

2025

PUBLIC POLICY AGENDA & OBJECTIVES

About Valley of the Sun United Way

Since 1925, Valley of the Sun United Way (VSUW) has unified diverse partners, donors, business supporters, nonprofits, government and faith-based communities to build a stronger Valley for us all. VSUW monitors needs, identifies critical social issues, and brings the right people together to advance the common good.

Mighty Change 2026 Plan

In the spring of 2021, Valley of the Sun United Way launched Mighty Change 2026 (MC2026), a collective impact plan for Maricopa County. Created with input from the community, the plan shines a spotlight on key needs in Maricopa County with strategic focus on education, health, housing and homelessness, and workforce development. A year-long, community-centered planning process resulted in bold aspirations and goals for MC2026 and woven into each of the plan's strategies is a focus on diversity, equity, access, and inclusion, as well as public policy and advocacy.

Our Role in Public Policy

Through the collective voice of our community and business leaders, we will focus our 2025 Public Policy efforts on the urgent need to solve for the growing housing and homelessness crisis to make the greatest impact on our MC2026 goal of reducing homelessness by 50%.

Secondarily, we will amplify the public policy and advocacy initiatives of our coalition and civic partners to support the needed services that will help our community succeed in the remaining MC2026 pillars. This includes collaboration with partners like AZ Impact for Good, and the many coalition partners who have communicated their policy agendas that are in alignment with our MC2026 priorities.

HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS PRIORITIES

MC2026 GOAL: Ensure all can have a safe home to call their own. Reduce the number of families and individuals entering or experiencing homelessness by 50%.

FEDERAL PRIORITIES

1. Increase funding for programs that provide broader housing options for lower-income Americans, including public housing.
2. Ensure national housing policy actively supports inclusion, actively roots out discrimination, and promotes housing affordability, especially for the most vulnerable.
 - a. Monitor FY25 budget increasing housing access and affordability - FY24 Spending Bill was reduced 28% below the FY23 enacted level, while it maintains housing assistance for vulnerable Americans, including elderly, disabled and veterans.

3. Increase funding for programs that provide broader housing options for lower-income Americans, including public housing.
4. Ensure national housing policy actively supports inclusion, actively roots out discrimination, and promotes housing affordability, especially for the most vulnerable.
5. Increase awareness about the impact of loss of emergency shelter funding from the loss of American Rescue Plan Act support and the need for HUD to fund prevention resources in Arizona.
6. Increase awareness about the impact of extreme heat emergencies on the unhoused and low-income communities to secure greater resources and support for heat related crisis response.

STATE PRIORITIES

1. The Arizona Department of Housing (ADOH) plays a fundamental role in the state’s affordable housing landscape, coordinating and deploying resources statewide. With its current mandate set for sunset review, we will urge lawmakers to extend this vital agency’s operations.
2. LIHTC: Ensure that the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit is renewed and increased as it is set to expire in 2025, to address the shortage of affordable housing.
3. The Housing Trust Fund: leverage the fund to build various types of housing, and support for eviction prevention programs. Recommend significant investment for homelessness prevention.
4. Support housing for seniors and efforts to streamline zoning on proposed projects in development.
5. Support policy efforts that provide funding for services that help reduce preventable evictions.

COUNTY PRIORITIES

1. Build relationships with new Board of Supervisors to advocate for heat relief, cash assistance, shelter & the Threshold program.

LOCAL PRIORITIES

1. Support local efforts to mitigate zoning and community opposition for affordable housing, new shelter, and homeless services.
2. Strengthen funding to decrease homelessness through providing resources that promote housing stability, shelter services, and mental health.
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EDUCATION PRIORITIES

MC2026 GOALS: Close opportunity gaps to ensure children read at grade level by 3rd grade and youth are prepared for educational success and employment. Increase the number of 3rd graders reading proficiently by 25%. Increase the number of people between ages 16-24 who are working and/or in school by 38%.

FEDERAL PRIORITIES

1. Ensure all families have high quality early childhood education options.
 - a. Support funding early childhood education options such as Early Head Start which help fill gaps and support innovative funding options such as matching dollar requirements (25% match)
2. Ensure all children have access to PK-12 educational opportunities that set them up for long-term success.

- a. Promote the results of fiscal mapping and cost modeling for childcare centers for Phoenix and Southwest Valley to educate stakeholders on systemic gaps impacting education results and workforce needs.
- 3. Support access to high quality post-secondary education options that lead to gainful employment and increased professional mobility.
 - a. Support the completion of FAFSA and increase participation by funding programs that support this work.

STATE PRIORITIES

- 1. Lift the constitutional aggregate expenditure for K12 schools and community colleges.
 - a. Advocate for long term reform to avoid need for legislative overrides.
- 2. From the Governor’s budget support:
 - a. Hold charter schools and ESA funded private schools to the same reporting requirements as district schools.
 - b. Support Dual Enrollment Programs to increase post-secondary attainment.
 - c. Expand the Arizona Promise Scholarship Program by including funding capacity for an additional 10,000 students.

LOCAL PRIORITIES

- 1. Support programming that reduces chronic absenteeism in partnership with school districts and school boards, and implement policies identified by the Absenteeism Task Force.
- 2. Support family and student access to high quality academic supports, appropriate tools, and basic needs to effectively support their child’s academic journey.
 - a. Assist in roll out of Education and Career Action Plan, state mandated for students prior to graduation addressing career readiness.

HEALTH PRIORITIES

MC2026 GOALS: Remove barriers to ensure everyone in our community is healthy, with focus on access to food and health care. Decrease food insecurity by 50%. Increase the number of individuals with access to affordable care by 100,000.

FEDERAL PRIORITIES

- 1. Increase funding for Affordable Care Act (ACA) outreach and enrollment, including targeted outreach to communities of color to close accessibility gaps.
- 2. Protect and maintain a robust Medicaid program and supporting Medicaid expansion to support low to moderate income working families.
- 3. Expand access to healthy, affordable foods for all Arizonans through Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and protect the program from cuts or other harmful changes, helping seniors, families, children, active military members and others.
 - a. Support and align efforts with the Arizona Food System Network, which includes Pinnacle Prevention and the Arizona Food Bank Network, around Farm Bill provisions to support and expand SNAP eligibility.

STATE PRIORITIES

- 1. From the Governor’s budget:
 - a. \$20M to expand the income eligibility cutoff for the KidsCare program from 200 percent of Increase federal expenditure authority for AHCCCS and the Department of Economic Security (\$115.8 million) the federal poverty level to 300 percent of the federal poverty level.

2. Support the implementation of the Community Health Worker Certification and educate stakeholders about the impact of the initiative to seek reimbursement from ACCHS.
3. Continue to coordinate efforts with Medicaid stakeholders, including AHCCCS, UniteUs, Contextue, and Managed Care Organizations, in partnership with Equality Health Foundation, to develop a standardized method for social care reimbursement utilizing Medicaid resources and funding, like the closed loop referral system.
4. Support AHCCCS 1115 demonstration waiver to allow for billable codes for medically tailored food boxes, in coordination with Arizona Food System Network and Desert Mission Food Bank. Public comments and committee testimony.

COUNTY PRIORITIES

1. Support Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) and Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) that will dictate and shape the county’s public health priorities.
 - a. Through CDE Health Director’s efforts as a member of the HIPMC Steering Committee, a federally mandated advisory board for Maricopa County Public Health, continue to ensure VSUW priorities of increasing access to health care and decreasing food security are implemented through the CHIP.

LOCAL PRIORITIES

1. Support the City of Phoenix Food Action Plan to reduce food insecurity by increasing the community’s ability to access healthy, affordable food.
 - a. Chris Mackay -ECD and office of environmental programs – led to city wide analysis of available land available for community benefit.
 - b. In coordination with the Land Use Coalition for Open Space Equity, and the City of Phoenix Office of Environmental Programs, work with City of Phoenix Councilwoman Hodge-Washington to pass an ordinance on permanent Earned Density Incentives to incentivize developers to provide green and open spaces to local communities. VSUW to coordinate the gathering of data with stakeholders, and to receive feedback from developers on board of directors around these efforts, at the request of the councilwoman.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

MC2026 GOALS: Open pathways to better paying jobs. Increase preparation for a living wage job by 33%. Achievement of higher paying employment by 20%.

FEDERAL PRIORITIES

1. Increase investments in the nation’s workforce development system, including programs authorized under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), and national service programs designed to serve unemployed and underemployed individuals including dislocated workers, justice impacted individuals, veterans, and opportunity youth, and high school students preparing for college or a career.

VSUW WIOA Funded Programs:

- Arouet Foundation
- Jewish Family & Children’s Service – VSUW Funded
- Jobs for Arizona’s Graduates – VSUW Funded
- Per Scholas, Inc. – VSUW Funded
- Televerde Foundation, Inc.

2. Educate community through coalition meetings how job seekers and employers' access WIOA funding.
 - a. Partner with the Arizona Department of Economic Security and the Office of Economic Opportunity to host community learning sessions where workforce and economic development professionals can attend and explore different programs such as apprenticeships, internships, training one-stops and information on accessing WIOA funding in Arizona.
3. Enhance the Child Tax Credit and Earned Income Tax Credit to provide ongoing income support to struggling families and help build thriving communities.
 - a. Expand the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) for low-wage workers not caring for children at home.
 - b. Make the Child Tax Credit (CTC) fully refundable to the lowest income families with children.

STATE PRIORITIES

1. Improve economic stability for lower-wage workers through improved work benefits, greater education and training, and opportunities to advance.
 - a. Support and promote workforce accelerator program Future 48, providing advanced skills training in rural Arizona, and Drive 48 training for high-tech manufacturing jobs housed in Central Arizona.
 - b. Strengthen the state's workforce by supporting fair chance hiring programs/workforce development efforts and identifying policy efforts that reduce discrimination and improve hiring options.
2. Expand incentivized sector-based strategies that help meet employer demand for a more educated and skilled workplace.
 - a. VSUW's Fair Chance Collaborative engaged a diverse group of employers, service providers, educational institutions, and state agencies in robust conversations on Fair Chance hiring and works to strengthen and sustain the Fair Chance ecosystem in our community by increasing the number of Fair Chance employers in the valley. The collaborative arms businesses with the resources and tools to incorporate fair chance hiring practices which will result in increasing the number of people with past convictions who gain productive, family-supporting employment.

LOCAL PRIORITIES

1. Maricopa Association of Governments-Support efforts to provide more affordable, high-quality options for childcare promoting successful models of employers offering workplace benefits to expand access.
2. Participate in policy and civic dialogue to drive consensus around economic performance objectives for advancing our region's competitiveness. Restore STEM and Workforce funding for Maricopa, Pima, and Pinal Community Colleges to match STEM and Workforce funding for rural counties.
 - a. 2024 Central Arizona Workforce Forum Series: Presentations from the National Association of Workforce Boards and local business representatives on critical workforce and economic development topics. Series of virtual online forums dedicated to strengthening and fostering workforce partnerships, regional collaboration, economic development, innovation, and inspiration.

NONPROFIT AND COMMUNITY STRENGTHENING

FEDERAL PRIORITIES

1. Increase the nonitemizer or universal charitable deduction to at least \$4600/\$9200.
2. Support individual and corporate giving tax incentives for charitable giving to nonprofits.
3. Invest federal funds to fully operate 211 in every state at increased capacity through the HELP Act and funding the data and technology infrastructure to create a national database of community needs.