



ASK THE CANDIDATES

What will you do to ensure North Carolina workers and families have what they need during times of personal hardship and economic downturn?

- What is your vision for supporting the basic needs of North Carolinians during the long recovery from the economic crisis of COVID-19?
- Do you support ending the North Carolina ban on seeking a waiver of SNAP work requirements for able-bodied individuals without children who cannot find employment within three months?
- There are currently tens of thousands of children on the waitlist for the North Carolina child care subsidy program. What will you do to expand access to legal, licensed, quality child care to those children so their families can continue to work and provide for their families?
- Tax credits for working families like the EITC, have been shown to significantly improve the health and wellbeing of children and parents and lead to children's improved education, economic, and health outcomes into adulthood. Will you bring back the North Carolina state EITC and expand other tax credits for working families?
- North Carolina's cash assistance program, "Work First", is serving fewer and fewer North Carolinians with a benefit that has not been increased in 25 years, even as need is growing. What will you do to strengthen the cash assistance program so that it accomplishes the intended goal of being a bridge from poverty to financial stability?
- If our tax system were less regressive and corporations and wealthy North Carolinians were asked to pay as much as low-and-middle-income North Carolinians as a share of their income, what would you do with that revenue to support the well-being of workers and families in our state?
- North Carolina's Unemployment Insurance program has been called the weakest in the country. What are your ideas for strengthening the program?
- There are more than one million uninsured people in North Carolina. What is your plan for ensuring that every North Carolinian has access to quality and affordable health insurance and healthcare that does not discriminate based on a preexisting condition?

DID YOU GET A REAL, MEANINGFUL ANSWER TO YOUR QUESTION?

If not, here are some follow-up questions that might help you get a more specific answer:

- Please be more specific about the actions you will take to implement your plan.
- You have mentioned ways individuals might take action to benefit themselves. Please focus your response on how you will ensure North Carolina institutions and public policies can better support families and communities.
- Can you tell me about what principles and/or values will guide your decisions on this issue?
- What are the problems you see in the current approach?

TELL US WHAT YOU HEARD.

VISIT WWW.NCJUSTICE.ORG/ELECTION2020 TO SHARE THE ANSWERS YOU RECEIVED.

BACKGROUND

The COVID-19 public health and economic crisis have increased Americans' and North Carolinians' need for anti-poverty and basic needs support. The network of sometimes disjointed government programs designed to help those who are out of work avoid poverty is often referred to as the social safety net. Stigma around the of the safety net persists, although about 60 percent of Americans will make use of the safety net at some point in their lives.

Safety net programs are a crucial tool to weather the economic toll of COVID-19 on our state. This guide serves as a resource to learn more about these programs and ask questions of federal and local candidates before the November election. North Carolina needs lawmakers who will champion anti-poverty solutions, strengthen and expand our existing safety net programs, and take bold steps to implement an anti-poverty vision that expands on what works and create new programs that serve as a strong and enduring bridge from poverty to financial stability for North Carolinians.

KEY FACTS

North Carolina has seen a lack of state investment in safety net programs, along with administrative and legislative barriers that prevent programs from reaching their full potential to improve the well-being of North Carolina workers and families. Right now, in the midst of a long and likely painful recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, North Carolina has one of the weakest unemployment programs in the country, a ban on seeking federal flexibility on SNAP work requirements, tens of thousands of children on the child care subsidy waitlist, a cash assistance program that serves fewer North Carolinians with benefits that have not increased in 25 years, and lawmakers have failed to expand Medicaid for the up to half a million North Carolinians who would benefit.

Strengthening the safety net includes providing adequate support and services to eligible North Carolinians, coordinating support and services across programs to make programs truly accessible to all who need them, and expanding program eligibility criteria in order that programs can serve all North Carolinians who are in need of support.

Ideas for strengthening existing programs include:

- Creating a comprehensive and coordinated safety net system that provides all the anti-poverty, basic needs support that serves as a bridge from poverty to financial stability that is easy to navigate for participants.
- Expanding categorical eligibility, so that after successful completion of the application and eligibility process for one safety net program, an individual or family becomes automatically eligible for multiple safety net programs.
- Aligning the supports and services of programs like WIC and Medicaid, so mothers and children have what they need to stay healthy.

Bold ideas to expand safety net programs include:

- Providing universal child care for all workers.
- Guaranteed paid sick leave and extended paid emergency leave for all workers.
- Universal basic income to provide each person in the country, or those that meet income eligibility requirements, a guaranteed cash payment to cover their basic needs.
- A "baby bond" program to deposit a cash payment into a savings account for every newborn American, or those that meet income eligibility requirements.

MORE ABOUT THESE PUBLIC POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

Unemployment Insurance (UI)

The Unemployment Insurance program – administered by individual states but overseen by the federal government – is designed to partially replace wages when a person loses their job. In North Carolina, the program provides up to 12 weeks of benefits to eligible workers who become unemployed through no fault of their own and who meet certain requirements.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

This food assistance program distributes cards with a value that can be redeemed on unprepared food from grocery establishments. The SNAP program is known to be the most effective anti-hunger program and has been shown to increase GDP by \$1.50 for every dollar spent in a weak economy.

Medicaid

Medicaid is a public health insurance program for certain people with low incomes. Through the Affordable Care Act, states have the option to increase access to the program, and 38 out of 50 states have expanded their Medicaid programs so that more people can benefit from it. North Carolina has not expanded Medicaid. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there are now approximately 750,000 people who could receive health insurance coverage under the expanded program who remain ineligible until the program is expanded here.

Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)

CHIP provides health coverage to nearly [300,000 children in North Carolina](#) whose families cannot afford private health insurance but who have incomes that are too high to qualify for Medicaid.

Women, Infants and Children (WIC)

WIC is the special supplemental nutrition program for pregnant women, new mothers, infants, and young children with low incomes and who are at nutritional risk. The North Carolina WIC program provides benefits via electronic benefit transfer card that can be used at participating stores. [WIC has been linked to a 10 percent increase in the birthweight](#) of infants who are born to participating mothers as well as decreased infant mortality, improved cognitive development among children, and improved child health.

The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)

The EITC is a tax credit that for low- and moderate-income workers. [Almost 900,000 North Carolinians claim an average of credit of about \\$2,500 annually.](#) The EITC has been shown to improve physical and mental health and reduce the incidence of low birth weight. North Carolina is the only state to end the state-level complement of this tax credit program.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

TANF provides temporary cash assistance to very low-income families and is meant to assist participants with job preparation and related services. While the federal government funds a share of state TANF programs, states determine the program specifics. [In North Carolina, the TANF program, called "Work First", is serving fewer and fewer people every year even as rates of deep poverty increase.](#) In North Carolina, the amount of cash benefits a family can receive through the state's TANF program has not increased in 25 years.

North Carolina Child Care Subsidy Program

Funded through a federal block grant along with state dollars, North Carolina provides a partial child care subsidy to eligible parents with incomes up to 200% of the federal poverty level. [However, there are currently tens of thousands of eligible North Carolinians children on the waitlist due to a lack of state investment in this program.](#)