

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 30 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 \$16.48.²

Income is an important determinant of health

Studies show that higher wages are connected to positive health outcomes, including decreased rates of hypertension, suicide, sexually transmitted infections, and improved birth results. 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 rates.³ Research also shows that higher wages are critical to improving health equity. Women and individuals from marginalized communities, who often support their families, are at a higher risk of earning low wages and facing the negative health impacts of poverty.⁴

Raising the minimum wage is a vital measure for improving income and economic stability, both of which are essential for good health. Even though income may not be the primary determinant of a specific disease or health outcome, it is a critical factor in all instances. Having a job that pays enough to support a family can lead to better health, including access to safe housing, nutritious food, and high-quality schools. In short, economic policy is health policy.

FACTS ABOUT THE MINIMUM WAGE IN PENNSYLVANIA IN 2022:⁵

- **63,600 workers in Pennsylvania earn minimum wage or less.**
- **1,257,200 Pennsylvanians earn less than \$15/hr.**
- **Of minimum wage earners:**
 - **72.9% are women.**
 - **19.8% are people of color.**
 - **More than 41% of minimum wage workers are between 25 and 54 years of age.**

¹ Consolidated Minimum Wage Table. U.S. Department of Labor. <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/mw-consolidated>. Accessed December 7, 2023.

² Self sufficiency standard for Cumberland County, Self-Sufficiency Standard at the Center for Women's Welfare, University of Washington, <https://selfsufficiencystandard.org/pennsylvania/>, Accessed February 16, 2024.

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 Analysis of the Pennsylvania Minimum Wage. March 2023. Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry. <https://www.workstats.dli.pa.gov/Documents/Minimum%20Wage%20Reports/Minimum%20Wage%20Report%202023.pdf>. Accessed December 12, 2023.



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