

All In Illinois:

A Five-Year Strategy to Reduce Deep and Persistent Poverty



Commission Membership

The Illinois Commission on Poverty Elimination and Economic Security was established under the Intergenerational Poverty Act (IPA) in June 2020 to improve policy makers' understanding of the root causes of poverty and economic insecurity in Illinois, support efforts to ensure residents have equal opportunity to achieve economic security, and ultimately reduce and eliminate poverty in Illinois by making policy and other recommendations to the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of the State.

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Strategic Plan Brief

Illinois, like the rest of the nation, is at a turning point. The challenges of people experiencing poverty, and deep inequities in our communities, have been on stark display over the last two years. It is time for all of us to take long-term, meaningful action to ensure that every person, every family in Illinois can thrive and that each of us has the resources we need to manage through a crisis, be it a pandemic, a lost job, or a health scare.

The Illinois Commission on Poverty Elimination and Economic Security (the Commission) was created by the [Intergenerational Poverty Act](#) (HB5191) in June 2020 to “end the intergenerational transmission of poverty by addressing root causes of economic insecurity, racial disparities, and other contributing social, economic, and cultural factors.” The Commission is tasked with issuing a strategic plan by March 31, 2022, for accomplishing the following statutorily outlined goals:

- Reduce Deep Poverty in the State by 50% by 2026
- Eliminate Child Poverty in the State by 2031
- Eliminate All Poverty in the State by 2036

To achieve these goals, the Commission recognizes the need to invest in strategies that bring vitality to communities, address systemic barriers, and help individuals accumulate assets and resources that can provide economic security over time.

For too long, anti-poverty policies have focused on addressing individual challenges, rather than structural drivers of poverty. In this plan, the Commission outlines a different approach, one that promotes the development of asset-based social support programs that recognize the relationship between individual situations and the systems that perpetuate poverty.

These strategic initiatives will be:

- Centered on and led by the experiences of the community, with emphasis on those who have experienced systemic poverty.
- Rooted in an antiracist, restorative approach to equity and racial justice that reflects the diversity of those living in poverty.
- Conscious of the complex nature of poverty and the ways that economic, political, and social systems perpetuate wealth stratification and impair economic mobility.
- Focused on the strengths, assets, and potential of individuals living in poverty.

This strategic plan marks the Commission’s first step along a 15-year path to eliminate intergenerational poverty in Illinois. Overall, over 1.42 million individuals live in poverty in Illinois, of those 31% are children ages 0-17 and 44% live in deep or extreme poverty at less than 50 percent of the federal poverty line.

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Deep Poverty (50% FPL or Less)	Children (100% FPL or Less)	Poverty (100% FPL or Less)
630,012 Individuals	436,327 Individuals	1,420,542 Individuals

This initial strategic plan, spanning five years, focuses on reducing the number of people living in deep poverty by 50%, the first of our three statutory goals. This means improving the lives and resources available to over 315,000 Illinoisans - with ripple effects that will help many more.¹

Those in extreme, or deep poverty, are struggling to make ends meet with very little reliable income, as outlined below²

Extreme Poverty in Illinois

Household 1	Less than \$6,586
Household 2	Less than \$8,367
Household 3	Less than \$10,296
Household 4	Less than \$13,248

Deep poverty disproportionately impacts people with disabilities, women, children, and communities of color:

Illinois	Nationally
16% of those living deep poverty are people with disabilities.	More than one-third are single mothers and their children.
27% are under 18 years of age.	3% of all children—and 15% of black children—spend at least half their childhoods in deep poverty.
57% are women.	Three quarters of adults in deep poverty have not worked in the past year. ³
Those who are Black or Latinx are most likely to be in deep poverty, with deep poverty rates of 12.2% and 6.1%, respectively, compared to those who are White and not Hispanic, with a rate of 4.5%. ⁴	Deep poverty perpetuates multigenerational cycles of poverty: Of those who spent eight to 14 years in poverty as children, 46 percent were poor at age 20, and 40 percent were poor at age 25. ⁵

Addressing deep poverty is essential because families living well below the poverty line often get stuck, generation after generation, without the ability to ever realize economic mobility. People experiencing deep poverty often suffer from our community’s biggest work challenges: stagnating wages, health and disability, limited childcare, and institutional barriers to employment. When individuals do work, the work is often unreliable, and pay is insufficient to meet basic costs of living.

Poverty is not a rural or urban issue—it is a statewide issue. Cook County, the State’s most populous county, ranks 29th of the State’s 102 counties in terms of the percentage of families living in extreme poverty, although it ranks first in terms of the number of families living in extreme poverty. Alexander County, in far southern Illinois, ranks first by percentage of county households.⁶ While poverty affects every corner of our State—the challenges for those facing poverty can be different across communities. Indeed, finding affordable housing might be one of the most difficult challenges for people living in an urban area, while securing transportation to and from a job or a food pantry might top the list for someone struggling to make ends meet in a rural community.

1. National data come from the U.S. Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey. All sub-national data are derived from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey 1-year estimates program. For more information on the American Community Survey, visit www.census.gov/acs/www/.
 2. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/IL>
 3. The Urban Institute. The Unwaged War on Poverty. <https://www.urban.org/features/unwaged-war-deep-poverty>.
 4. 2019 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates; Steven Ruggles, Sarah Flood, Sophia Foster, Ronald Goeken, Jose Pacas, Megan Schouweiler and Matthew Sobek. IPUMS USA: Version 11.0 [dataset]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V11.0>
 5. Wagmiller, Robert Lee; Adelman, Robert M. National Center for Children in Poverty. Childhood and Intergenerational Poverty: The Long-Term Consequences of Growing Up Poor. <http://www.nccp.org/publication/childhood-and-intergenerational-poverty/>
 6. 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. U.S. Census Bureau’s. <https://www.census.gov/data/developers/data-sets/acs-5year.html>

This strategic plan has been shaped fundamentally by those who experience poverty and the organizations that serve them. To develop the plan, the Commission convened eight public listening sessions, successfully engaging more than 775 individuals in partnership with 34 community agencies and 18 elected leaders. Sessions were held in English and Spanish, in person and virtually across the State from Chicago’s South and West Sides to Southern Illinois. The feedback generated at these sessions was essential in defining the key barriers individuals in poverty experience across regions and identifying promising solutions to combat poverty. In addition to the listening sessions, a broad range of policy experts and community stakeholders across the State were consulted including other State led task forces and commissions to ensure the plan reflects existing State and community efforts and the latest evidence-based approaches to poverty alleviation. Cooperative efforts will continue to strengthen our impact as we proceed with the implementation of the strategic plan.

The strategies outlined in this plan focus on: 1) addressing barriers to benefits, housing, and employment for those in deep poverty; 2) strengthening and expanding social safety net programming to support individuals who are falling through the cracks; and 3) preventing people in crisis from falling into deep poverty. The plan also acknowledges the critical role that community-based providers play in meeting the needs of those in deep poverty and the significant challenges to sustainability these providers experience that can impair their ability to meet the need.



“I’m so glad I got on the right track and now it’s no telling where I can go. I have a job now...two beautiful kids. Y’all made a light click that hasn’t turned off yet. Thank you so much for helping me to turn into the man I am today. I’m glad to be able to get the second chance.”

*– ReDeploy Illinois
Program Participant*

The Commission has developed the following strategies, organized under five action pillars, to improve the economic mobility of those living in deep poverty. The pillars and associated strategies as outlined below emphasize a “multi-generational” approach to poverty, addressing the needs of grandparents, parents, children, and single adults to improve long-term outcomes for all.

Pillar 1: Ensure IL is Best in Nation for Raising Families
Ensure Access to High Quality Early Childhood Services
Find a Method to Replicate the Federal Child Tax Credit for Families Raising Children
Expand Access to Free and Reduced School Meals
Increase Participation in WIC by Improving Accessibility for Those Who are Eligible
Pillar 2: Stabilize Homes and Communities
End Homelessness and Ensure Housing Affordability and Accessibility
Invest in High-Quality, Specialized Supports for Persons Experiencing Mental Health and Substance Use Related Crises
Invest in Interventions that Address Cycles of Trauma and Violence in our Communities
Pillar 3: Ensure Just and Equitable Access to Economic Security Programs
Create a Single, Accessible Platform for Individuals to Enroll in All State Benefits
Increase Uptake, Access, and Value of Existing Public Benefits for Those in Extreme Poverty
Deploy Direct Cash Assistance Programs to Lift Families Out of Deep Poverty
Pillar 4: Address Barriers to Paid Work, Education, and Advancement
Address Barriers That Prevent Consistent Work at a Living Wage, by Investing in Transportation, Childcare, Paid Leave, Broadband, Legal Aid, Reentry Services, and Immigrant and Refugee Supports
Invest in Apprenticeship, Work Based Learning, and Barrier Reduction Programs So Individuals Can Learn and Train While Supporting Their Family
Expand Access to Legal Counsel for Illinoisans and Ensure Equitable Access to Court and Legal Processes
Pillar 5: Support Trusted Community Based Providers to Serve the Needs of those In Deep Poverty
Support our Caregiving Workforce by Ensuring Equitable Wages and Meaningful Supports for Unpaid Caregivers
Provide Consistent and Equitable Access to State Funding that Adequately Keeps Pace with Rising Costs

The Intergenerational Poverty Act includes clear metrics for success. For the first five years, the Act calls for the reduction of 50% of individuals living in deep poverty; this equates to reducing by half the 630,012 individuals living in deep poverty. The success of the strategies included in this plan will be defined by this metric and will be evaluated annually.

These recommended actions are meant to inform the activities of State government and drive investments being made at the local level and through private investment and philanthropy. Each recommendation is multifaceted and will require a variety of tactics to maximize success, including:

- Focus on racial equity and social justice.
- Impactful and sustainable financial investments.
- Data integration and analysis.
- Interagency collaboration and partnership with the Illinois General Assembly.
- Partnership with county and local government.
- Community and philanthropic support.
- Continued stakeholder feedback, prioritizing the voices of people living in poverty.


The Commission recognizes that this strategic plan is not static and will continue to be informed by the efforts of our government partners, community-based organizations, businesses, and philanthropy. To that end, the Commission will continue stakeholder engagement in those regions of the State that are most impacted by deep poverty, to ensure strategies and solutions meet the varied needs of our diverse State. The work of the Commission will also be strengthened by collaborative efforts among other statewide taskforces, committees, and commissions who have contributed to this strategic vision and who are committed to ensuring that the Poverty Commission can meet its bold objectives. These state partners include the Illinois Commission to End Hunger, the Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, the Illinois Impact Task Force, and the Illinois Future of Work Task Force, to name a few.

This strategy is an important step in acknowledging what it will take to end systemic, intergenerational poverty in Illinois. It will be necessary for all Illinoisans to commit themselves to this effort and work toward achieving this bold vision. Illinois needs to be all in to dramatically change the landscape of poverty and ensure that the cycle of intergenerational poverty is broken.

Next Steps

To accomplish this strategy, the Commission will engage in the following immediate actions:

- Finalize the Commission’s accompanying full report on the “Poverty Commission’s Five-Year Strategy to Reduce Deep and Persistent Poverty.”
- Work with Illinois Governor JB Pritzker and the Illinois General Assembly to inform them of strategic recommendations and to confirm support for implementation.
- Launch working committees, made up of Commission members and outside stakeholders, to drive strategic initiatives under each of the five strategic pillars.
- Launch regional councils to ensure continued local stakeholder engagement in regions across Illinois with the highest rates of deep poverty.
- Successfully advance strategic initiatives through research and data analysis, legislative and administrative policy development, and community partnership.



“People are having to choose between getting food and meeting other needs on a regular basis. We are not asking them “how bad is it” before we will help them.”

*– Sherrie Crabb, CEO,
Arrowleaf*