



United Community Services of Johnson County

2007 PLATFORM

Developed with Representation by United Way of Johnson County



Human services contribute to the quality of life by protecting, promoting and/or restoring the well-being of individuals and families. UCS supports policy decisions that advance and sustain the delivery of effective, outcome-based human services. UCS recognizes that the Kansas policymakers have multiple, important issues before them and that public resources are limited. UCS also understands that wise public investment in human services contributes to human well-being, long-term cost avoidance and overall community strength.

PRIORITY STATE POSITIONS

Bolster Economic Self-Reliance and Independence of Low-Income Kansans ►

The state should support and sustain policy strategies that promote individual and family economic self-reliance and independence, such as:

- **Maintain Eligibility and Access to an Effective State Child Care Subsidy:** Access to affordable, quality child care is critical for low-income working families to enter and successfully retain employment. It also provides a tool to strengthen access to the quality of early learning by working with the state's child care providers through efforts such as Kansas Quality Rating System (K-QRS).
Recommendation: UCS urges that Kansas' current eligibility of 185% of Federal Poverty Level be maintained, and supports increased funding to address growing need.
- **Sustain and Improve Access to Health Care:** Medicaid, MediKan and Health Wave provide health care coverage to many vulnerable Kansans. An additional one out of every nine Kansans is uninsured and lacks health care coverage.
Recommendation: UCS recommends that eligibility be maintained and adequate funding allocated to maintain coverage and reduce the number of uninsured statewide. UCS also supports health care coverage for the estimated 15,000 Kansas children ages birth through five with no health insurance, and presumptive eligibility for children under Medicaid.
- **Improve Food Stamp Outreach:** The Food Stamp program addresses hunger and malnutrition by helping low-income households, including working households, to buy food.
Recommendation: UCS supports additional funding for SRS staff dedicated to Food Stamp outreach and bringing more of these federal nutrition dollars back to Kansas.
- **Strengthen Transit Planning:** Transportation is a significant barrier to well-being for Johnson County residents who lack transportation options to travel to work, or to access health and human services.
Recommendation: UCS supports on-going planning to improve public transit options in Johnson County. New attention and dialogue is needed on how to strengthen transit in this community.

STATE POSITIONS

Sustain the Investment in Early Learning Initiatives ➤

Early childhood is a critical time to impact school and life-long success for young children.

Recommendation: Current funding should be maintained to preserve and enhance access to quality early learning, such as:

- *Smart Start Kansas:* UCS encourages sustaining current funding (\$8.6 million) for Smart Start Kansas, which provides partnership grants for communities that seek to improve the quality and availability of services for young children and their families.
- *Early Head Start:* UCS urges maintaining current funding for Early Head Start, a comprehensive family support program for parents of children under age three and/or pregnant mothers.
- *Kansas Quality Rating System:* UCS supports expansion of Kansas Quality Rating System for Child Care to increase the number of classrooms that provide higher quality early care and education.
- *The Kansas Endowment for Youth Fund (KEY):* UCS supports the strategic direction of the KEY fund, which was created to receive the state's share of the Master Tobacco Settlement funds to provide a long-term source of funding to benefit Kansas children.

Increase Housing Opportunities for Vulnerable Populations ➤

Decent, modest housing is increasingly out of reach for many households. Someone who works full-time at minimum wage cannot afford a two-bedroom apartment at the fair market rent anywhere in America.

Recommendation: UCS supports the development and retention of housing opportunities that are affordable to low-income working households and special needs populations on fixed incomes.

Dream Act – Support Immigrant Access to Higher Education ➤

Existing law that encourages today's immigrant youth graduating from Kansas high schools to pursue post-secondary education fosters fairness and helps youth achieve their highest potential.

Recommendation: UCS encourages support of existing Kansas law on in-state tuition.

Preserve Policymakers Fiscal Responsibilities ➤

Many children, elderly and disabled Kansans depend upon public safety net human services to provide for daily basic needs. Preserving effective legislative oversight for the budget decisions that affects the lives of vulnerable residents is important. Legislators need the flexibility to respond to changing state needs and economic conditions, such as future economic downturns.

Recommendation: UCS supports adequate human service funding and opposes any proposal that restricts the state's ability to adequately fund human services.

Maintain Effective Alcohol and Other Drug Services ➤

In order to reduce alcohol abuse and other drug problems, UCS supports a full continuum of care – prevention, intervention and treatment – for the residents of Kansas.

Recommendation: UCS, and its division, the Drug and Alcoholism Council of Johnson County, support funding and policy choices that preserve access to effective treatment and other substance abuse services for low income residents. UCS also supports maintaining local control of alcohol tax dollars.

Preserve and Maintain the Voluntary Sector ➤

The voluntary sector – philanthropic and nonprofit organizations – plays a critical role in addressing human needs across Kansas, often in partnership with state programs.

Recommendation: UCS will monitor and advocate for policies that aid the voluntary sector's ability to effectively operate community-based human services.

FEDERAL POSITIONS

Federal funding plays a key role in the Kansas human service response. At this time, significant federal budget cuts to a wide range of vital human service programs are under consideration. Many of the proposed cuts hold the potential to harm programs that serve as essential building blocks to households falling into economic hardship. UCS urges the federal government to continue to play a strong partnership role in helping states address the human service needs of vulnerable populations.

Affordable Housing – Expand the Federal Role in Addressing Housing ➤

The federal investment in affordable housing has been shrinking dramatically for over two decades and federal funding plays a critical role in bringing other public and private resources to address the housing market needs of vulnerable populations.

Recommendation: UCS urges full funding for traditional federal housing programs such as the HOME Investment Partnership Program (HOME), Section 8 Vouchers, and the Community Development Block Grant. In addition, new strategies, such as a national housing trust fund, should be supported that increase housing opportunities for low-income working families to rent and/or own their own home.

Calling for 2-1-1 – Provide Federal Support for Implementation ➤

United Way is a leader in the effort to implement 2-1-1 as a number to call for quality community information and referral services.

Recommendation: UCS supports federal action to create an annual dedicated appropriation for the implementation and support of 2-1-1.

Food Stamp Reauthorization ➤

One in eight Americans lives in hungry and food-insecure households. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's 2004 study on food security and hunger ranked Kansas seventh in the nation in the number of hungry households (4.8% or 1 in 20). The Food Stamp program, to be reauthorized in 2007 as part of the Farm Bill, is a cornerstone of this nation's ability to address hunger.

Recommendation: UCS supports reauthorization of the Food Stamp program in a way that builds upon progress made in the 2002 Farm Bill and that further improves the Food Stamp program's efforts to eradicate hunger and food insecurity. The entitlement structure should be retained and more funding earmarked for food stamp outreach and education activities. The \$10 minimum benefit is inadequate and negatively impacts participation by seniors and other vulnerable individuals; the minimum should be raised to \$25.

Head Start – Support Its Proven Track Record ➤

Head Start provides comprehensive early childhood services to low-income preschool children and their families. Recent federal proposals would transfer funding and administration to states. Head Start's existing, research-tested approach should be retained.

Recommendation: UCS urges that Head Start funding remain federal-to-local, and that existing quality program performance standards and strong parental involvement be preserved and strengthened.

Immigration Reform – Support Comprehensive Reform ➤

The current U.S. immigration system is in need of fundamental reform. Existing law does not acknowledge the important role of immigrants in today's economy. Current immigrants often live in fear and may not seek safety or human services when needed.

Recommendation: UCS supports comprehensive immigration reform that creates new paths of citizenship for immigrants and that protects this country's proud tradition of protecting civil rights and civil liberties. UCS is particularly concerned about proposals that criminalize the human service and charitable sectors for carrying out their missions of human service delivery. Proposals that criminalize immigrants for seeking help, or the helping professions from doing their jobs should be rejected.

ABOUT UNITED COMMUNITY SERVICES (UCS)

Established in 1967, United Community Services (UCS) of Johnson County is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) community planning organization that works to improve human service systems and the policies and funding which affect them.

UCS' mission is to identify human service needs in Johnson County, Kansas and marshal public and private resources to meet those needs. Guided by the vision of a community where all people have access to the services they need to live safe, productive lives, UCS advances a public policy agenda that supports and sustains policy choices that effectively promote positive outcomes for people.

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