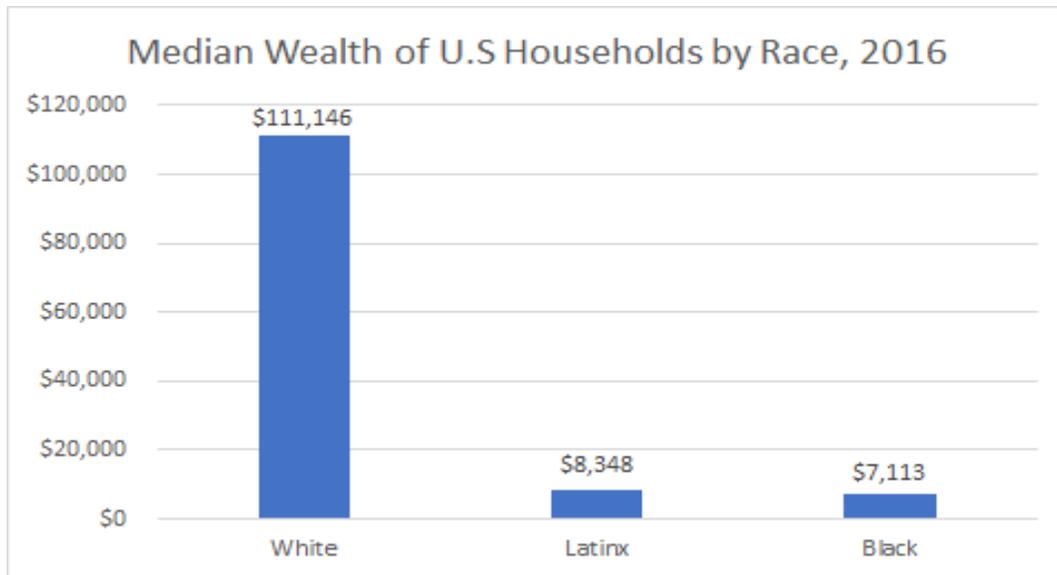
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<sup>1</sup> "Breaking Records: Mayor de Blasio's Affordable Housing Plan Has Financed 40,000 Apartments So Far." The official website of the City of New York. January 11, 2016. Accessed September 25, 2017. <http://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/040-16/breaking-records-mayor-de-blasio-s-affordable-housing-plan-has-financed-40-000-apartments-so-far>.

stagnant over time, impacting one in five New York City residents, and income inequality remains among the highest in the United States.<sup>2</sup>

Rampant income and wealth inequality in America is the enduring result of slavery and colonization, which supported capitalist systems on the backs of disenfranchised people. The consolidation of power, land, and capital was maintained by creating policies that barred access to opportunities and capital for communities of color, women, immigrants, and LGBTQ people. Institutional policies impacted communities in the following ways: redlining limited housing opportunities, gerrymandering and voting laws disenfranchised eligible voters, criminal justice policies encouraged violent over-policing and incarceration, (c) overt job discrimination, salary inequity, and regressive tax policies limited economic opportunities, and admissions policies barred access to educational opportunities.

Nevertheless, these policies and systems have reverberated throughout history to the present day, all the while increasing wealth accumulation and income disparities across generations. The top one percent of U.S. households has an average of \$18.6 million in wealth while the bottom 40% has an average wealth of -\$10,800.<sup>3</sup> This has resulted in a dramatic difference in wealth holdings by race (see chart below).



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, "Survey of Income and Program Participation" <https://www.census.gov/sipp/>

<sup>2</sup> "Interactive: The Unequal States of America." Economic Policy Institute. Accessed September 25, 2017. [http://www.epi.org/multimedia/unequal-states-of-america/#/New\\_York](http://www.epi.org/multimedia/unequal-states-of-america/#/New_York).

<sup>3</sup> Domhoff, G. William. "Power in America." Who Rules America: Wealth, Income, and Power. April 2017. Accessed September 25, 2017. <http://www2.ucsc.edu/whorulesamerica/power/wealth.html>.

In New York City, the income ratio between the top 20% of households and the bottom 20% of households has grown substantially from 36:1 to 43:1 since 2012.<sup>4</sup> The disparity is even greater at the very top of the income scale: the top one percent of income earners in New York City earn an average of two million dollars-- 45 times more than the average annual income of the bottom 99% of earners.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, 96% of the top one percent are white and 85% are men,<sup>6</sup> highlighting the ways that economic systems and policies have systematically disadvantaged people of color and women.

These inequities are not inevitable. Poverty is not a state of mind. It was actively created, and is intentionally maintained, and perpetuated through discriminatory systems and institutions. Transformational policy reforms are required to dismantle these systems of oppression that overwhelmingly impact and threaten economic stability.

## Reframing Economic Equity

Discussions with our member agencies brought to light the myriad of ways that people conceive of *economic equity*. Therefore, a critical first step in this project was developing a shared understanding around the term. Going forward, we will use the below framework when discussing economic equity:

We believe that economic equity is achieved through an economic system that enables people to sustain themselves, their families and their communities, and eliminates the injustices and disparities that create and perpetuate poverty.

Key components of this vision include:

- Social policies that provide the foundations of an equitable economic system, including:
  - High quality, accessible social goods and services (for example: public education, health care, transportation, housing)
  - Comprehensive safety nets

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<sup>4</sup> Roberts, Sam. "Gap Between Manhattan's Rich and Poor Is Greatest in U.S., Census Finds." New York Times. September 17, 2014. Accessed September 25, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/18/nyregion/gap-between-manhattans-rich-and-poor-is-greatest-in-us-census-finds.html?mcubz=0>.

<sup>5</sup> "Interactive: The Unequal States of America." Economic Policy Institute. Accessed September 25, 2017. [http://www.epi.org/multimedia/unequal-states-of-america/#/New\\_York](http://www.epi.org/multimedia/unequal-states-of-america/#/New_York).

<sup>6</sup> Moore, Antonio. "America's Financial Divide: The Racial Breakdown of U.S. Wealth in Black and White." The Huffington Post. April 13, 2015. Accessed September 25, 2017. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/antonio-moore/americas-financial-divide\\_b\\_7013330.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/antonio-moore/americas-financial-divide_b_7013330.html).

- The reformation of inequitable economic policies and implementation of progressive policies that:
  - Address chronic systemic injustices
  - Create universal access to financial security, stability, and upward mobility
  - Create a more equitable distribution of wealth and income
  - Align income with cost of living

### A Better Measure of Economic Equity

Often, anti-poverty work focuses on moving people over the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). However, this visioning process led us to shift our analysis from an anti-poverty framework to one of *economic equity*. As we laid out above, economic equity, is about building economic stability and security for all individuals; simply moving people above the FPL fails to achieve this. The FPL is a common measure of poverty, but it has many well-documented weaknesses and does not adequately reflect the extraordinarily high cost of living in New York City. While the FPL measures a person's rock bottom, the Self-Sufficiency Standard (the Standard), developed by the Center for Women's Welfare, is a much more accurate representation of the income level needed to meet basic needs.<sup>7</sup> While the Standard does not include all categories of expenses needed for true economic security and stability (such as debt repayment, additional healthcare costs,<sup>8</sup> quality of life savings, retirement savings, etc.), it does include the major budget items needed to make ends meet (housing, food, childcare, health insurance premiums and some out of pocket costs, transportation, taxes, and emergency savings) and takes into account geographic location and cost of living.

Within New York City, the Standard varies across boroughs and depends on household size and composition (see chart below).<sup>9</sup> The resultant income levels are more than three times the federal poverty line. According to the Standard, 42% of New Yorkers --almost three million New Yorkers-- lack the income to make ends meet.<sup>10</sup>

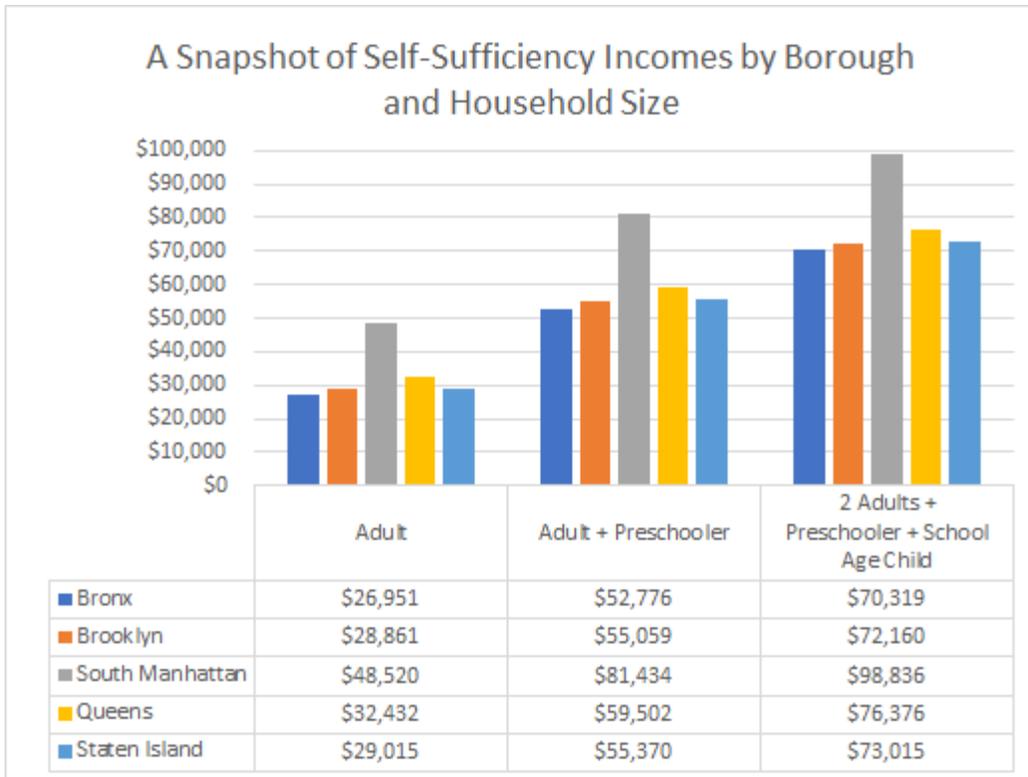
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<sup>7</sup> Pearce, Diana M. "Overlooked and Undercounted: The Struggle to Make Ends Meet in New York City." Women's Center for Education and Career Advancement. December 2014. Accessed September 25, 2017. <http://selfsufficiencystandard.org/sites/default/files/selfsuff/docs/NYC2014.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Such as preventative care, emergency health savings, mental health, reproductive health, elder health care.

<sup>9</sup> Pearce, Diana M. "Overlooked and Undercounted: The Struggle to Make Ends Meet in New York City."

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.



Source: <http://selfsufficiencystandard.org/sites/default/files/selfsuff/docs/NYC2014.pdf>

Notably, this framework for understanding economic equity aligns more closely with our members’ reports of their constituencies and the demographics of economic inequity. Seventy-eight percent of New Yorkers living below the Standard are people of color: 26% are Latinxs, 25% are black, and 16% are Asian American/Pacific Islander.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, 29% of households below the Self-Sufficiency Standard are non-US citizens.<sup>12</sup>

## [Part 2: Building A Policy Vision for Economic Equity](#)

Our vision for economic equity requires transformational policy change that tackles systemic injustices and dismantles systems of oppression. Moreover, our members identified challenges in housing, education, living wages, health care, and work readiness as the top five barriers to achieving economic equity in New York City. Along with our members we have identified tax and financial structures, criminal justice institutions, housing policies, public education opportunities, workforce policies, and health care accessibility as perpetuating systems of oppression in need of transformation. For each area, we have listed examples of

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

transformational policies that could move the city towards economic equity and that should be further considered as FPWA builds its strategy and advocacy efforts.

## SOCIAL SERVICES SECTOR

*There's a huge disparity in the way the sector is treated, and I think it has to do with who we serve. It's people who are disenfranchised, it's poor people, people of color, people who don't have political clout. It's seen as charity as opposed to a social obligation. Because of all of those reasons...they try to justify not picking up the total cost. A lot of services we provide are services that government is mandated to provide, and so if we didn't do it they would have to do it.*

The nonprofit social services sector connects New Yorkers with critical supports that sustain their lives. The sector, which is funded almost entirely through government contracts, offers senior services, early childhood education, youth development, health and mental health services, housing, employment services, and more to low-income individuals. However, city agencies typically design contracts that significantly under-resource nonprofit organizations, undermining their work at the expense of low-income communities across the city.

Inadequate salaries for staff, the under-funding of overhead, and a failure to invest in innovation are primary concerns of the sector. Providers and members have repeatedly told stories of losing staff to fast food establishments that offered better salary and benefits, of being unable to repair broken elevators and other essential equipment, and of rent increases that forced them to shut down programs. According to a report from the New York City Comptroller's office, of the contracts examined, 55% had indirect cost rates below 10% and the average indirect cost rate was 8.6%.<sup>13</sup> FPWA's research found that actual overhead costs for social services organizations are significantly higher, averaging approximately 16%.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, average annual pay for social services workers is \$29,600 in New York--about 40% percent of the average for all workers and far short of the Standard for New York City.<sup>15</sup> Sixty percent of social services sector workers utilize or have a family member utilizing

<sup>13</sup> Office of the New York City Comptroller Scott M Stringer. "Strengthening the Frontline: An Analysis of Human Services Contracts in NYC." May 25, 2017. Accessed October 01, 2017. <http://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/strengthening-the-frontline-an-analysis-of-human-services-contracts-in-nyc/>.

<sup>14</sup> FPWA. "The Underfunding of Overhead." (Forthcoming).

<sup>15</sup> Parrott, James A. "Undervalued and Underpaid: How New York State Shortchanges Nonprofit Human Services Providers and their Workers." March 2017. <https://restoreopportunitynow.files.wordpress.com/2017/03/final-undervalued-and-underpaid.pdf>.

at least one public assistance benefit, reflecting the deep need for additional investment in the sector.<sup>16</sup>

Collaboration among FPWA, nonprofit colleagues, and the New York City government has resulted in some improvements to the sector. The de Blasio administration increased the overhead reimbursement rate to 10% over the next five years, to right-size budgets for selected City-funded human services, and to continue providing 2% Cost of Living Adjustments (COLAs) to social services workers over the next three years. While these measures provide a degree of relief, far more progress is necessary, especially at the state level where limited support has been demonstrated by the Cuomo administration.

FPWA envisions a social services sector that provides a systemic model for economic and social equity, where staff is paid sustainable wages, overhead is fully funded, and investments in innovation create cutting edge services. Government must treat social services organizations as full partners and ensure they are able to carry out their critical missions, which are also the government's missions and mandates. The goal is not to grow the social services sector for its own sake, but to ensure that the sector is fully resourced and able to meet the needs of disadvantaged New Yorkers. FPWA believes that by addressing the underlying systemic issues in the policy areas referenced in this document, our society can move towards realizing economic equity and sustaining a targeted social services sector that is fairly compensated and valued.

*We have a high turnover rate for entry level positions- direct support for the disabled, mentally ill, chemically dependent. Those positions are paying equivalent or less than those at Burger King. Do you want to work with diapers, colostomy bags, someone who is in the throes of their addiction or mental illness, or do you want to flip burgers? We have 200 staff and a 40% turnover rate.*

#### **Promising policy approaches for further consideration:**

- Create a policy requiring that government contracts include nonprofit salaries and fringe rates that are competitive with market rates, reflective of Self-Sufficiency Standards, and baseline an annual COLA that is consistent with the CPI
- Human services contracts should pay the full cost of doing business and include year-to-year cost escalation clauses similar to contracts in the for profit sector

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<sup>16</sup> Reich, Michael, Allegretto, Sylvia, Jacobs, Ken, and Montialoux, Claire. "The Effects of a \$15 Minimum Wage in New York State." Center on Wage and Employment Dynamics. Institute for Research on Labor and Employment. University of California, Berkeley. March 2016. Accessed October 01, 2017. <http://irle.berkeley.edu/cwed/briefs/2016-01.pdf>.

## INCOME SECURITY

*I see so many people working full time that can't make rent. And it doesn't give kids something to look up to because they see someone working two or three jobs and can't make rent.*

Incomes for low- and moderate-income New Yorkers have stagnated in recent years, even as the cost of living continues to rise, particularly for housing, health care, transportation, and childcare. Forty-eight percent of FPWA's surveyed members identified living wages as one of the top challenges to achieving economic equity in New York City, citing a lack of well-paying jobs and the need for many individuals to work multiple low-wage jobs to make ends meet. Data supports these anecdotes, as 42% of New

Yorkers still live below the Self-Sufficiency Standard, meaning they do not earn enough income to meet their basic needs each year.<sup>17</sup> Of these nearly three million New Yorkers, 17% are in households with no workers, 55% are in households that have one worker and 28% have two or more workers.<sup>18</sup> This illustrates the critical importance of both job creation *and* establishing livable wage structures.

While public benefits are meant to serve as a social safety net when adequate pay is inaccessible, many factors (language, culture, immigration status, and more) prevent access to these benefits. Additionally, these programs are underfunded, and do not reflect the cost of living in New York. Because the eligibility criteria for many public benefits programs is based on the FPL, the gap between the New Yorkers who need public benefits and the New Yorkers who are eligible for them is significant.<sup>19</sup> While public benefits are an important safety net and can be a path to income security, they are not a permanent solution. Rather, they must work in tandem with access to adequate incomes that provide economic stability and security.

*People who receive daily home delivered lunch often divide it so that they can have an evening meal. At risk elders, who are unable to meet costs of food, shelter, medical care are at risk for depression, isolation and even financial and emotional/physical abuse.*

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<sup>17</sup> Pearce, Diana M. "Overlooked and Undercounted: The Struggle to Make Ends Meet in New York City."

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Pearce, Diana M. "Overlooked and Undercounted: The Struggle to Make Ends Meet in New York City." Only 6% of New Yorkers below the Self-Sufficiency Standard receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and only 34% receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits.

*Our families are either underemployed or unemployed, looking for work or education opportunities, and stability in their income, housing and services for them and their children.*

Policy changes implemented by the de Blasio and Cuomo administrations have strengthened income security over the past four years, but there is still room for progress. The increase in the state's minimum wage represents a move toward realizing income security, and the passage of paid family leave policies at the city and state levels bolstered job security. Yet for many households, the minimum wage is far less than the salary required to meet the Self-Sufficiency Standard. Further policy changes should focus on moving New

Yorkers beyond the poverty line and towards the ability to cover the costs of housing, food, health and mental health care, child care, transportation, emergency savings, debt repayment, quality of life savings, and retirement.

To achieve this, livable wages should accompany all jobs, and benefits should be made available to supplement wages and to sustain those who are unable to work.

Moreover, policies that support consolidation of wealth contribute directly to the economic instability of the lowest earners and should also be reformed in order to adequately reduce the gap between the highest and lowest wealth holders.

#### **Promising policy approaches for further consideration:**

- Reform income structures and policies to promote equity:
  - Adopt living wage policies that assess a living wage (tied to the Self-Sufficiency Standard)
  - Adopt a universal basic income<sup>20</sup>
  - Adopt and enforce policies preventing income discrimination based on identity
  - Adopt policies that control against widening income disparity
  - Reform income tax policy, including progressive taxation of earned and unearned income (such as capital gains, assets, hereditary wealth etc.), and a permanent increase of the millionaire's tax
- Expand benefits eligibility and promote phase-in/phase out benefits structures to mitigate the benefits cliff

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<sup>20</sup> Also referred to as "Guaranteed Minimum Income," which is a baselined income guaranteed by governments. This policy has been implemented to date in a number of localities, including in Switzerland, Canada, and Finland.

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE

*Many families get involved with the criminal justice system due to poverty and lack of education. When they are released they are further in poverty, unable to obtain assistance for education, unable to secure employment, they cannot afford housing, and in many cases there is little or no support. Families suffer, neighborhoods suffer, the state suffers.*

In New York City, as in the United States, criminal justice policies have effectively created a poverty to prison pipeline by disproportionately targeting low-income communities. Eighty percent of incarcerated persons are identified as low-income.<sup>21</sup> In addition, over 60% of the 2.2 million currently incarcerated in the United States, are from Black and Latino communities.<sup>22</sup> Yet, there remains a lack of public acknowledgment of

the many ways poverty, race, and crime intersect in America, and of the special needs of these individuals and their families.

Whereas some human services providers exist primarily to serve and support justice system-involved individuals or members of their families, most providers working with low-income communities do not have specific training on how to best serve these individuals, despite the significant overlap between the two populations. These providers are further hampered by rules and regulations stemming from federal funding for human services that bar access to services for individuals and families who are justice system-involved. As a result, human services providers and the City of New York, which is the chief social and fiscal policy arbiter, lack an integrated approach to service delivery.

*Criminal justice reform will address racial inequities that have significant long term consequences for economic inequity.*

New York City has made some promising changes in recent years including implementing policies aimed at improving jail conditions, moving youth out of the adult criminal justice system, providing protections for undocumented immigrants, and reducing illegal and unjust policing practices. Despite these improvements, violent policing of low-income, immigrant, LGBTQ, and communities of color remains a critical issue, as does their treatment in the criminal justice system overall.

<sup>21</sup> deVuono-powell, Saneta, Schweidler, Chris, Walters, Alicia, and Zohrabi, Azadeh. "Who Pays? The True Cost of Incarceration on Families." Ella Baker Center, Forward Together, Research Action Design. September 2015. <http://ellabakercenter.org/sites/default/files/downloads/who-pays.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> The Sentencing Project. "Fact Sheet: Trends in U.S. Corrections." June 2017. <http://sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Trends-in-US-Corrections.pdf>

To further redress the harmful criminal justice practices overwhelmingly impacting low-income communities and communities of color, the City should support alternative approaches to law enforcement and criminal justice that eliminate the inequitable treatment of populations that are presently marginalized, and aggressively counter the root causes of crime – primarily poverty and racism.

**Promising policy approaches for further consideration:**

- Build and strengthen a more integrated services approach to shut down the pipeline of low-income persons becoming justice system-involved and to better address the needs of those exiting incarceration
- Leverage community oversight of policing,<sup>23</sup> implicit bias/cultural competency trainings, and the expertise of community-based organizations' in policing to strengthen community safety
- Redirect funding from criminal justice policies and systems towards social services that support Black and Latinx communities that have been historically targeted by law enforcement

*A change in the criminal justice system is needed. Young people, black males in particular, are being targeted and charged for petty crimes, often unjustly. Many of them are being charged as adults regardless of their status as a minor and they often stay in jails for extended periods of time without trial dates within a reasonable amount of time. It is often difficult for this population to get jobs because of their arrest record. They waste valuable time in jail when they could be attending a college, a trade school or perhaps developing a business.*

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<sup>23</sup> Per the Movement for Black Lives Policy Platform, community oversight for policing is direct democratic community control of local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies, ensuring that communities most harmed by destructive policing have the power to hire and fire officers, determine disciplinary action, control budgets and policies, and subpoena relevant agency information.

## HOUSING

*Anxiety about food and housing are both realities for low and moderate income older adults with many facing eviction because rent is equal to or more than 2/3 of their monthly income.*

New York City has long suffered from a severe shortage of affordable housing, resulting in instability within families and communities and a considerable increase in homelessness. As the interest in housing shifted throughout history from having safe and secure shelter to turning a large profit, all but the wealthiest of residents have struggled with housing affordability. This has become a cornerstone of economic inequity in the City, with 61% of surveyed members listing it as a top challenge for the communities they serve. Of the New York City households below the Self-Sufficiency Standard, 81% are rent-burdened, spending more than 30% of their income on housing.<sup>24</sup> The lack of affordable housing is the primary cause of our exploding population of homeless residents, which has increased by 34% since 2012.<sup>25</sup> Gentrification and speculation--aided by unscrupulous landlords looking to cash-in on their investments--have aggressively displaced lower-income residents, especially people of color and immigrants.

In addition to planning an expansion of the shelter system, the de Blasio administration has implemented an ambitious plan to build or preserve 200,000 units of affordable housing.<sup>26</sup> The city has also made some other promising strides in addressing housing needs, such as passing laws guaranteeing legal representation in housing court for low-income tenants and an initiative designed to establish Community Land Trusts.

*While New York City has tried to address the lack of affordable housing, the need is so much greater than these efforts.*

Yet government subsidized development plans are not creating housing that is truly or permanently affordable. Today we are seeing the repercussions of subsidized housing developed without provisions for permanent affordability: 72% of subsidized units created

<sup>24</sup> Pearce, Diana M. "Overlooked and Undercounted: The Struggle to Make Ends Meet in New York City."

<sup>25</sup> Coalition for the Homeless. "New York City Homeless Municipal Shelter Population, 1983 - Present." July 2017. [http://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/NYCHomelessShelterPopulation-Worksheet-1983-Present\\_July2017.pdf](http://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/NYCHomelessShelterPopulation-Worksheet-1983-Present_July2017.pdf). This figure uses the most recent numbers from July 2017 and July 2012. However, because shelter populations decrease in the summer months, a comparison of numbers from February 2017 and 2012 shows an increase of 46%.

<sup>26</sup>For more details and a June 2017 update on the plan's progress, see: "Housing New York: A Five-Borough, Ten-Year Plan." New York City Department of Housing Preservation & Development. Accessed October 01, 2017. <http://www1.nyc.gov/site/hpd/about/housing-plan.page>

between 1987 and 2007 are at risk of becoming unaffordable by 2037.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, many of our member agencies noted that even “affordable” housing units are not affordable for the clients that they serve.

To address the root of our affordable housing crisis, we must dismantle systems that commodify housing. Housing is a human right, and like other rights, should not be traded for profit. New York City has a legally codified right to shelter, which should be expanded to explicitly include a right to housing.

City-subsidized housing must be truly and permanently affordable. Public housing must remain a public good with adequate funding for maintenance, safety, and a high quality of life. Finally, high quality social services programs should be fully implemented to address the underlying causes of homelessness that are unrelated to affordability, such as support for those with disabilities or mental health needs, older adults, youth aging out of foster care, and more.

*We are constantly fighting with landlords, especially big management companies, who utilize their lawyers to either intimidate and bully families to give up their rights to their apartments or raise rent beyond their ability to pay. The bullying tactics are not unique to our families, however. It is a tool that landlords across the city are using on tenants who are paying low rent and whose lease is about to expire or has expired. This is especially cruel because it is used on the most vulnerable New Yorkers (for example, low income and/or families with immigration issues).*

#### **Promising policy approaches for further consideration:**

- Advance policies that support true and permanent housing affordability:
  - Reconfigure the area median income, the standard by which affordability is measured, by community district.
  - Modify time limits associated with rent regulations and development financing.
  - Fund support services along with housing developed for special needs populations, for example, older adults, people with disabilities, etc.
- Create opportunities for community ownership of land

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<sup>27</sup> ANHD. “A Permanent Problem Requires a Permanent Solution: New York City’s Next Affordable Housing Expiring-Use Crisis and the Need for Permanent Affordability.” Spring 2010. Accessed October 01, 2017. <https://anhd.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/APermanentProblemRequiresaPermanentSolution.pdf>

## HEALTH & MENTAL HEALTH CARE

*We've seen people turn down health insurance because it's so expensive and they say they need the cash to feed their kids. They are forced to put off prevention and overall health because they have to meet immediate needs.*

Quality health care access is a complex combination of preventive and environmental factors, high-quality medical care, and access to health insurance. Current health care systems in New York City are not equitably accessible to low-income people, people of color and immigrants, and health outcomes differ dramatically because of these factors. While on average one in 10 New Yorkers went without essential medical care last year (which in its own right is unacceptable), only one in

20 Upper East Siders went without essential care, compared to the nearly one in five residents of Mott Haven and Melrose did.<sup>28</sup> Access to medical care is further complicated by the lack of high quality hospitals in low income neighborhoods, and overburdened and often ill-equipped community health centers. Finding linguistically accessible and culturally appropriate care can be a serious barrier to health care access. Forty-one percent of FPWA members reported healthcare as one of the top challenges to achieving economic equity in New York City.

First Lady Chirlane McCray's ThriveNYC initiative has expanded access to mental health services, and strengthened community-based services. But there is still much to do in building comprehensive mental health services, especially among low-income people. According to a 2012 survey, nearly 40% of New Yorkers with a serious mental illness received no treatment within the past year.<sup>29</sup> Supportive services, including housing, must also be prioritized for those with severe mental health or substance abuse issues.

*Many people with mental illness are in the criminal justice system, but what they need is mental health treatment.*

The lifestyle and environmental factors tied to health outcomes are directly related to poverty and income inequality. Given a higher level of economic sustainability, more people could afford preventive healthcare and higher quality nutrition and housing. Additionally, environmental inequities, such as placement of sewage and waste treatment facilities in low-

<sup>28</sup> "New York City Community Health Profiles." New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. Accessed October 01, 2017. <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/data/data-publications/profiles.page>

<sup>29</sup> New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. "Serious Mental Illness among New York City Adults." *NYC Vital Signs* 14, no. 2 (June 2015). Accessed October 01, 2017. <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/survey/survey-2015serious-mental-illness.pdf>

income neighborhoods inhabited predominantly by people of color, lead to chronic health conditions that result in poor health outcomes and, in many cases, death.

*At risk elders, who are unable to meet costs of food, shelter, medical care are at risk for depression, isolation and even financial and emotional/physical abuse. The lack of available and affordable mental health services is a major problem that can exacerbate an already precarious situation for these elders.*

New York's health care system is among the most expensive and least efficient in the country, leaving New Yorkers with poor access to resources and poor health outcomes. Despite the huge gains made by the Affordable Care Act in extending insurance to those without access, far too many New Yorkers lack health insurance, and many more are paying extremely high prices for inferior coverage. Low-income New Yorkers are especially bearing the brunt of the lack of affordable options; of New York City households below the Self-Sufficiency Standard, 25% lack insurance coverage.<sup>30</sup>

Health care is a human right and our society's priority should be providing optimal and affordable care for all, rather than preserving outsized profits for health insurance and pharmaceutical companies. Until the federal government adopts policies to bring about a transformation of the nation's health care system, New York must lead the way in building a model system for the City's and State's residents, that can serve as an example to our nation.

#### **Promising policy approaches for further consideration:**

- Extend universal affordable health care coverage, including preventative, specialist, mental health care, prescription drug costs, and more, to all New Yorkers
- Ensure equitable access to good health through policies that support healthy lifestyle factors such as affordable healthy foods, protections from environmental pollution, safe neighborhoods and green space
- Ensure equitable access to high quality medical care, and expand access to high quality community health care, rooted in specific community needs, which delivers culturally and linguistically appropriate care, and creates better pipelines for access to hospitals and specialist care

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<sup>30</sup> Pearce, Diana M. "Overlooked and Undercounted: The Struggle to Make Ends Meet in New York City."

## Workforce Development

*Job creation is always a critical issue. More is better, but they have to be something other than the lowest salary-level positions.*

New York's economy has recovered significantly from the economic recession of 2008 and the unemployment rate in New York City has decreased significantly over the last year.<sup>31</sup> New York City and State have led the nation through supportive measures such as: passing paid sick leave legislation, implementing the Fair Work Week policies to create more protections for shift workers, and investing in support for worker cooperatives. Mayor de Blasio's Career Pathways initiative--a workforce development program targeting job development in fast-growing sectors, investing in job training, and building connections between workers and employers--is recognized as highly effective and still in great need of expansion. These are all important steps to improve access to sustainable jobs for New Yorkers.

Despite these improvements, generations of exclusion from educational and work opportunities, combined with a shift towards a knowledge-based economy and an increase in automation, continue to have a detrimental impact on people of color, immigrants, and women. For example, while New York City's overall unemployment rate in 2016 was 4.1%, 10.4% of black people and 8.3% of Latinxs and 5.1% of Asian Americans were unemployed.<sup>32</sup> Immigrant New Yorkers comprise 47% of the City's workforce, but are disproportionately represented in low-wage industries.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, undocumented immigrants are informally employed in large numbers, rendering them susceptible to abuse. Women are most likely to be caregivers for children or older adults, requiring them to reduce hours or temporarily exit the workforce, which in turn significantly impacts their earned income, career advancement, and/or retirement savings.

*[There is a] lack of good paying jobs with lattices for growth that offer the opportunity to raise a family and achieve economic self-sufficiency.*

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<sup>31</sup> "Labor Statistics for the New York City Region." New York State Department of Labor. Accessed October 01, 2017. <https://www.labor.ny.gov/stats/nyc/>

<sup>32</sup> Undocumented employees are not included in these official figures.

<sup>33</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey, 2016 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Table S2301. Generated by Jeanette Estima using American FactFinder. September 28, 2017. [https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS\\_16\\_1YR\\_S2301&prodType=table](https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_16_1YR_S2301&prodType=table).

*Our Central and East Harlem families (and children) face housing and economic insecurity, low wages or lack sufficient skills to obtain a living wage job. Their children (we are a Head Start program) need their parents to possess at least these three factors to have a chance to climb the economic ladder and give their children a fighting economic chance in the U.S.*

Additionally, workforce development providers note that some groups are not adequately covered by existing programs, particularly older adults, immigrants, and youth aging out of foster care. Even those with job training or college degrees have a hard time finding well-paying jobs that are aligned with their skills. Higher education is not an appropriate strategy for everyone, yet apprenticeships, technical training, and skill renewal programs are in short supply.

New York City needs workforce development strategies that include all workers, align with the decrease in manufacturing and trend towards a knowledge-based economy. Workforce policies must also include protections for workers and expansion of hard-fought policies that support job stability and quality.

#### **Promising policy approaches for further consideration:**

- Better align the City's workforce development planning with current and future economic development:
  - Expand and fully fund Career Pathways, focusing on groups with high unemployment rates
  - Create job training opportunities that prepare workers for a knowledge-based market and continued automation
  - Expand job readiness and apprenticeship opportunities
- Expand existing worker protection policies (such as paid family leave, fair scheduling, minimum wage) to include all types of workers, and enact policies that ensure stability for workers

## EDUCATION

*Sadly, we see [some] Head Start graduates [later] bring in their grandchildren. Given that we are a Federal Poverty Level eligible operation, this suggests that generational poverty and the permanence of the American underclass is a real and persistent issue facing New York City and the U.S.*

An equitable and adequately funded system of public education is critical for New Yorkers to thrive and succeed, and should not be commodified and unevenly accessible based on income. Fifty six percent of surveyed FPWA members reported education as one of the top factors in achieving economic equity in New York City. High quality early childhood education, academics, English language learning opportunities, special education, vocational training, arts, and recreational offerings, and post-secondary opportunities, as well as culturally competent and linguistically accessible engagement,

support student success in the short and long term.

Significant city and state investment in the public education system has been made over the past four years, including the de Blasio administration's Equity and Excellence Agenda, Universal Pre-kindergarten program for three and four year olds, school desegregation plan, and community schools around the city, and Governor Cuomo's creation of a statewide college tuition assistance plan. Despite this progress, New York City's public school system still faces considerable structural challenges. The city's school system is extremely segregated;

half of all schools in the city—869 schools serving over 400,000 students—have student bodies that are more than 90% Black and Latinx.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, while high school graduation rates are rising, 30% of high school students in New York City do not graduate in four years.<sup>35</sup> For those who do, more than half are not considered "college-ready" and are in need of remediation in math or reading.<sup>36</sup>

*Funding for afterschool programs is vital for working parents. Policy changes to support single parents to achieve education and job skill training is key and a societal need.*

<sup>34</sup> "Diversity Plan Brief." Center for New York City Affairs. Accessed October 01, 2017. <http://www.centrernyc.org/diversity-plan/>

<sup>35</sup> Office of the New York City Comptroller Scott M Stringer. "Diploma Disparities: High School Graduation Rates in New York City." September 2016. Accessed October 01, 2017. [https://comptroller.nyc.gov/wp-content/uploads/documents/Graduation\\_Rate\\_Brief.pdf](https://comptroller.nyc.gov/wp-content/uploads/documents/Graduation_Rate_Brief.pdf)

<sup>36</sup> *ibid*

*Education is the foundation to open doors for work opportunities and the more education, the greater the options for employment that provides living wages and independence.*

As educational levels increase, the number of people living below the Self-Sufficiency Standard decreases: 80% of those lacking a high school degree live below the Standard as opposed to 21% of those with a four-year college degree or more.<sup>37</sup> However, skyrocketing student debt is crippling the economic security of post-secondary degree-seekers and discouraging many from attaining further education that could otherwise support career advancement. In

order to achieve economic equity in New York City, we must transform our educational system, make it universally affordable at levels, and desegregate our schools, thereby ensuring high quality programs for all New Yorkers.

#### **Promising policy approaches for further consideration:**

- Expand the capacity of the early childhood education system (up to five years old) to serve all families who need services and invest fully in high quality programming
- Support access to excellent, equitably resourced schools for students of all backgrounds by addressing the intersection of segregation, systematized uneven funding, and streamlined and accessible supportive services
- Ensure that students in need have the guidance and financial support to succeed in vocational opportunities and higher education

#### **Conclusion**

Over the past four years, programmatic and policy efforts have made systemic improvements to better support the lives of low-income New Yorkers. Despite this progress, inequity is deeply entrenched in New York City; we must be bold in our vision to address the systems that sustain it.

The vision for economic equity developed with our member agencies and introduced in this document is lofty and requires transformational change within our systems and institutions, which does not happen easily or quickly. True economic equity requires a long-term, sustained effort to achieve. Moving forward, this document will serve as a framework that will inform and guide our policies and strategies to realize economic equity. Economic equity is the vision, and justice is the guiding light.

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<sup>37</sup> Pearce, Diana M. "Overlooked and Undercounted: The Struggle to Make Ends Meet in New York City."