

Raise the Minimum Wage to Improve Health

Policy Recommendations:

- Support increases to both the State and Federal minimum wage of at least \$15 an hour indexed to inflation, with a reasonable phase-in period.
- Oppose pre-emption laws that prevent local governments in Pennsylvania from setting higher minimum wages.
- Support changes to public assistance programs eligibility requirements to avoid a “benefits cliff” for low-wage workers that would benefit from a higher minimum wage.

The current minimum wage is inadequate for today’s costs of living

The \$7.25 federal minimum wage has remained unchanged since 2009, though 29 states have set a higher rate.¹ To be clear, that’s \$290 for a 40-hour week. In comparison, the self-sufficiency wage for two full-time workers in a family of four for Cumberland County is \$17.55.²

Income is an important determinant of health

Raising the minimum wage is a fundamental step in addressing income and economic stability, two important determinants of health. While income may not be the strongest risk factor for any one particular disease or outcome, it is a significant risk factor for all of them. Income is not only tied to health access, but to other factors that create the opportunities for better health, such as safe homes, nutritious foods and good schools. In short, economic policy is health policy.

Research has shown associations between higher wages and a host of health outcomes including lower rates of hypertension, suicide, sexually transmitted infections, and better birth outcomes. Other research suggests that wage increases could improve mental health. Not coincidentally, states that have not raised their minimum wage are also states that report some of the worst health outcomes, including high rates of obesity and low birth weights.³

Raising the minimum wage is also an avenue to addressing health equity. Women and people of color—many of whom provide for families—are more likely to earn low wages and therefore disproportionately experience the adverse health effects of poverty.⁴

FACTS ABOUT THE MINIMUM WAGE IN PENNSYLVANIA IN 2021:⁵

There are **90,700** minimum wage earners in PA.

1.7 million Pennsylvanians earn less than **\$15/hr.**

Of minimum wage earners:

- **77.4%** are women.
- **32%** are people of color (compared to **22%** of the population).
- **Average age is 35.**

¹ Raising the Minimum Wage and Public Health, JAMA, January 25, 2021

² Self sufficiency standard for Cumberland County, Pathways PA, <https://pathwayspa.org/2020standard/standardbycounty/>, May 3, 2021

³ Raising the Minimum Wage and Public Health, JAMA, January 25, 2021

⁴ Improving Health by Increasing the Minimum Wage, American Public Health Association, November 1, 2016

⁵ 5 things to know about the minimum wage debate in Pa, WHYY, March 12, 2021 <https://whyy.org/articles/5-things-to-know-about-the-minimum-wage-debate-in-pa/>



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