

Poverty & the Role of Community Action

- Poverty is a serious problem and has an impact—either directly or indirectly—on the lives of **all** Americans. It affects the quality of life for those who are poor and for all those who live in communities where poverty exists.
- 32.3 million Americans are poor; 12.1 million of them are children. One out of every six American children is raised in poverty.
- Community Action is committed to raising public awareness about issues of poverty, leads inclusive community building initiatives to change policies that cause poverty, and develops programs and services to serve the needs of people in poverty. Examples include:
 - ◆ National Dialogue on Poverty
 - ◆ Ongoing community needs assessments
 - ◆ National Policy Forums
 - ◆ Programs and services to build community, serve families, and advocate opportunity
- Community Action promotes strategies, resources, and policies that can help poor individuals, families, and communities become permanently self-sufficient.
- All members of the community, including low-income people themselves, are included and given the chance to participate in Community Action's efforts.
- Hundreds of thousands of people participated in local and state dialogues on poverty held by 625 Community Action Agencies and their state associations across the nation during the National Dialogue on Poverty in 1996 and 2000.
- More than 85 percent of Dialogue participants agree that public policies and programs should assure that people who work earn enough money to provide for their families' basic needs and secure safe and decent housing.

TALKING POINTS

Jobs & Income Supports

- Welfare reform has reduced the number of people on public assistance; yet many of those people, whether they are working or not, still live in poverty.
 - ◆ 32.3 million Americans do not earn enough income to lift themselves and their families out of poverty.
 - ◆ The current federal minimum wage is \$5.15 per hour. A full-time, year-round worker making minimum wage earns \$10,712 per year.
 - ◆ People who work full-time, year-round should not live in poverty.

- America needs to change existing wage and tax policies so low-income people have disposable income available to meet their basic needs and secure safe and decent housing.
 - ◆ We know what does not work. The tax cuts and increased military spending of the 1980s resulted in record-setting deficits and increased poverty.
 - ◆ The federal minimum wage of \$5.15 per hour should be raised by at least \$1.00 per hour and indexed to keep pace with inflation. This will help restore some of the value it once had.
 - ◆ Full-time workers should earn a living wage.
 - ◆ The Earned Income Tax Credit program should be expanded by raising income thresholds and including more families.

- If we do not sufficiently increase disposable income for working people, we must have programs and services to provide essential benefits to families in need.
 - ◆ Government should create public service jobs that pay a living wage and give unemployed people work experience.
 - ◆ Everyone should be able to obtain affordable health insurance directly, through an employer, or through a government-supported plan. Currently, more than 44 million Americans have no health insurance; 10 million of them are children. Every year, 1 million people lose their health insurance.
 - ◆ Financial aid, apprenticeship programs, and other educational options should be available to all who want them. Students should be encouraged to pursue education beyond the high school level to prepare them to take their place in work and society.
 - ◆ Head Start, Early Head Start, quality childcare, and youth development programs, which help children grow to their full potential, should receive full government funding.



**The National Association of
Community Action Agencies (NACAA)**

"Helping People Help Themselves"

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NEWS RELEASE

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CHANGES TO EXISTING POLICIES NEEDED TO HELP THE POOR, ANTI-POVERTY REPORT ILLUSTRATES

Action plan suggests new approaches, recommendations

WASHINGTON, DC – America needs to change existing wage and tax policies in order for low-income people to secure decent housing and meet their basic needs, according to a new anti-poverty report. *Community Action: An Agenda for Every American*, published by the National Association of Community Action Agencies (NACAA), will be released today during NACAA's annual Policy Forum at the Washington Court Hotel.

The report indicates that 32.3 million Americans do not earn enough income to support themselves and their families. Many of these individuals make the minimum wage and earn only \$10,712 per year. In addition, findings show that welfare reform has reduced the number of people on public assistance; yet many of those people, whether working or not, still live in poverty. To address these and other problems facing low-income Americans, the report includes the following recommendations:

- The federal minimum wage of \$5.15 per hour should be raised by at least \$1.00 per hour and indexed to keep pace with inflation.
- The Earned Income Tax Credit program should be expanded by raising income thresholds and including more families.
- Government should create public service jobs that pay a living wage and give unemployed people work experience.
- Everyone should be able to obtain affordable health insurance directly, through an employer, or through a government-supported plan.
- Financial aid, apprenticeship programs, and other educational options should be available to all who want them. Students should be encouraged to pursue education beyond the high school level.
- Head Start, Early Head Start, quality child care, and youth development programs should receive full government funding.

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NACAA RELEASES ANTI-POVERTY ACTION PLAN
PAGE 2

Community Action: An Agenda for Every American is the result of local and state dialogues convened by 500 Community Action Agencies last year. The dialogues gave people from all walks of life an opportunity to discuss which specific actions should be taken to achieve a reasonable standard of living for all Americans. Report findings include results from 28,000 participant surveys collected during the dialogues. "More than 32 million people live in poverty," said NACAA Executive Director John Buckstead. "We have conducted the Dialogue on Poverty and developed this report because immediate action is required at the local, state, and national levels to significantly reduce the number of poor individuals in our country."

Today's Policy Forum features the release of the report during a panel on jobs and income supports. The panel will show participants how they can use the data to advance an anti-poverty agenda. NACAA will use *Community Action: An Agenda for Every American* to work with citizens, policymakers, and other non-profit organizations at all levels to change policies that keep working Americans poor.

Based in Washington, DC, NACAA is the national association representing the interests of the 1,000 Community Action Agencies (CAAs) organized to fight poverty at the local level. CAAs comprise the premiere network in community building, service delivery, and low-income advocacy in this country. For more information on NACAA and CAAs, visit the association's Web site at www.nacaa.org.

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