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## KIDS COUNT in Delaware “Data to Action” Series: February 2022 *Economic Security*

### INTRODUCTION

This brief was written based on a webinar hosted by KIDS COUNT in Delaware supported by Highmark Health. The webinar featured a data presentation from Delaware’s Office of Women’s Advancement and Advocacy.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led many to re-evaluate the resources available to help Delawareans achieve and maintain economic security including basic needs, health care coverage, educational opportunity, and other family supports.

Children in households with single mothers are more likely than their peers to be living in poverty. Therefore, while supports examined in this brief may be available to a larger group of Delawareans, women beneficiaries who are mothers are of particular focus.

Basic need supports include wage equity, food assistance programs like the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and access to health care coverage for children.

This brief also examines educational opportunities and family supports like child care and paid family leave, which will allow those in Delaware’s service sector— disproportionately women— to increase earnings and care for family members. This dual role of breadwinner and caregiver that many women play has been made even more difficult by COVID-19 and the impacts of related public health guidance.



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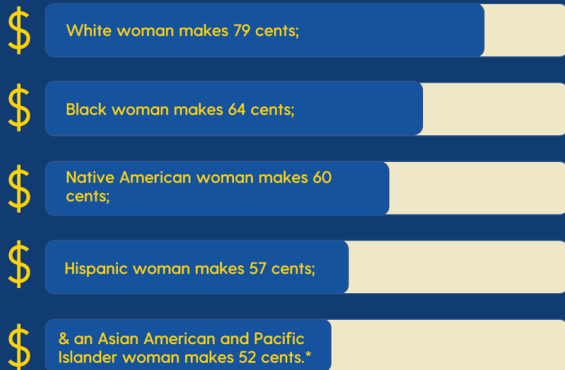
## ECONOMIC SECURITY RELATED TO BASIC NEEDS

While first and foremost a public health crisis, COVID-19 had widespread economic impact at both the national and state levels. Family economic security relates to meeting basic needs including food, shelter, healthcare, and childcare.

Even pre-pandemic, wage disparity based on gender and race/ethnicity impacted the ability of many single Delaware mothers to provide for their children's basic needs. On average in the U.S., women—regardless of race or ethnicity—earn less than a non-Hispanic White man. Among women, there is variation in average wages based on race and ethnicity, indicating additional disparity.<sup>1</sup>

Source: National Partnership for Women & Families, 2022

In the United States, on average, for every dollar a non-Hispanic White man makes, a:



\*some within this group may make as much as 87 cents while others may make as little as 52 cents

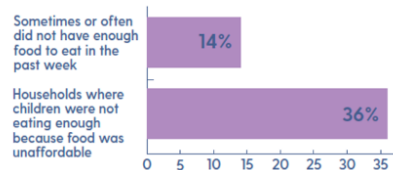
Social infrastructure safety net programs strengthen the resources within low- and middle-income households to help prevent those families from falling into (or further into) poverty. These programs include tax credits, cash assistance, housing vouchers, health care coverage, and food assistance.

According to the Household Pulse Survey, more than a third of Delaware households with children experienced children not eating enough because

food was unaffordable, as recently as early 2022.<sup>2</sup>

## COVID-19 Continues to Impact Food Insecurity for Delaware Children

Food Insecurity during pandemic in Delaware, January 26-February 7, 2022



Source: Population Reference Bureau analysis of U.S. Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey, 2020-2022



In the Data to Action webinar, a food assistance safety net program was featured. The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) combats food insecurity by providing food, nutrition education, breastfeeding support, and referrals to other programs to pregnant, postpartum, and breastfeeding women as well as infants and children up to age 5. With eligibility that is determined by family incomes and size, WIC offers guidelines, like an authorized food list that can be accessed in multiple languages to help participants make the most of their benefit.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, WIC experienced a growing demand for services. Program officers adapted by offering more food options as well as offering telehealth services. According to Maria Shroyer, Consultant Dietitian at the WIC program in Delaware, "Our no-show rate, in clinic, was 28 percent statewide pre-pandemic. We implemented text message appointment reminders, leading to a 22 percent drop [in the no-show rate] statewide. During remote services, we are operating under a 10 percent no-show rate."

## ECONOMIC SECURITY RELATED TO HEALTHCARE COVERAGE AS A BASIC NEED

Access to healthcare coverage is another basic need for families with children. Unfortunately, there

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are some children who have not been eligible for health plans. Providers who work with our immigrant communities have noted this. At the state level, policy makers are working to address coverage gaps. Specifically, legislation was introduced in February 2022 that would address health coverage for all of Delaware's children. If passed in its current form, this bill would provide health coverage for children in Delaware who are not otherwise covered.<sup>3</sup>

## ECONOMIC SECURITY LINKED TO EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

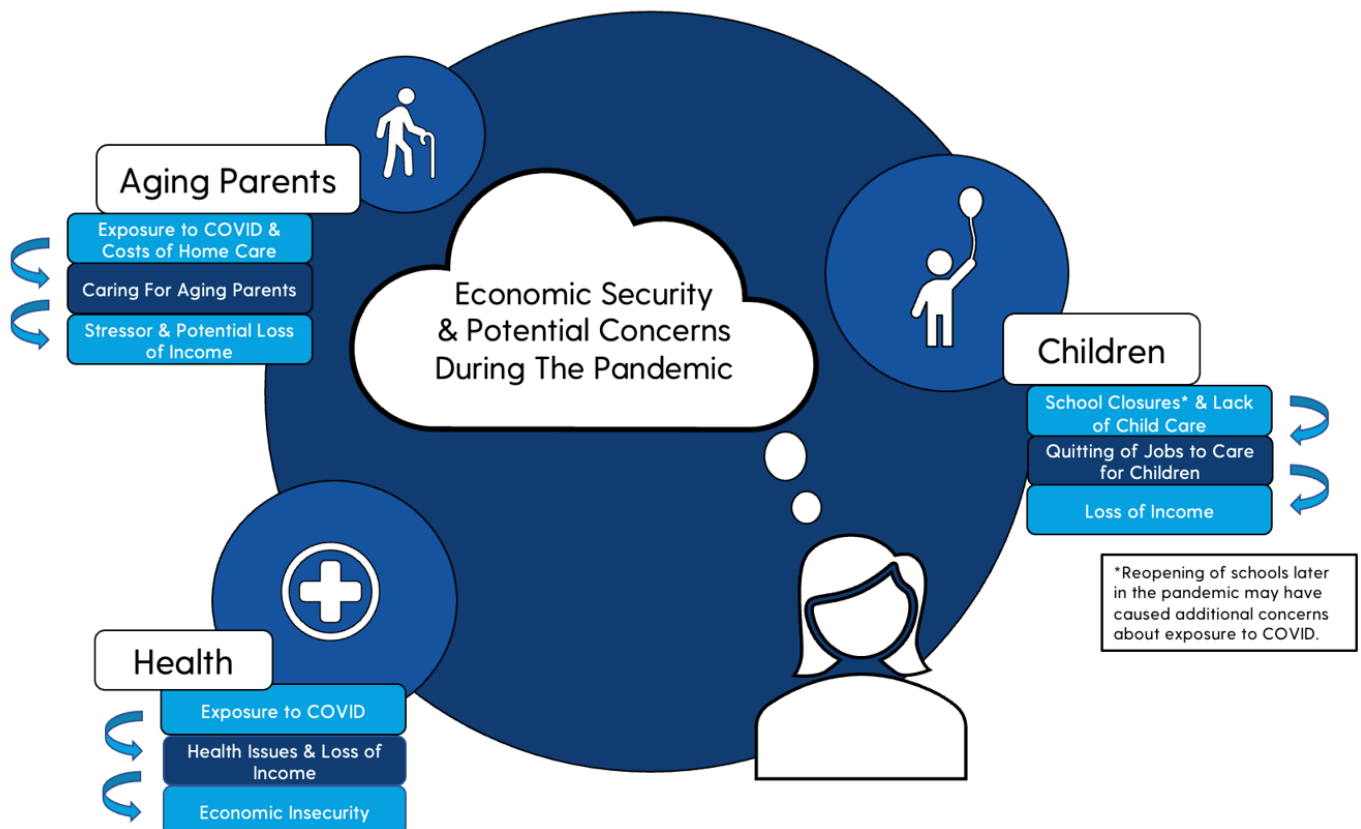
In the state of Delaware, 21 percent of all children come from low-income working families and 17.5 percent live in poverty.<sup>4</sup> One recognized path out of poverty is pursuit of education.

During year one of COVID-19, 87.7 percent of

Delaware high school students graduated on time, despite pandemic related disruptions within educational settings.<sup>5</sup> That means that the majority of the class of 2020 completed their K-12 journey. Next steps for these student may include employment, technical training, military service, or higher education.

For those seeking higher education, additional barriers exist. Tuition fees tend to be a large expense and have been on the rise across the U.S. In 2019/20, the average cost of tuition at a public four-year institution was \$9,400, which increased from an average cost of \$8,300 compared to a decade prior.<sup>6</sup> Such large expenses tied to higher education can lead to exorbitant debt. In fact, student loans were one of the leading types of debt in the U.S. even prior to the pandemic.<sup>7</sup>

In Delaware, policy makers have recognized that



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excessive higher education related costs are a barrier for many individuals and have attempted to address the high costs of tuition. State Senator Nicole Poore, a Data to Action webinar panelist, described financial aid and other forms of support passed through the Delaware General Assembly in recent times.

The Delaware Student Excellence Degree Act (SEED) is a program which was implemented statewide pre-pandemic. Through the SEED scholarship, Delaware high school graduates were eligible for tuition when enrolled full-time in an associated degree program at Delaware Technical and Community College or the University of Delaware's Associate in Arts program. During COVID-19, the program's eligibility requirements were expanded to remove the previous age restriction, among other things. This new, expanded program is known as SEED+.

*"We don't know what we don't know and so the SEED+ bill allows you the opportunity to be whomever you want to be at whatever age you want."*

*-Senator Nicole Poore  
Featured Panelist on Economic Well-Being  
webinar*

Delaware's Inspire Scholarship is another higher education financial aid opportunity offered by the State of Delaware. This scholarship is a four-year full tuition award which is available to qualifying

Delaware high school graduates who enroll at Delaware State University in the fall semester right after high school graduation.

Both SEED+ and the Inspire Scholarship provide Delawareans with the additional support that may be needed to pursue a higher education.

## ECONOMIC SECURITY RELATED TO FAMILY SUPPORTS

According to Kim Lowman from Delaware's Office of Women's Advancement and Advocacy, "in order for our communities and our state to thrive, we really need to ensure that our families are thriving."

According to the American Association of Retired Persons, there are over 129,000 caregivers in the state of Delaware, which is approximately 13 percent of Delaware's population.

Limited family leave was offered in Delaware prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. After March 2020, it became essential to address the impact of COVID-19 on Delaware's workforce, childcare services, education, and more, which has led to broader conversations about family leave. Caregivers have had to deal with the possibility of COVID-19 exposure in the workplace, but were hesitant to stay home due to the related income loss which would be incurred.

*"The luckiest among us have jobs where we can work from home and have more balance to manage competing responsibilities, which may not be possible for those who work within the service sector, most of whom are women."*

*-Melanie Ross-Levin  
Director, Delaware Office of Women's Advancement and Advocacy &  
Featured Panelist on Economic Well-Being webinar*



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Further compounding the issue, caregivers were impacted when children were exposed. The Household Pulse Survey found that 32 percent of families with children under the age of 12 and 38 percent of families with children under the age of 4 experienced disruptions in their childcare arrangements due to the pandemic. For many women missed work days due to family caregiving responsibilities reduced income due to missed work days.

In May 2022, Delaware's Governor signed paid family leave legislation.<sup>8</sup> Known as the "Healthy Delaware Families Act," this legislation creates a statewide paid family leave program effective January 1, 2025, which ensures that workers will no longer have to choose between their family members, their health, and their job.

*"The data gives a very good picture of what some of the problems have been for a while, and people in poverty feel it first, more so than anybody else."*

*-Donna Snyder-White*

*Vice-President of Financial Empowerment, United Way of Delaware & Featured Panelist on Economic Well-Being webinar*

## CONCLUSION

Economic security involves a family's basic needs, health, education, and overall well-being. Financial stability and access to resources allows families to make the most of opportunity. Safety net programs, educational opportunities, and work supports each play a part in economic security.

While need for a quality support system for Delawareans existed pre-pandemic, COVID-19 created greater demand for efficient options to ensure families could balance responsibilities related to the dual roles of work and caregiving.

The pandemic is not over. Therefore, it should remain a priority to take what has been learned throughout this time to assist Delaware families in being able to achieve economic security.

A Special Thanks...

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*KIDS COUNT is a national and state-by-state effort of the Annie E. Casey Foundation to track the well-being of children in the United States. KIDS COUNT in Delaware, a project of the University of Delaware Center for Community Research & Service, is a collaborative effort of over forty organizations to enrich local and state discussion concerning ways to secure better lives for all children by providing policy makers and citizens with benchmarks of child well-being.*

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