

MAKE IT HAPPEN:

**Investing for
Rhode Island's**

Future

Guiding Principles

Recommended investments will...

- 1. Equity:** Address the root causes and conditions of systemic inequalities based on race, gender, disability, economic status, and other historically marginalized or oppressed communities which predated and were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 2. Sustainability:** Deliver enduring change and solutions that enhance the resilience of impacted communities.
- 3. Impact:** Transform economic opportunities and quality of life, and build community assets for impacted communities for the short and long term.
- 4. Process:** Reflect both broad input from impacted communities and public stakeholders, as well as solid data and research.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

Investing for Rhode Island's Future

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Executive Summary

Make it Happen: Investing for Rhode Island's Future is a Rhode Island Foundation-led initiative to develop recommendations for state leaders to consider as they decide how to spend \$1.1 billion in federal American Rescue Plan Act funding.

During early Spring 2021, the Foundation contracted with the Economic Progress Institute (EPI) and the Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council (RIPEC) to staff the initiative and convened a 15-member Steering Committee to consider rigorous policy analysis, public, and stakeholder input to develop a set of spending recommendations that, if adopted, have the potential to significantly improve the lives of Rhode Islanders. The Committee, EPI, and RIPEC were focused on the recommendations that follow addressing needs that pre-existed COVID-19 and were exacerbated by the pandemic. In addition, the work was informed by a set of Guiding Principles developed cooperatively by the Steering Committee (see [page 2](#)).

A vigorous community engagement process spanned several months and included electronic submissions from individuals and groups, focus groups with populations hard-hit by COVID, community visioning sessions hosted by local nonprofits, and key stakeholder interviews (see [Appendix](#) for details). The Steering Committee considered the breadth of the subject areas in the recommendations and while agreeing on the areas in the recommendations below, acknowledged the importance of other topics—for example, education, broadband and digital access, and climate change. These are topics for which funding is available or is likely to be available through other federal investments.

Throughout 15 meetings, the Steering Committee, which broadly represented our diverse community, was provided with a large quantity of data and research, including: guidance from federal and state officials regarding American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) fund disbursement, the ways in which other states proposed using ARPA funds, needs assessments in requested topic areas, and program and policy analyses. During this process, the Steering Committee was steadfast in its commitment to transformational change that will benefit those communities and underserved populations that have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.

This initiative does not examine or make recommendations for uses of other very significant ARPA earmarked funds, such as those for local cities and towns (\$542M), K-12 education (\$400M), higher education (\$168M), or the capital project fund (\$113M). It also recognizes that further federal programs are contemplated that would meet additional needs, also not addressed in this report.

However, the Steering Committee noted the real need for collaboration, coordination, and oversight in the use of the funds between municipalities and the state to achieve the best outcomes for their residents. Similarly, while each recommendation area addresses an individual component of need, the Committee emphasized that these areas are interrelated. The Committee urges that in making investments of ARPA funds attention must be paid to how funding for the different areas can be used in communities most adversely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and with robust community engagement. The Committee also noted that residents should be able to easily access and receive assistance in obtaining available services that meet their needs.

This is an historic opportunity to address and counter the disparate public health and economic impacts of the coronavirus pandemic, which reflect long-standing inequities based on systemic racism, gender, and disability. And, to ensure that investment of these funds supports a genuine recovery that is broad and inclusive, efforts to allocate ARPA funds need to be transparent and accountable to all Rhode Islanders.

This initiative was committed to a rigorous, comprehensive, and inclusive process with the belief that those populations which were impacted the most by the pandemic should benefit the most from these resources.

The recommendations that follow, totalling \$1.065 billion, meet the requirements of United States Department of the Treasury's (Treasury) Interim Final Rule. By investing in the areas suggested below, Rhode Island will be addressing the needs of residents disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. These proposals target low-income residents and communities of color, and directly address many needs. Collectively, these "big ideas," if implemented, could be major vehicles for building wealth and economic opportunity to ensure a more equitable Rhode Island.

Housing \$405 million

The goals and recommendations that follow aim to address the decades-long acute shortage of housing in Rhode Island, especially for those with low to moderate income.

GOALS: Provide at least 5,150 units of affordable housing to Rhode Islanders by investing in affordable rental housing, permanent supportive housing, and homeownership opportunities; remediate lead paint for at least 2,850 units; and renovate and/or repair code violations for at least 4,000 homes.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Invest \$200 million for affordable rental housing production and preservation.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Invest \$50 million to build 500 units of permanent supportive housing and provide temporary housing for targeted populations.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Invest \$50 million to expand first-time home buyer programs to increase home ownership opportunities for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) populations and/or in areas disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Invest \$100 million for healthy homes repairs, including the remediation of lead paint and assistance to low-income homeowners and qualifying landlords for renovations to substandard units for code compliance.

RECOMMENDATION 5: Invest \$5 million to develop a strategic plan and to improve capacity and expedite processing of housing projects that are accessing ARPA funds.

Behavioral Health \$255 million

The goals and recommendations that follow attempt to address the well-documented, ongoing, epidemic among those battling mental health and substance abuse challenges.

GOALS: Decrease statewide emergency department visits by both children and adults for acute behavioral health crises by 20% each; decrease the number of unintentional opioid overdoses and suicides by 15% each; increase the number of Rhode Island licensed outpatient mental health counselors, social workers, psychologists, and psychiatrists to reach New England's behavioral healthcare occupational median.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Invest \$170 million to build new facilities and renovate and upgrade existing facilities to expand and improve services and treatments across the behavioral health continuum of care.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Invest \$50 million in technology infrastructure, including electronic medical records and other non-facility infrastructure, including one-time investments in mobile response and stabilization services, and technology that could increase the availability and access to telemedicine.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Invest \$30 million to increase provider capacity through a loan forgiveness program, as well as stipends/bonuses, to recruit and retain behavioral health professionals. The program should target BIPOC populations to build a culturally and linguistically diverse behavioral health workforce.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Invest \$5 million to complete a strategic plan for a behavioral health system of care for adults and children.

Workforce Development \$205 million

The goals and recommendations that follow aim to address the fact that businesses of all sizes in Rhode Island are facing worker shortages, while many residents remain unemployed or underemployed and encountering barriers to employment, such as lack of affordable childcare.

GOALS: Provide 15,000 Rhode Islanders with high-quality jobs through robust training, adult education, workforce skills services, and the elimination of barriers to employment.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Invest \$150 million in high quality “earn and learn” job training programs that lead to a promotion, certificate, academic credential, and/or higher salary.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Invest \$30 million in high quality and accessible adult education/foundational workforce skills including English language, literacy, and digital skills.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Invest \$15 million for one year to continue and expand the RI Reconnect initiative that provides assistance to individuals to mitigate barriers to participation in a job training or employment opportunity.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Invest \$10 million in IT data structure improvements to the state’s longitudinal data system and support a plan for long-term sustainability of that system.

Small Business Assistance \$100 million

The goals and recommendations that follow recognize that as the backbone of Rhode Island’s economy, small businesses require significant additional support to sustain and grow their businesses.

GOALS: Provide significant financial assistance to at least 2,250 small businesses, targeted to minority-owned businesses, through forgivable loans, low-interest loans, and grants.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Invest \$50 million in Rhode Island small businesses and cooperatives through forgivable loans.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Invest \$35 million to provide technical assistance to small businesses by awarding one-time grants for business services through a newly established business resource network.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Invest \$10 million to create a new Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) or expand capacity of one or more existing CDFIs to provide financing for projects in distressed and underserved neighborhoods in Rhode Island.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Invest \$5 million to establish a loan program for certified Minority Business Enterprises (MBEs).

Neighborhood Trusts

\$50 million

The recommendation that follows suggests that investments, directed by residents in places whose populations and communities have been impacted most by the pandemic may prove to make a significant, innovative impact for those living in a Qualified Census Tract.

RECOMMENDATION: Invest \$50 million for the creation of neighborhood trusts in Qualified Census Tracts.

Immediate Relief

\$50 million

The recommendation that follows recognizes that there is a continued short-term need to support those most impacted by COVID-19.

RECOMMENDATION: Invest \$50 million in Rhode Island nonprofit organizations to provide immediate relief to residents suffering from behavioral health disorders, economic, food and housing insecurity, lack of affordable childcare, and domestic violence, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Implementation, Capacity, Accountability & Oversight

RECOMMENDATION: We recommend that an office be established within the Governor's Office and reporting directly to the Governor with the authority to oversee the recommended spending of ARPA funds pursuant to clear goals, performance metrics, and transparency. The critical responsibilities of this office would include ensuring that funds are expeditiously used and oversight of expenditures. This office would need additional staffing for the expenditure period and would coordinate with legislative input and oversight.

Each recommendation area addresses an individual component of need, but the needs of those individuals and communities most adversely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic are interconnected. It is important, then, that these recommendations be viewed as, and implemented through, a holistic and community-driven approach prioritizing those communities most impacted by the pandemic.

Steering Committee

Neil D. Steinberg, Chair, President and CEO of Rhode Island Foundation

Marcela Betancur, Executive Director of the Latino Policy Institute

Jessica David, Founder and Principal at Good Worth Working For

Ditra Edwards, Executive Director of SISTA Fire

John Friedman, Professor of Economics and International and Political Affairs at Brown University

John Galvin, President and CEO of AAA Northeast

Marie Ganim, Former Rhode Island Health Insurance Commissioner and former Rhode Island Senate Policy Director

Ross Gittell, President of Bryant University

Rajiv Kumar, Technology entrepreneur and Founder of ShapeUp

Tony Maione, Former President and CEO of the United Way of Rhode Island

Anna Cano Morales, Associate Vice President for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at Rhode Island College

Nina Pande, Executive Director of Skills for Rhode Island's Future

Megan Ranney, Professor of Emergency Medicine and Associate Dean of the School of Public Health at Brown University

Nic Retsinas, Director Emeritus, Harvard Joint Centers for Housing Studies

Don Stanford, Adjunct Professor of Computer Science at Brown University and former Chief Technology Officer at GTECH

Edi Tebaldi, Professor of Economics and Executive Director of Institutional Effectiveness and Strategy at Bryant University

Background and Process

In April 2021, prompted by passage of the American Rescue Plan Act, the Rhode Island Foundation initiated Make It Happen: Investing for Rhode Island's Future.

The initiative's goal, working with a diverse, experienced, 15-member Steering committee, the Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council (RIPEC)¹, and the Economic Progress Institute (EPI)², was to pull together three to five transformative recommendations to share with the public, and state leaders, as they decide how to spend the \$1.1 billion in ARPA funds that the state is receiving from the federal government. The Governor, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and President of the Senate were also briefed on this undertaking.

At the outset of this process, the Foundation engaged EPI and the RIPEC to lead stakeholder conversations, provide policy analysis, and help to craft recommendations for use of the funds. And, we worked together to appoint a 15-member Steering Committee to guide the work (see [page 9](#)). The Steering Committee was comprised of members of the community representing diverse backgrounds, including medical doctors, academics, nonprofit leaders, community advocates, local business owners, and policy experts.

The Steering Committee has been working together for many months, first with a focus on establishing clear guiding principles for our collective effort that are consistent with the stated intent of this once-in-a-generation federal funding. The guiding principles are focused on equity, sustainability, impact, and process (see [page 2](#)).

¹ The Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council is a nonpartisan and nonprofit public policy research organization dedicated to advancing fiscally responsible government, competitive tax policies, and economic opportunities for all in Rhode Island.

² The Economic Progress Institute – formerly The Poverty Institute – is a nonpartisan research and policy organization dedicated to improving the economic well-being of low- and modest-income Rhode Islanders.

In addition to the guiding principles, the Steering Committee and our project team agreed that recommendations would be informed by a number of things:

- Significant public and stakeholder input
- Rigorous policy analysis by the teams from RIPEC and EPI
- Dialogue among Steering Committee members at their regular meetings from April through October, 2021

As stated, robust community engagement was a primary focus of this initiative. At its launch, the Rhode Island Foundation made a general call for ideas that could be submitted via email. In early summer, the Foundation provided an “idea generation toolkit” that was available on the Foundation’s website and encouraged community groups and individuals to independently convene conversations designed to generate ideas. The summaries of these conversations were submitted to the Foundation using the toolkit feedback template. The Rhode Island Foundation received nearly 410 investment ideas - approximately 185 ideas via email submission and roughly 225 ideas via online toolkit submission.³

In addition to the submissions described, EPI and RIPEC conducted over 60 key stakeholder interviews, hearing from a diverse array of nearly 150 people. A full list of those interviewed can be found on [page 48](#) of the Appendix. The stakeholder groups ranged across geographic regions, the political spectrum, and areas of expertise. They included community-based organizations, peer support groups, nonprofits, for-profits, trade associations, higher education institutions, small businesses, advocacy groups, and state agencies. EPI and RIPEC provided feedback and ideas from these groups to the Steering Committee.

Global Strategy Group, acting on behalf of the Rhode Island Foundation, convened five anonymous focus groups to hear directly from approximately 30 community members who identified as being a part of communities hardest hit by COVID, including Hispanic residents, Black residents, disabled residents, multiracial women, and White seniors. Those who participated had less than a college education and a combined household income of less than \$75,000. Participants provided ideas regarding what the state could do to improve their quality of life.

³ Ideas submitted via the online toolkit are listed in the appendix beginning on [page 52](#). Ideas submitted via email have been shared with the Steering Committee but are not included in the contents of this document.

Background and Process

Across all five conversations, healthcare and more affordable housing options were the two areas that participants agreed were most important to a good quality of life. Economic development and job opportunities were also discussed but were less urgent than affordable housing and healthcare. The same was true for investing in technology and environmental programs—these topics were deemed important, but less urgent. Focus group members who identified as seniors and/or having a disability expressed significant frustration with the lack of reliable transportation across the state; for these groups in particular, transportation was deemed as very important to quality of life.

Overall, focus group participants keyed in on six areas for investment—aimed at improving quality of life:

- Advocacy programs in both primary and behavioral health
- More subsidized housing
- Increased diversity and language capacity among health and behavioral healthcare providers
- Job training opportunities specifically designed for people with disabilities
- Investment in small businesses for people who would like to work for themselves
- Increased financial assistance to help with the high cost of healthcare and prescriptions

A slide deck detailing the focus group findings can be found on [page 82](#) of the Appendix.

Six local nonprofit organizations (Community Action Program of Providence County, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Center, Jonnycake Center for Hope, Progreso Latino, United Way of Rhode Island, and the West Bay Community Action Program) hosted 11 community visioning sessions throughout the state. Approximately 125 Rhode Islanders participated. The conversations took place in late summer and were an opportunity for participants to dig in to topics identified as priority areas for investment by focus group participants, through the idea submissions received by the Foundation as part of this process, via key stakeholder interviews, and as part of the Committee's own deliberations.

Across these conversations, it was clear that participants were affected and challenged by many interconnected factors; however, the most frequently discussed topics were housing, COVID-19, education, health and mental health. Business, jobs, and the economy were also frequently discussed across conversations. There was general agreement that the challenges community members face often seem—and feel—intractable, and there was additional agreement that navigating systems should not be so challenging, particularly for those in need.

Regarding housing, there was consistent dialogue about the lack of, or subpar condition of, housing stock, lack of affordable housing and transitional housing. Additional conversation focused on prioritizing those most in need; and there was consistent dialogue regarding wrapping services around accessible and affordable housing—creating opportunities for healthcare, behavioral healthcare, educational and workforce development opportunities, affordable childcare, and more, where people live.

Participants' discussions regarding COVID-19 centered around the pandemic's impact on people's daily lives and challenges exacerbated by the crisis.

There was also significant conversation about education and workforce development, with participants focused on the need to prepare students to enter the workforce and succeed, the need to make good quality education more accessible for all traditional and non-traditional students, and to ensure that educators are culturally competent and connected to the community of students they teach.

Health and behavioral health were also frequently discussed topics. There was significant conversation about intergenerational trauma, access to services and providers that are reflective of the community, and discussion regarding ways to coordinate across the nonprofit sector to help folks navigate and learn about the health system.

Rhode Islanders who engaged in the community visioning sessions also spoke at length about business, jobs, and the economy. Specifically, participants discussed barriers to employment and difficulty accessing living wage jobs or advancing in a career. There was significant conversation around the importance of access to reliable transportation and affordable childcare, as well as safe affordable housing. Discussion regarding small business and entrepreneurship focused on access to education and information regarding how to start and manage a business, and support for small local businesses.

A slide deck detailing the input received can be found on [page 98](#) of the Appendix.

Background and Process

Throughout 15 meetings, the Steering Committee was provided with robust data and research including: guidance from federal and state officials regarding ARPA fund disbursement, information regarding the ways in which other states proposed using ARPA funds, needs assessments in requested topic areas, and programs and policies that could address issues and specifically target those communities and underserved populations that were disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. RIPEC and EPI provided the Steering Committee with rigorous policy analysis. With problems clearly identified, staff examined current programs and gaps to assess additional programmatic and financial needs. Finally, RIPEC and EPI researched national best practices, model programs, and innovative approaches to address the pressing needs in focused areas. These ideas were presented to the Steering Committee for discussion and debate. The Committee engaged in thoughtful discussion and reflection around each identified area as they contemplated proposals.

The group has also kept close watch on the guidance from federal and state officials regarding the fact that these funds should be spent in ways that support those most impacted by COVID-19, particularly in historically marginalized communities. We see this as an incredible opportunity for real investment that pushes us closer to equity—investment in people and places that need it the most.

The emphasis of our work has been to recommend sustainable, transformative investments to be made over the three years allowed under ARPA. We did not focus primarily on funding existing programs or state-level initiatives, nor was the work intended to inform how ARPA funding that cities and towns, or the state, will receive for specific areas—such as education or rent relief—will be allocated. That said, our hope is that the recommendations we make in this report will complement and, wherever possible, be coordinated with other local and state-level ARPA-funded investments. In fact, the recommendations contained in this report should not be viewed and implemented in silos but rather through a holistic and community-driven approach.

In the end, after revising and revamping promising strategies, the Steering Committee decided on recommended investment areas and formulated and finalized proposals. Thereafter, they determined the suggested allocation of ARPA funds - \$1.065 billion of the \$1.1 billion - across broad areas of focus and offered specific spending areas within each. Throughout these meetings and conversations, the Steering Committee was steadfast in their commitment to transformational change.

Developing ideas regarding how best to leverage the opportunities these dollars present is something we have taken very seriously. Thanks to the support of the Steering Committee, many engaged community members, and our partners across sectors, this process has been robust, rigorous, inclusive, and unique—by design.

American Rescue Plan Act Funds for Rhode Island

The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), signed into law on March 11, 2021, provides Rhode Island with over \$2.5 billion in relief funding, on top of the relief funding from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and other federal sources, such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

The ARPA relief funds come in two buckets: at least \$772 million in targeted aid and \$1.74 billion in more flexible aid. The targeted aid supports pandemic response in such areas as education, childcare, public health, and housing and rental assistance. The more flexible aid is called State and Local Federal Relief Funds (FRF) and includes \$542 million for Rhode Island's local governments and \$1.2 billion in state funding. Of the state funds, \$113 million is designated for capital projects. This report addresses the use of \$1.1 billion state funding, exclusive of capital projects funds.

The ARPA funds are distributed in two ways: some funds go directly from the federal government to the recipient entities, while most funds flow through the state. Approximately \$273 million from the local FRF goes directly to Rhode Island's six largest municipalities, and \$168 million of targeted funds go directly to public and private nonprofit colleges and universities. The vast majority of relief funds, both targeted and flexible, flow through the state. The targeted aid, such as rental assistance or education funding for primary and secondary schools, is passed through the state to the recipient entities without any allocation decisions on the part of the Governor or General Assembly. So too is the remainder of the local FRF; the state transfers funds to the smaller municipalities, and because Rhode Island possesses no county governance structure, the FRF for counties are divided proportionally and transferred to all municipalities within those counties.

Funds must be obligated by December 31, 2024⁴ and spent by December 31, 2026.⁵ Funds not obligated or spent by these deadlines must be returned to the federal government. The United States Department of Treasury has released draft guidance and an Interim Final Rule as to how states can and cannot use the funds, impacting the \$1.1 billion that Rhode Island is receiving. Although quite flexible, Treasury has set some limits. Funding cannot be used to: pay into pension or rainy-day funds, service debt, cover legal settlements, spend on infrastructure projects (except for water, sewer, and broadband), or offset recent tax cuts.

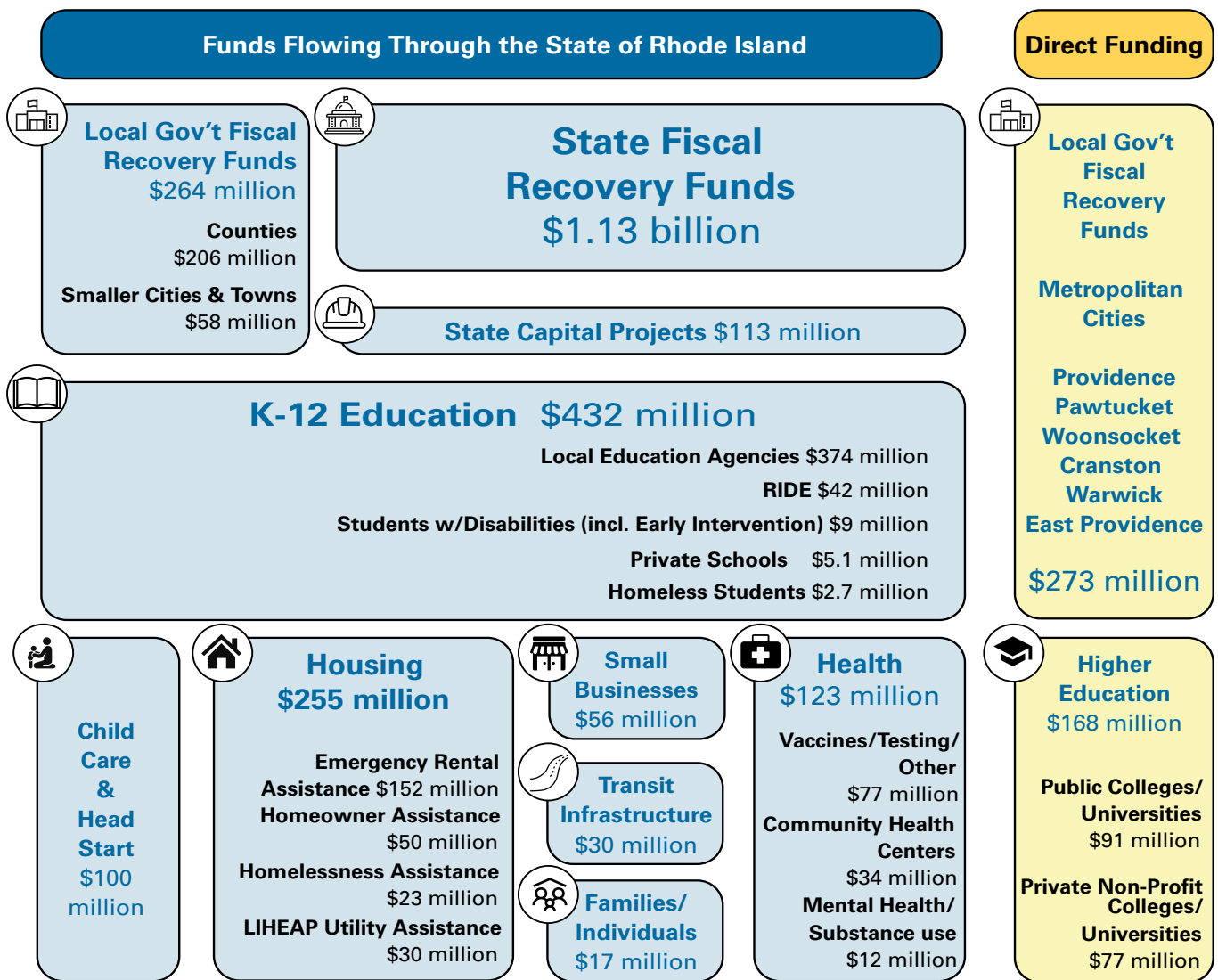
Treasury has specified five areas for appropriate spending: to pay for the public health response to the pandemic, to respond to damaging economic impacts of the pandemic (including aid to households, small businesses, nonprofits and industries), to provide premium pay for essential workers, to replace lost public sector revenue, and to support water, sewer, and broadband infrastructure projects.

Furthermore, the Treasury guidance and the Interim Final Rule emphasize the critical importance of addressing and countering the disparate public health and economic impacts of the coronavirus pandemic, the fact that some communities—particularly people of color—have fared much worse than others during the pandemic, and that a genuine recovery must be broad and inclusive.

The recommendations contained in this report meet the requirements of Treasury’s Interim Final Rule. By investing in housing, behavioral health, workforce development, small business, and Neighborhood Trusts, RI will be addressing the needs of residents disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. These proposals target low-income and BIPOC households and address their needs through high-quality workforce development training and foundational skills programs, home and small business ownership opportunities, and increased access to behavioral health treatments and services. Operating in Qualified Census Tracts, Neighborhood Trusts also fulfill the ARPA requirements. Collectively, these “big ideas,” if implemented, could be major vehicles for building wealth and economic opportunity to ensure a more equitable Rhode Island.

⁴ Pursuant to the United States Code of Federal Regulations § 200.71 “obligations” means orders placed for property and services, contracts and subawards made, and similar transactions during a given period that require payment during the same or future period. For ARPA purposes, costs must be incurred between March 3, 2021 and December 31, 2024. See 31 CFR 35.5 – Use of Funds

⁵ The period of performance to use obligated funds will run until December 31, 2026, which according to Treasury, will provide recipients a reasonable amount of time to complete projects funded with Fiscal Recovery Funds. See 31 CFR 35.5 – Use of Funds



Investment Recommendations

The goal of this initiative was to develop three to five bold, transformative, sustainable, and equitable ideas/areas for investment of the \$1.1 billion in flexible federal ARPA funds allocated to Rhode Island.

This report does not make recommendations for the use of other earmarked ARPA funds, such as those allocated for local cities and towns (\$542M), K-12 education (\$400M), capital projects (\$113M), and higher education (\$168M).

Having engaged in robust conversations with the community members and key stakeholders, the Steering Committee recommends investment in five areas: housing, behavioral health, workforce development, small business, and neighborhood trusts. In addition, there is one recommendation regarding immediate relief and another regarding implementation. While the immediate relief recommendation may not meet all the Guiding Principles, we would be remiss not to acknowledge and address the pressing needs of the many Rhode Islanders still experiencing hardships caused by the pandemic. These investment recommendations, if implemented collectively, can be leveraged for a greater impact on the health, economic opportunity, and quality of life of Rhode Islanders.

While these recommendations address a wide breadth of issues, they do not address all topics raised in emails, toolkit submissions, community discussions, and key stakeholder interviews. In particular, several residents suggested that investments be made in education, broadband, and climate change infrastructure. Elementary and secondary education (K-12) has received substantial federal dollars— \$400 million—with roughly 90 percent allocated directly to local school districts or local education agencies and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education receiving approximately \$40 million. As a result of these substantial available funds, the Steering Committee

focused its attention on other pressing issues. Also, with consistent and continuous communications and feedback from our federal delegation, the Steering Committee also concluded that broadband and climate change infrastructure may be appropriate investments of the capital funding in ARPA and may moreover receive funding through the anticipated federal infrastructure bill currently pending in Congress. We note that investment of ARPA funds to develop a strategic plan to address the digital divide that includes broadband, devices and digital literacy is included in the recommendations.

The following pages describe the Steering Committee's suggestions for the investment of \$1.065 of the \$1.1 billion in ARPA funds.

Housing \$405 million

Rhode Island is in the midst of a housing shortage that has implications on affordability, economic development, workforce, and health, as shown throughout the pandemic. For August 2021, the median sales price for a single-family home in Rhode Island was \$390,000, with a 1.8-month supply of housing on the market, far shorter than the six-month supply typically considered a good balance.⁶ This lack of housing supply, along with an increase in out-of-state purchasers, has driven home prices higher, affecting both homeownership and rental markets. For 2020, Rhode Island ranked last in the 50 states in rental unit vacancy rates⁷, limiting opportunities for all Rhode Islanders—and particularly low-income Rhode Islanders—to find safe, affordable places to live.

The lack of affordable housing was an issue that permeated throughout the community engagement process and state agencies, elected officials, and business leaders also identified housing as an important area to make investments. The community engagement process additionally highlighted that housing needs vary based upon many factors, including income, required supportive services, family size, and location.

The following four recommendations are designed holistically to: increase the units of affordable rental housing and permanent supportive housing, expand homeownership opportunities for underrepresented populations, and provide healthy homes for Rhode Islanders. There is an additional opportunity to coordinate with cities and towns that are also likely to identify housing as a local need.

⁶ Rhode Island single family home sales August 2021 rhodeislandliving.com

⁷ Housing Vacancies and Homeownership Annual Statistics: 2020 - U.S. Census Bureau

GOALS: Provide at least 5,150 units of affordable housing to Rhode Islanders, by investing in affordable rental housing, permanent supportive housing, and homeownership opportunities; remediate lead paint for at least 2,850 units; and renovate and/or repair code violations for at least 4,000 homes.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Invest \$200 million for affordable rental housing production and preservation.

We recommend that RI invest ARPA funds to primarily increase the number of affordable housing rental units, including units for individuals and families in a variety of income ranges, as well as to preserve existing affordable housing rental unit stock, including public housing. Funds should be used to move the needle on affordable housing needs by pursuing new and creative approaches like single-source funding, the adaption of vacant commercial properties, and renovating former hotels into affordable housing.

As part of this effort, the RI Municipal Infrastructure Grant Program shall be provided with **\$10 million** to incentivize development of affordable housing projects and assist municipalities to advance projects that support affordable housing developments.

In 2020, the average cost of rent and utilities in Rhode Island for a 1-, 2-, and 3- bedroom was \$1,315, \$1,660, and \$1,849, respectively.⁸ Many residents are considered “cost burdened” with respect to housing costs, which means that more than 30 percent of one’s income is used for housing costs. This disproportionately affects Black and Latinx households in the rental and homeownership markets.

According to Rhode Island Housing, Rhode Island has approximately 37,000 units of affordable housing; however, deed restrictions for 39 percent of existing affordable units will expire over the next 10 years. Preservation of these units is a key strategy to maintain the current affordable housing stock while simultaneously producing more units.

Current funding for affordable housing is as follows. The state has \$85.1 million from general obligation bonds for affordable housing support, including the rehabilitation of existing structures and new construction for FY2021 to FY2025.⁹ The FY2022 budget

⁸ RIHousing Rent Survey | RIHousing

⁹ FY 2020 Budget Analysis Section I Budget at a Glance (rilegislature.gov) p.4

also established a Housing Production Fund, capitalized with \$25 million to produce additional housing and provide funding for opt-in municipal partnerships that include technical assistance and subsidized local education cost increases.¹⁰ The program will be administered by Rhode Island Housing subject to the guidelines established by the Coordinating Committee of the Housing Resources Commission. Beginning January 1, 2022, the real estate conveyance tax will provide a dedicated revenue stream that is estimated to average \$4.3 million annually.¹¹

The recommended investment in affordable rental housing will be in addition to the appropriations discussed above and will not only preserve affordable housing stock and renew expiring deed restrictions for many existing affordable units but also produce a significant number of new affordable rental units. Recognizing that existing policies to preserve and build affordable rental units are often inefficient and have failed to produce large number of new units over time, innovative approaches should be explored in deploying ARPA funds, including the adaptation of vacant commercial or industrial buildings and the acquisition of underutilized hotels.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Invest \$50 million to build 500 units of permanent supportive housing and provide temporary housing for targeted populations.

We recommend that Rhode Island create new/additional permanent supportive housing units that would provide housing coupled with the necessary supportive services to house chronically homeless individuals. Funds should also be made available for additional temporary housing for victims of domestic violence, people in recovery, and people exiting incarceration to provide shelter for these populations while they secure permanent affordable housing.

When comparing Point in Time count data from 2020 to 2021, unsheltered persons increased by 67 percent, those in emergency shelters increased by 17 percent, and the total number of persons experiencing homelessness increased by 14 percent.¹² A deficit in emergency housing for single adults and families with children has caused a large increase in unhoused Rhode Islanders.¹³ In addition, standard permanent supportive housing units have shifted from double to single dwelling units, increasing the need for units.

¹⁰ FY 2020 Budget Analysis Section I Budget at a Glance (rilegislature.gov) p.4

¹¹ FY 2020 Budget Analysis Section I Budget at a Glance (rilegislature.gov) p.4

¹² RI Coalition to End Homelessness slide deck Virtual Housing Summit Presentation p.3

¹³ RI Coalition to End Homelessness slide deck Virtual Housing Summit Presentation p.11-13

The General Assembly created a five-year pilot program, Pay for Success, to provide permanent supportive housing and additional wraparound services to 125 individuals experiencing homelessness. The budget included \$6.0 million to capitalize a fund to support the program, and if certain contracted metrics are achieved, the budget assumes expenditures up to \$1.5 million for FY2022.¹⁴

ARPA funding presents an opportunity to essentially fill the current gap in capital funding needed to address homelessness in Rhode Island. This recommended investment is in addition to the above program and will add 500 units of supportive housing and create additional temporary housing for those waiting for the production of additional affordable housing units.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Invest \$50 million to expand first-time home buyer programs to increase home ownership opportunities for BIPOC populations and/or in areas disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.

We recommend that RI expand RI Housing's first-time home buyer programs to offer forgivable loans of up to \$50,000, forgivable over five years for 1,000 residents. This assistance should be targeted to residents of Qualified Census Tracts to remove the primary barrier to home ownership for Blacks, Latinx, and other underserved and marginalized populations, and in communities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. Qualified individuals could combine this assistance with other down payment assistance programs.

Homeownership is one way for families to build wealth; however, Rhode Island's Black and Latinx populations have not participated in homeownership to the extent of their White peers. Black residents have a 33 percent homeownership rate while White residents have a 67 percent rate of homeownership.¹⁵ Nationally, the Black homeownership rate of 41 percent is higher than the rate for Rhode Island.¹⁶ When looking at Rhode Island's Latinx population, the homeownership rate of 29 percent is the lowest of all racial and ethnic categories and significantly lower than the national Latinx homeownership rate of 45 percent.¹⁷

¹⁴ FY 2020 Budget Analysis Section I Budget at a Glance (rilegislature.gov) p.4

¹⁵ Housing Fact Book 2020 - housingworksri.org p.7

¹⁶ Housing Fact Book 2020 - housingworksri.org p.7

¹⁷ Housing Fact Book 2020 - housingworksri.org p.7

This recommendation addresses substantial barriers to homeownership by essentially reducing the purchase price of a home, along with existing down payment assistance. By providing up to \$50,000 in forgivable loans on top of traditional down payment programs, this recommendation will make homes more affordable for qualifying individuals and families. While this assistance is targeted to residents of Qualified Census Tracts, those residents can utilize this assistance to purchase a home anywhere in Rhode Island, thereby increasing the homeownership rate and wealth building for future generations.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Invest \$100 million for healthy homes repairs, including the remediation of lead paint and assistance to low-income homeowners and qualifying landlords for renovations to substandard units to code compliance.

We recommend that Rhode Island dedicate \$60 million to expand the existing lead paint remediation programs including RI Housing's LeadSafe Homes Program, Lead Safe Providence Program, and Woonsocket Lead Hazard Reduction Program. These funds would provide lead paint remediations that comply with current safety standards for approximately 2,850 – 3,750 additional units.

Rhode Island's housing stock is older than that of the nation overall, with 74 percent of all housing stock built before 1979. Many of these older homes may contain lead.¹⁸ Though lead exposure has decreased in recent years, one in every 14 rising kindergarteners has a blood lead level of 5 mg/L or above.¹⁹ According to the Centers for Disease Control, blood lead levels over 5mg/L are considered "elevated" and higher than the majority of children.²⁰ While the highest number of students with blood lead levels over 5 mg/L are in the urban core, all municipalities have students with elevated blood lead levels.²¹

Rhode Island Housing's Lead Safe Homes Programs budgets \$1 million per year for lead remediations and provides funding throughout Rhode Island.²²

¹⁸ Housing Fact Book 2020 (housingworksri.org) p.10

¹⁹ Lead Exposure (datasparkri.org)

²⁰ Blood Lead Levels in Children | Lead | CDC

²¹ Lead Exposure (datasparkri.org)

²² Virtual Housing Summit | Office of the Lieutenant Governor (ri.gov)

Investment Recommendations

According to Childhood Lead Action Project, the average cost of funding and administering lead hazard reduction is between \$16,000 and \$21,000 per unit. An additional investment of \$20 million per year for three years could make between 950 and 1,250 units safe per year, for a total of between 2,850 and 3,750 units over three years.

We also recommend that RI dedicate \$40 million to provide forgivable loans up to \$10,000 for low-income homeowners and qualifying landlords to remedy code violations and repair properties, and to allow low-income homeowners to age in place. Loans would be conditioned on continued code compliance and limitations on maximum rent to be charged.

While affordability is the most pressing housing issue, Rhode Island also suffers from a large inventory of substandard housing in need of repair and renovation.

This recommendation creates a new program that will provide loans to qualifying landlords to repair and remedy code violations in exchange for continued code compliance and limitations on rent or acceptance of rental vouchers. This strategy could create more affordable rental properties. In addition, with an aging population and the pivoting away from nursing home and other congregate care settings, these forgivable loans for repairs, modifications, and/or the retrofitting of homes would allow more low-income homeowners to age in place.

RECOMMENDATION 5: Invest \$5 million to develop a strategic plan and to improve capacity and expedite processing of housing projects that are accessing ARPA funds.

A long overdue and comprehensive statewide strategic plan should be developed that lays out a strategy for continued development of affordable housing through the use of ARPA funds and other sources. State agencies and nonprofit partners would need to quickly process applications for affordable housing projects and permanent supportive housing projects to comply with ARPA expenditure deadlines. Additional staffing and/or funds for other pre-development expenses would be necessary to streamline the process and to allocate these funds to qualified housing projects in an expeditious manner. These other expenses include due diligence on properties, environmental review, and architectural design.

During the community and stakeholder engagement process, little consensus emerged as to strategic priorities for addressing Rhode Island’s housing crisis. Moreover, many raised concerns about the ability of the state and nonprofit providers, including nonprofit developers, to administer allocated funds efficiently and effectively, and for current housing providers/developers to increase housing production capacity. This recommendation provides funds for a strategic plan, and for temporary, limited-term staff to increase capacity at the state and nonprofit agencies. In order to efficiently process applications, Rhode Island should consider investing in a streamlined application process through a single application portal and collaborative review process of community and economic development grant programs, similar to the MassWorks model.²³ Finally, with the Governor expected to hire a Deputy Secretary of Commerce to coordinate all functions and agencies involving housing, this would be an opportune time to elevate this position to a cabinet-level position. The severe housing issues require a seat at the table and a direct voice to current and future Governors.

These recommendations present many opportunities. Additional thought and planning should be given to collaborating and even braiding funding with other revenue sources, including ARPA allocations for local municipalities. The Rhode Island House of Representatives has established a commission to examine the Low-and-Moderate Income Housing laws which presents an opportunity to change state laws, incentivize affordable housing in municipalities, and increase the production of affordable housing units.

Behavioral Health \$255 million

COVID-19 highlighted long-standing systemic issues within the state’s behavioral healthcare system for both children and adults. Increases in overdose deaths in 2021, extraordinarily long wait times for hospital admission, and the lack of meaningful access to behavioral health services across the continuum of care have brought the need for the expansion of outpatient community-based services to the forefront.

From April through May 2020, 36 percent of Americans reported depression or anxiety compared to 11 percent for January to June 2019.²⁴ Depression or anxiety reports were higher among Black and Hispanic residents, 45 and 47 percent respectively, compared to their White peers—40 percent.²⁵

²³ MassWorks | [Mass.gov](https://www.mass.gov)

²⁴ COVID-19 Pandemic Coincided with Elevated and Increasing Anxiety and Depression Symptoms

²⁵ COVID-19 Pandemic Coincided with Elevated and Increasing Anxiety and Depression Symptoms

Drug overdoses are the leading cause of accidental deaths in Rhode Island, with more people dying annually from overdoses than from fires, firearms, and car crashes combined.²⁶ Black residents in Rhode Island have faced higher rates of overdose death each year compared to other residents.²⁷ Over time, overdose death rates have increased fastest among Black and Hispanic Rhode Islanders.²⁸ During the first eight months of 2020, the rate of unintentional drug overdose deaths in Rhode Island increased 28 percent relative to the same period in the prior year.²⁹

Throughout the public engagement process and key stakeholder interviews, behavioral health was identified as a priority area for additional investments. Facilities, whether state or privately owned, are in dire need of repair, and new facilities are required to meet treatment needs in the least restrictive setting and close gaps in the continuum of care. Equally important is that services are provided in convenient and safe places by trusted providers who understand how to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate care. Increasing the diversity of providers across the behavioral health sector will help promote access to care. Now more than ever, behavioral health services across the continuum of care must be accessible to the people of Rhode Island who need it most.

GOALS: Decrease statewide emergency department visits by both children and adults for acute behavioral health crises by 20 percent each; decrease the number of unintentional opioid overdoses and suicides by 15 percent each; increase the number of Rhode Island licensed outpatient mental health counselors, social workers, psychologists, and psychiatrists to reach New England’s behavioral healthcare occupational median.

²⁶ Drug Overdose Information | Dept. of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities, and Hospitals ([ri.gov](https://www.ri.gov))

²⁷ Drug Overdose Information | Dept. of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities, and Hospitals ([ri.gov](https://www.ri.gov))

²⁸ Race & Ethnicity – Prevent Overdose RI

²⁹ Men, jobless and people with mental health diagnoses most vulnerable in 2020 overdose spike | Brown University

RECOMMENDATION 1: Invest \$170 million to build new facilities and renovate and upgrade existing facilities to expand and improve services and treatments across the behavioral health continuum of care.

We recommend that RI invest ARPA funds to build new facilities or renovate or upgrade existing state and private nonprofit facilities that provide high-quality behavioral health services in Rhode Island. These investments should be used to address the gaps and increase behavioral health services for children and adults, including but not limited to, residential treatment facilities for youth with serious substance use disorders or serious mental illness and the expansion of outpatient community-based services across the continuum of care. Investments should be aligned with a strategic plan for a behavioral health system of care and where appropriate integrated with other community-based services. (See [Recommendation 4](#))

The need to build new, or renovate existing, state and private nonprofit facilities is key to increasing high-quality behavioral health services and expanding the services offered across the continuum. This capital investment also is most consistent with the one-time nature of ARPA funding. The gaps in the behavioral health services continuum of care vary for adults and children/youth. With respect to children and youth, residential treatment facilities for individuals with serious substance use disorders, residential facilities for individuals with serious mental health needs, and the expansion of outpatient, community-based services across the continuum of care are urgently needed to fill the gaps in essential behavioral health services. Adults in Rhode Island would benefit from expanding outpatient residential facilities, including step-up/step-down facilities and services, and investing in other necessary, outpatient community-based services across the continuum of care. In order to reach those most in need, it is imperative that services be conveniently located and provided by behavioral healthcare providers who are trusted by the community. The current gaps in services cause the overuse of hospital emergency departments, increased physical and emotional disease complications due to delayed care, and often avoidable involvement with the criminal justice system and/or the Department of Children Youth and Families (DCYF).

RECOMMENDATION 2: Invest \$50 million in technology infrastructure, including electronic medical records and other non-facility infrastructure, including one-time investments in mobile response and stabilization services, and technology that could increase the availability and access to telemedicine.

We recommend that funds be provided to enable electronic medical/health records for community-based behavioral healthcare providers, technology necessary for increasing the availability of telemedicine, and technology-based prevention services.

Electronic medical records (EMR) improve patient care through improved management, reduction in medication errors, reduction in unnecessary investigations, and improved communication and interactions among primary care providers, patients, and other providers involved in the patient's care.³⁰ Community-based behavioral health service providers would benefit from funds to install EMR systems and/or system upgrades, as well as technical assistance for implementation of these systems. While some providers have a basic form of EMR that provides some services, like billing capabilities, most providers do not have EMR that can communicate with hospital or other providers, leaving out a critical piece of patient care. This recommendation provides funds for community-based behavioral healthcare providers to improve patient care.

We further recommend one-time investments (workforce training and vehicle purchases) in mobile response and stabilization services that are aimed at ensuring the safety and well-being of children, youth and their families who may be experiencing emotional or behavioral stress to avert a psychiatric admission or other out-of-home placement.

The mobile response and stabilization services model responds to a behavioral health crisis by dispatching a mobile crisis team to reach a person in the service area in his or her home, workplace, or any other community-based location of the individual in crisis in a timely manner.³¹

³⁰ National Institutes of Health Do electronic medical records improve quality of care? (nih.gov)

³¹ National Guidelines for Behavioral Health Crisis Care Best Practice Toolkit Executive Summary (samhsa.gov)

The goal of the mobile response is to reduce reliance on restrictive, longer-term hospital stays, hospital readmissions, overuse of law enforcement and DCYF, and the human tragedies that result from a lack of access to care. Extremely valuable psychiatric inpatient facilities are over-burdened with referrals that might be best supported with less intrusive, less expensive services and supports.³²

The Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) has identified a statewide mobile mental health crisis system as one way to address the existing gaps and access in Rhode Island's behavioral health services.³³ The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration has developed national guidelines outlining best practices for behavioral health crisis care, including mobile crisis response teams.³⁴ This recommendation provides funding for one-time investments related to the development of mobile response and stabilization services. Additional funding would be required on a continuing basis to sustain these services.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Invest \$30 million to increase provider capacity through a loan forgiveness program, as well as stipends/bonuses, to recruit and retain behavioral health professionals. The program should target BIPOC populations to build a culturally and linguistically diverse behavioral health workforce.

We recommend that RI invest an additional \$30 million by offering loan forgiveness, stipends, and bonuses to increase provider capacity particularly targeting BIPOC populations in behavioral healthcare professional shortage areas. These additional funds would be focused on behavioral health professionals, including but not limited to, adult or child psychiatrists, health service psychologists, licensed clinical social workers, psychiatric nurse specialists, mental health counselors, and licensed professional counselors. As a condition of receiving this assistance, behavioral healthcare professionals would agree to work for a specified period of time in these areas.

³² National Guidelines for Behavioral Health Crisis Care Best Practice Toolkit Executive Summary ([samhsa.gov](https://www.samhsa.gov))

³³ Behavioral Health System Review | Executive Office of Health and Human Services (ri.gov)

³⁴ National Guidelines for Behavioral Health Crisis Care Best Practice Toolkit Executive Summary ([samhsa.gov](https://www.samhsa.gov))

The Rhode Island Department of Health administers the state's Health Professionals Loan Repayment Program, which is designed both to improve access to care and retain personnel who provide healthcare services in underserved communities and to address health professional shortages that cause disparities in health.³⁵ This program has not been able to deliver the volume, diversity, and spectrum of critical health professionals for the healthcare system, including behavioral healthcare providers.

Funding for this program has been limited with a FY2022 budget of just over \$1 million from all sources, including federal funds and restricted receipts (no general revenue allocation). These funds are used to pay a portion of an eligible healthcare professional's student loans if the participant agrees to work for two years in a health professional shortage area. The restricted receipts are donated funds and are used to provide the 50 percent minimum match for the federal grant.³⁶

A Health Professional Shortage Area is a geographic area, population group, or healthcare facility that has been designated by the Health Resources and Services Administration as having a shortage of health professionals in primary, dental, or mental healthcare.³⁷ As of March 31, 2021, Rhode Island had the highest percentage—40 percent—of the state population living in a mental health shortage area in New England.³⁸ Massachusetts, on the other hand, had the second lowest percentage in the country—4 percent.³⁹

Rhode Island has a shortage of child psychiatrists and psychologists, as well as other behavioral health providers. Increasing the funds in the Health Professional Loan Repayment program, with direction to invest in expanding the behavioral health work force, is one way to increase the number of providers to meet unmet needs. Medicaid is the single largest payer for mental health services in the United States and is increasingly playing a larger role in the reimbursement of substance use disorder services.⁴⁰ We consistently heard that Medicaid reimbursement rates are insufficient to provide competitive wages to attract and retain behavioral health providers across the various disciplines. (See recommendation 4, proposing funding for analysis of Medicaid reimbursement rates).

³⁵ Health Professionals Loan Repayment Program: Department of Health (ri.gov)

³⁶ FY 2022 Budget Enacted Section III Agency Analyses.pdf (rilegislature.gov)

³⁷ What is Shortage Designation? | Bureau of Health Workforce (hrsa.gov)

³⁸ Over one-third of Americans live in areas lacking mental health professionals - USAFacts

³⁹ Over one-third of Americans live in areas lacking mental health professionals - USAFacts

⁴⁰ Behavioral Health Services | Medicaid

These funds could also be used for bonuses and stipends for behavioral health professionals to retain current behavioral health staff and incentivize new staff, particularly BIPOC individuals, to enter the behavioral health field. In addition, these incentives should increase provider capacity that especially targets BIPOC populations. Bonuses and stipends can reach behavioral health workers who may not have loans or may provide more effective incentives to certain professionals.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Invest \$5 million to complete a strategic plan for a behavioral health system of care for adults and children.

We recommend that RI complete a long overdue, coordinated strategic plan that examines the current behavioral health system in RI for children and adults, identifies the gaps in the respective continuums of care, and develops and implements a plan to fill those gaps thereby providing a high-quality behavioral healthcare system that meets the needs of Rhode Islanders. This plan should include an assessment of Medicaid reimbursement rates and the associated cost of providing services across the continuum of care. The plan should also include an Olmstead plan to ensure that persons with disabilities receive services in the most integrated setting appropriate to their needs. These funds also could be used to enhance planning and service delivery capacities at agencies and nonprofits.

Rhode Island has the opportunity to align the youth and adult behavioral health systems and to address the gaps within their respective continuums of care. A gap analysis and Medicaid rate assessment are critical to be able to target ARPA and other funds to areas with the most crucial needs. This effort would build on the work that is underway for the children's behavioral health care system. We also recommend funding to temporarily increase capacity at state agencies to disburse funds and for nonprofits to quickly enhance services to address waiting lists, backlogs, and other issues to quickly provide behavioral health services to those in need.

Investing in Rhode Island's behavioral healthcare system presents many opportunities. ARPA funds should be leveraged with local, philanthropic, and private funds along with other state and federal resources. Nonprofit providers should also collaborate and partner when possible, to deliver a broader spectrum of services that better align with community needs. While many nonprofits providing behavioral health services operate throughout Rhode Island, they provide a wide array of services for varying needs and populations. When creating new programs or adding substantial funding to existing programs, agencies, or nonprofits, challenges are also present. Staff is required not only to effectively and efficiently disburse or utilize funds, but also to account for the proper and intended use of those funds. We must plan and prepare to ensure that the ARPA funds make an immediate and profound impact on those most affected by the pandemic.

Workforce Development \$205 million

The COVID-19 pandemic caused an unprecedented shutdown of the Rhode Island economy, with unemployment rates reaching as high as 17.4 percent in April 2020, disproportionately affecting people of color.⁴¹ While Rhode Island is making strides, its unemployment rate remains higher than the national average and higher than pre-pandemic levels.⁴² There are particular industries that are having difficulty finding qualified employees.⁴³ The Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training (DLT) has identified labor shortage areas by major occupation group as of 2021 Quarter 2.⁴⁴ These groups include community and social services, healthcare support, computer occupations, and healthcare practitioners, to name a few.⁴⁵ This is an opportunity to focus on today's jobs and those of the future.

GOALS: Provide 15,000 Rhode Islanders with high-quality jobs through robust training, adult education, workforce skills services, and the elimination of barriers to employment.

⁴¹ RI Department of Labor & Training Employment Bulletin, September 2021

⁴² RI Department of Labor & Training Employment Bulletin, September 2021

⁴³ RI Department of Labor & Training Monthly Labor Force Report, August 2021

⁴⁴ RI Department of Labor & Training Labor Supply & Demand, Q2 2021

⁴⁵ RI Department of Labor & Training Labor Supply & Demand, Q2 2021

RECOMMENDATION 1: Invest \$150 million in high-quality “earn and learn” job training programs that lead to a promotion, certificate, academic credential, and/or higher salary.

We recommend investment in high quality “earn and learn” job training at an average cost of \$25,000 per participant. These programs would provide training of much greater rigor and length of time than the typical training programs currently offered. “Earn and learn” models refer broadly to workforce training models, including apprenticeship/pre-apprenticeship, that allow individuals to earn a paycheck or receive a stipend while gaining the skills and education required for a specific occupation.

Under these more rigorous programs, individuals would receive a tangible training benefit beyond the minimum training required for a given job. Employers would receive subsidies and other supports sufficient to incentivize and sustain employees throughout the training experience. To address workforce needs, some of these funds should be dedicated to qualifying programs focused on training in areas of critical need: healthcare, construction, education, and IT services. Pre-apprenticeship programs and foundational skills training/education will allow participation in this model across the skill level of workers.

The state operates several workforce development programs that are designed to meet employer demands by providing training to unemployed and underemployed individuals. Real Jobs RI is a workforce development program designed to grow business partnerships to address their workforce needs and challenges. The Department of Labor and Training (DLT) anticipates workforce demands of business and industry and builds programs or clears barriers to teach the necessary skills to potential employees. Included in the Real Jobs portfolio of programs, Real Pathways is a workforce development initiative that partners with community organizations to train and support job seekers in learning the foundational skills and abilities that employers seek. For FY2021, Real Jobs served 12,229 people, 74 percent of whom were placed into employment upon program completion at an average cost of \$3,614 per person.⁴⁶ For FY2022, Real Jobs RI was allocated \$6 million in general revenues, \$651,000 in federal funds, and an initial allocation of \$2 million from restricted receipts from the Job Development Fund.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Real Jobs RI Impact Report July 2021

⁴⁷ House Fiscal Report, FY2022 Enacted Agency Analyses, pp. 108-109

While these programs have been effective in training individuals to fill job vacancies, training investments typically have been aimed to provide the minimum necessary to meet qualifications for the particular job to be filled. In the case of lower-wage positions, individuals often do not receive training to enable them to qualify for promotions or other positions providing greater economic security.

Apprenticeships, a long-standing earn and learn workforce development model, were traditionally employed in the building and construction industry. Over the past few years, this model has been expanded to other sectors, including technology, healthcare, and childcare.⁴⁸

“Earn and learn” training programs provide multiple paths to jobs and careers for people with diverse backgrounds and experiences, better meeting the needs of individuals, employers, and a changing economy.⁴⁹ Expanding such programs delivers viable training and growth options for employed and unemployed adults with fiscal and family responsibilities.⁵⁰ These programs will help drive a more equitable and inclusive economic recovery for Rhode Island.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Invest \$30 million in high-quality and accessible adult education/foundational workforce skills, including English language, literacy, and digital skills.

We recommend ARPA funds be invested to increase capacity of the adult education network to provide foundational skills for adults who require English language services, literacy, and/or digital skills to advance in the workforce and to increase access to workforce development for incarcerated individuals. These funds would be used for ‘earn and learn’ best-practice programs targeted to these adults, strengthening the adult education distance learning infrastructure, bolstering intake services and waitlist prevention for adult learners, expanded access to digital literacy classes, the development and implementation of a pilot RI Promise program for low-income adults and for increasing access to workforce development services for incarcerated individuals. Funds would also support the development of a strategic plan for adult education and a statewide strategy to close the digital divide, including access to devices, broadband, and digital literacy skills.

Many adults need to develop basic literacy, numeracy, and digital skills that allow for their full participation in their community and workplace. Skills training is also critical

⁴⁸ Apprenticeship RI

⁴⁹ Desegregating work and learning through ‘earn-and-learn’ models ([brookings.edu](https://www.brookings.edu))

⁵⁰ Desegregating work and learning through ‘earn-and-learn’ models ([brookings.edu](https://www.brookings.edu))

for workers who have been adversely affected by the pandemic. Adult education creates opportunities for adults who may struggle economically otherwise.⁵¹ However, current programs do not have the capacity to immediately serve all adults requesting services.

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education administers adult education grants that are used to fund local adult education programs and literacy services, including workplace literacy, family literacy, English literacy, and civics education programs.⁵² Approximately 6,000 students participate in these programs annually, with 50 percent receiving English language learner services, 25 percent receiving GED preparation services, and 25 percent receiving basic literacy services.⁵³

The department received \$6.7 million in federal and state funding for adult education grants that included \$3.3 million from the Governor's Workforce Board and \$1.9 million from general revenue for the state's enacted FY2022 budget.⁵⁴ With an increased need for skilled workers, now is the time to increase funding to provide low-income adults with the foundational skills and training necessary to fully and equitably participate in Rhode Island's economy.

This recommended ARPA allocation would expand program capacity so that more adults, the vast majority of whom were disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, are able to pursue and achieve their educational and workforce goals.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Invest \$15 million for one year to continue and expand the RI Reconnect initiative that provides assistance to individuals to mitigate barriers to participation in a job training or employment opportunity.

This one-time, one-year funding would continue and expand the RI Reconnect program for 3,000 participants in programs funded through DLT, the RI Department of Education/ Division of Adult Education and other similar programs approved by RI Reconnect that offer training/employment opportunity at no cost to the participant and are in an in-demand industry. Tailoring the amount and scope of assistance to the individual's needs removes barriers that would otherwise preclude obtaining a job or success in a training program leading to employment.

⁵¹ Increase Adult Ed Funding to Meet Need, Drive Economic Recovery | CLASP

⁵² Adult Education & GED (RIDE)

⁵³ FY 2022 Budget Enacted Section III Agency Analyses.pdf (rilegislature.gov) p. 280

⁵⁴ FY 2022 Budget Enacted Section III Agency Analyses.pdf (rilegislature.gov) p.280

Beginning July 1, 2020, RI Reconnect became a part of Back to Work RI, an initiative funded by the CARES Act and designed to train, support, and find employment for thousands of Rhode Islanders whose jobs were displaced due to COVID-19. Program funding was used to increase employment participation by removing obstacles and providing support services, like childcare and transportation assistance. The program enrolled 7,717 people in training with 3,611 hired for employment and/or upskilled.⁵⁵ Of those enrolled, 14.6 percent received support services at an average cost of \$4,184 per person.⁵⁶ This initiative received funding of \$45 million from federal CARES Act dollars in FY2021, of which \$9.5 million was shifted to FY2022 based on projected expenditures.⁵⁷

This recommended allocation would allow the RI Reconnect program to operate for one additional year, serving 3,000 participants by expanding its reach beyond those individuals enrolled in a Back to Work RI training program.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Invest \$10 million in IT data structure improvements to the state’s longitudinal data system and support a plan for the long-term sustainability of that system.

We recommend ARPA funds be invested to enhance the DataHUB, RI’s longitudinal data system, including to enable integration of that system with the Ecosystem data system housed at the Executive Office of Health and Human Services. The DataHUB connects data across sectors to support research and analysis that informs policy making and program evaluation. ARPA funds also should be used to fund a long-term sustainability plan for DataHUB. A more effective longitudinal data system would provide relevant, timely data that could link RI’s talent pipeline with workforce needs and projections.

A robust statewide longitudinal data system would connect non-identifying data from birth through time in the workforce and would provide data to inform policy, fiscal, and other decision-making opportunities within a state. Rhode Island’s longitudinal data system, DataHUB, maintained by DataSpark at the University of Rhode Island, connects aggregated data across sectors from multiple federal, state, and local sources on the early childhood, K-12, postsecondary, and workforce continuum.⁵⁸ Linking data across agencies allows policy makers and state leaders to view new information and identify patterns that may emerge. DataHUB has conducted research on chronic absenteeism,

⁵⁵ Real Jobs RI Impact Report July 2021

⁵⁶ Real Jobs RI Impact Report July 2021

⁵⁷ House Fiscal Report, FY2022 Enacted Agency Analyses, p.108

⁵⁸ Rhode Island DataHUB

evaluated the impact of elevated blood lead levels on academic achievement, and analyzed workforce development efforts.⁵⁹

According to the Workforce Data Quality Initiative, Rhode Island's response to the challenges presented by COVID-19 was a great illustration of how data capacity built over a decade to build a secure, accessible, permissions-based Data Lake in the cloud, enabled Rhode Island to quickly respond to surging unemployment insurance claims.⁶⁰

While Rhode Island has made some advancements in its longitudinal data system, this integrated system could deliver much more. For example, Kentucky has developed a robust state longitudinal data system that produces a wide range of interactive reports from *Early Childhood Profile* that examines kindergarten readiness and third grade proficiencies to *Work Ready Communities*, allowing communities to analyze current and future workforce needs, identify workforce gaps, and implement strategies to address projected needs.⁶¹

By investing in the state's longitudinal data system and a long-term sustainability plan, Rhode Island can become more proactive and equitable in its workforce strategies, and better address equity issues in education, health, and housing.

Small Business Assistance \$100M

Through the course of many interviews with small businesses, chambers of commerce, and other key stakeholders, two themes emerged: the need for both capital and technical assistance in the form of business services. Capital is the money or resources needed to open, operate, and grow a business, and can come in many different forms.⁶² Access to capital funding has been difficult for small businesses that may lack collateral or appropriate financial recordkeeping.

⁵⁹ Rhode Island DataHUB

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Access to Capital - Dun & Bradstreet (dnb.com)

Most entrepreneurs cannot start new businesses or grow existing business without adequate financing.⁶³ Traditional bank loans can be difficult for small businesses to obtain as they may be identified as a “lending risk.”⁶⁴ Black and Latinx entrepreneurs who have historically had less access to mainstream financial institutions are more likely to rely on personal and family savings to access capital, presenting less opportunities in these communities for wealth building through small business ownership.⁶⁶ ⁶⁷

While small business owners have had difficulties navigating their businesses through the COVID-19 pandemic, minority-owned business owners have been hit especially hard.⁶⁸ Between February and April 2020, Black-owned businesses in the United States experienced declines of 41 percent, Latino-owned businesses fell by 32 percent, and Asian-owned businesses saw a 26 percent decline, compared to a 17 percent decline in White-owned businesses.⁶⁹

COVID-19 financial assistance programs, such as Paycheck Protection Program loans and other small business aid, were not equally accessible to minority-owned small businesses.⁷⁰ Interviews with Rhode Island key stakeholders have indicated that access to business services, including legal, accounting, IT, and other technical professionals would have provided the much-needed support for minority-owned businesses to apply for and receive financial assistance, as well as meet other COVID-19 challenges.

GOALS: Provide significant financial assistance to at least 2,250 small businesses—targeted to minority-owned small businesses—through forgivable loans, low-interest loans, and grants.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Invest \$50 million in Rhode Island small businesses and cooperatives through forgivable loans.

⁶³ Access to Capital - U.S. Committee on Small Business & Entrepreneurship ([senate.gov](https://www.senate.gov))

⁶⁴ Alternative Loans - Small Business - Dun & Bradstreet (dnb.com)

⁶⁵ Report | Latino-Owned Businesses: Shining a Light on National Trends (stanford.edu)

⁶⁶ Access to Capital for Minority-Owned Businesses | U.S. Chamber of Commerce (uschamber.com)

⁶⁷ Report | Latino-Owned Businesses: Shining a Light on National Trends (stanford.edu)

⁶⁸ Why Black-Owned Businesses Struggle To Get Small Business Loans (forbes.com)

⁶⁹ Why Black-Owned Businesses Struggle To Get Small Business Loans (forbes.com)

⁷⁰ Latino businesses face barriers to COVID-19 relief funds | UMN Extension

We recommend that **\$50 million** of ARPA funds be invested to establish a forgivable loan program that provides up to \$50,000 for at least 1,000 small businesses with fewer than 25 employees. These loans would be forgivable over three years to the extent the funds are utilized for capital investments, including IT, and should be targeted towards minority-owned businesses and businesses located in areas disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. Qualifying businesses shall be offered financial education before receiving loans under this program.

ARPA funds present Rhode Island with an opportunity to create a forward-looking forgivable loan program that provides much needed capital for minority-owned small businesses that incentivizes capital investments. Such investments would include any expense that could be capitalized under accounting rules, including buildings, equipment, motor vehicles, and IT upgrades. These loans would provide start-up capital and also position existing small business owners to make transformative investments for the growth of their businesses. Additionally, these forgivable loans would help minority-owned small businesses become more resilient in the face of future challenges.

This recommendation would provide much needed access to capital through forgivable loans targeting minority-owned businesses. By offering business financial education, many small business owners may, at their election, receive the tools to better manage their financial situations and assess current and future capital needs that could identify opportunities for leveraging funds for future growth.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Invest \$35 million to provide technical assistance to small businesses by awarding one-time grants for business services through a newly established business resource network.

As part of this effort, **\$5 million** should be invested to fund start-up costs and IT infrastructure to establish a business resources network of qualified providers available to deliver business services, including legal, accounting, bookkeeping, marketing, IT services, and e-commerce support to small businesses and cooperatives with fewer than 25 employees. The network should focus on the recruitment and inclusion of women- and minority-owned service providers, and culturally and linguistically diverse providers. These funds should also be used to support existing business services organizations.

In addition, **\$30 million** should be invested in a program that provides at least 1,200 one-time grants of up to \$25,000 for small businesses and cooperatives with fewer than 25 employees for business services, including legal, accounting, bookkeeping, marketing, IT services, and e-commerce support. These grants should be focused on minority-owned businesses and businesses located in communities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.

From small businesses to chambers of commerce, those interviewed expressed the need for funds to access services such as accounting, legal, and e-commerce support. By creating a business resource network that recruits women and minority-owned service providers, Rhode Island would ensure that culturally appropriate services are available to support small business owners and cooperatives who may need technical services while also bolstering minority-owned service providers. In addition, with one-time grants of up to \$25,000 for business services, small businesses could use the funds for services that they may not otherwise be able to purchase, such as website design, online ordering software, marketing tools, or accounting and legal services.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Invest \$10 million to create a new Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) or expand capacity of one or more existing CDFIs to provide financing for projects in distressed and underserved neighborhoods in Rhode Island.

CDFIs expand economic opportunity in low-income communities by providing access to financial products and services for local residents and businesses. The recommended one-time funding would serve as seed money to establish a new business-focused CDFI for Rhode Island, or alternatively to expand the capacity of one or more existing CDFIs.

CDFIs have a broad range of specialties and focus areas, including affordable housing and home ownership, economic development, and support for nonprofits.⁷¹ CDFIs should have a singular focus on communities that have historically had difficulty accessing capital and other project financing.⁷² Through building relationships and trust in these communities, CDFIs are well-positioned to leverage resources for projects that have broad community support and address the most pressing needs. Minority-owned businesses have a higher chance of getting loans and investments if they look outside of traditional sources to CDFIs.⁷³

⁷¹ What is a CDFI? | Opportunity Finance Network (ofn.org)

⁷² CDFI Program | Community Development Financial Institutions Fund (cdfifund.gov)

⁷³ Access to Capital - Dun & Bradstreet (dnb.com)

Additionally, the establishment of a new CDFI, or the expansion of existing CDFI work in Rhode Island would present an opportunity to apply for and receive federal funding for the direct benefit of distressed communities throughout the state. The Treasury operates the CDFI Fund, which provides both financial and organizational support through a competitive process for CDFIs across the country.⁷⁴ A 50-50 match is required for financial assistance awards; however, no match is required for the technical assistance offered to CDFIs to build their organizational capacity.⁷⁵ More than \$2 billion in direct funding has been provided to CDFIs through this program, along with certification guidance, startup training, and technical assistance.⁷⁶ There may also be opportunities to leverage private capital, in coordination with local banks and corporations.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Invest \$5 million to establish a loan program for certified Minority Business Enterprises (MBEs).

Certified MBEs are businesses owned by minorities and/or women that are certified by the state as qualifying for preferences for purposes of state procurement. Such businesses often are challenged with lack of capital and insufficient cash flow. We recommend using **\$5 million** in ARPA money to establish a loan fund for certified MBEs to facilitate better access to capital and liquidity. Loans would be up to \$100,000 each and could be applied to a wide range of business expenses for at least 50 small businesses.

Many small businesses require access to capital to support business growth and also describe the need for financing to bridge cash flow gaps. The lag time between contract performance and payment receipt is prevalent in certain industries. For example, MBE construction contractors have been identified as particularly vulnerable to lack of access to capital and cash flow problems.⁷⁷ This recommendation is designed to provide an additional financing mechanism through which MBEs can access capital.

⁷⁴ CDFI Program | Community Development Financial Institutions Fund ([cdfifund.gov](https://www.cdfifund.gov))

⁷⁵ CDFI Program | Community Development Financial Institutions Fund ([cdfifund.gov](https://www.cdfifund.gov))

⁷⁶ CDFI Program ([fdic.gov](https://www.fdic.gov))

⁷⁷ Governors WGDC Report of Recommendations - 4-27-18 ([ri.gov](https://www.ri.gov))

A linked deposit loan program is one way to provide certified minority-owned businesses with low-interest loans. Rhode Island could model the Washington State MBE linked deposit loan program. In Washington, the state purchases certificates of deposit (CDs) in an amount equivalent to the amount financial institutions loan to certified minority and women's business enterprises.⁷⁸ The state then forgoes a specified percent of the interest it would earn, and the banks transfer those savings to the MBE in the form of an interest rate reduction.⁷⁹

Investing in Rhode Island's minority-owned businesses presents several opportunities to benefit people of color, underserved communities, and the Rhode Island economy. As is the case in our other areas of recommendation, ARPA funds should be leveraged with local, philanthropic, and other private funds along with other state and federal resources to maximize support for new and existing minority-owned small businesses. Implementing these recommendations with a focus on minority-owned businesses and targeting BIPOC communities creates a wealth-building opportunity that can improve the lives of future generations. In addition, linking these recommendations with those contained in workforce development could provide transformational change in distressed communities, by supporting small businesses and providing them with the skilled workers from their community that they need to thrive and grow.

Neighborhood Trusts \$50M

RECOMMENDATION: Invest \$50 million for the creation of neighborhood trusts in Qualified Census Tracts.

We recommend that **\$50 million** be allocated for the creation of neighborhood trusts in Qualified Census Tracts. A neighborhood trust is a collection of funds, pooled and held in trust for the benefit of a specific neighborhood, to be directed by people who live in that place. These trusts would allow communities to pool funds, including allocations by other funders and small-dollar investments by residents themselves, into large-scale efforts to revitalize and improve their communities. Strategic investments made by the community would generate social and, ideally, financial returns, resulting in a regeneration of funds. Decisions on how the trust is allocated would be made by members of the community themselves, through the creation of democratic and transparent governance structures.

These trusts would bring financial resources to those communities which have experienced decades of financial disinvestment, which have directly resulted in the

⁷⁸ Linked Deposit Loan Program | Office of Minority and Women's Business Enterprises (wa.gov)

⁷⁹ Linked Deposit Loan Program | Office of Minority and Women's Business Enterprises (wa.gov)

unequal impact of COVID-19 on their residents. In the process, the trusts would build up long-term local infrastructure, leverage additional investments, and center direct community decision-making. To qualify for this funding, investment trusts must demonstrate matching funds from private or local contributions and establish an authentic community governance structure.

Neighborhood trusts are a form of impact investing that should be place-based investments that create a positive impact and catalyze social outcomes by focusing on communities that have limited access to capital.⁸⁰ There may be opportunity to coordinate the recommendations contained in this report within specific communities.

Neighborhood trusts typically comprise three interrelated entities: an asset management company to steward investments, a property management company to oversee the buildings operated by the trust, and an entity to assist and support resident governance and engagement.⁸¹ However, the great virtue of a neighborhood trust is its flexibility—residents, through the governance structure of a neighborhood trust, decide investment priorities and the path for the future of their neighborhood.⁸²

Neighborhood trusts could provide low-income households with homeownership or small business opportunities in their neighborhoods.⁸³ Funds could also be leveraged and braided with the above recommendations regarding housing, workforce development, and small business. Neighborhood trusts could stimulate local ownership in communities where it has otherwise seemed like a remote possibility.

Immediate Relief \$50M

RECOMMENDATION: Invest \$50 million in Rhode Island nonprofit organizations to provide immediate relief to residents suffering from behavioral health disorders, domestic violence, lack of affordable childcare, and economic, food, and housing insecurity, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

⁸⁰ Community Investment Funds (comcapcoalition.org) p.3

⁸¹ SSIR Spring2021 Building an American Ownership-Society (investcit.com)

⁸² In Defense of Neighborhood Trusts (ssir.org)

⁸³ SSIR Spring2021 Building an American Ownership-Society (investcit.com)

We recommend that \$50 million of ARPA funds be invested in Rhode Island nonprofit organizations to respond to immediate needs in communities, including providing treatment for mental health issues and substance use disorders, reducing food and housing insecurity, meeting childcare and other basic needs, and addressing domestic violence.

With increased needs for mental health services for adults and children, the rise in accidental overdoses, the end of the federal-supported unemployment benefits, and the expiration of the housing eviction moratorium, community-based nonprofit organizations are best situated to provide fast relief for those residents in immediate need of assistance. As discussed in the Behavioral Health section above, there has been a critical increase in the numbers of Rhode Islanders struggling with mental health and substance use disorders, and families impacted by unintentional drug overdose deaths. These illnesses have disproportionately impacted people of color.

During the pandemic, Rhode Island experienced the highest level of food insecurity recorded in 20 years.⁸⁴ Racial and ethnic disparities played a huge role in food access, as 36 percent of Black households and 40 percent of Latinx households were food insecure, compared to 21 percent of White households.⁸⁵ In a survey conducted between July and August 2020, 26 percent of Rhode Island households were worried about having adequate food.⁸⁶

In 2021, Rhode Island saw a rise in the number of unsheltered adults and families.⁸⁷ The moratorium protecting tenants from eviction no longer exists. While funds for rental assistance may help tenants who are being evicted for non-payment of rent, many tenants are being evicted for other reasons, including the ability to drastically increase rent due to current market conditions.

Access to stable, affordable, quality childcare is a basic need for many working families. Financially unstable before the pandemic, childcare programs across the U.S. have faced tremendous financial issues as enrollment has dropped markedly.⁸⁸ Rhode Island's childcare system is also facing difficulties. In January 2021, there were 106 fewer slots for infants and toddlers and 453 fewer spaces for preschoolers in licensed centers.⁸⁹ Licensed family childcare homes had 384 fewer openings in January 2021 compared to January 2020, and overall since 2011, the number of family childcare slots is down 36 percent.⁹⁰

⁸⁴ RI Food Bank-Hunger Facts & Resources - Rhode Island Community Food Bank

⁸⁵ RI Food Bank-Hunger Facts & Resources - Rhode Island Community Food Bank

⁸⁶ Rhode Island Life Index (rilifeindex.org)

⁸⁷ Point In Time Count | End Homelessness RI (rihomeless.org)

⁸⁸ 2021 Kids Count Factbook p.120

⁸⁹ 2021 Kids Count Factbook p.120

⁹⁰ 2021 Kids Count Factbook p.120

Nationwide, domestic violence incidents rose during the pandemic due to lockdown orders, increased unemployment, stress associated with childcare and homeschooling, increased financial insecurity, and the increased use of alcohol and other substances.⁹¹ Rhode Island also has experienced an increase in domestic violence.⁹²

Throughout this initiative's community engagement process, many have expressed that funding is necessary to address the immediate health and safety needs of Rhode Islanders. This recommendation acknowledges that reality. While this recommendation may not meet all our Guiding Principles, Rhode Island could not have transformative, sustainable, and equitable change without acknowledging and addressing the immediate needs of the many Rhode Islanders still experiencing hardships caused by the pandemic.

⁹¹ NCCCJ - Impact Report: COVID-19 and Domestic Violence Trends (counciloncj.org)

⁹² The Newsroom 5-28-20 (ricadv.org)

Implementation, Capacity, Accountability, and Oversight

RECOMMENDATION: We recommend that an office be established within the Governor’s Office and reporting directly to the Governor with the authority to oversee the recommended spending of ARPA funds pursuant to clear goals, performance metrics, and transparency. The critical responsibilities of this office would include ensuring that funds are expeditiously used and oversight of expenditures. This office would need additional staffing for the expenditure period and would coordinate with legislative input and oversight.

State government currently lacks the organizational capacity to effectively plan and manage the very large streams of federal ARPA funding flowing to Rhode Island. Similarly, community-based organizations lack capacity to manage and execute expanded programs.

A new office within the Governor’s Office should be established, staffed, resourced, and empowered to efficiently and effectively address the capacity of state agencies to disburse funds and oversee execution and implementation of ARPA-funded programs. This office should regularly convene a formal public process to report on the status of spending and implementation and to receive public input.

This office would also work collaboratively with the General Assembly, regularly reporting to lawmakers and the general public. And while not the focus of this initiative we do believe that comparable oversight and accountability for implementation should be applied to each of the recommendation areas outlined in this report.

The recommendations in this report have the potential to make substantive, long-term, positive change across Rhode Island, and particularly for those most impacted by the pandemic. However, committing to a strategy and allocating dollars is only the beginning. To achieve the desired goals, implementation of these recommendations and/or programs must be effectively executed and laser-focused on the intended beneficiaries. It is imperative that additional human resources and adequate funding are allocated to provide tactical planning and capacity building for departments, agencies, and other entities that will have responsibility for implementation. These implementing entities—primarily state agencies—will need administrative capacity to ensure the funds are spent in accordance with state and federal legal requirements, and proper competitive bidding, and contract management processes.

In addition to implementation and capacity, accountability and oversight are critical to ensuring public confidence in the allocation and distribution of funds. State government and other organizations must commit to the fundamentals of transparency and accountability. Clearly articulated goals, objectives, and performance metrics are a part of the equation. State government should provide ongoing, meaningful opportunities for public input as well as accessible, timely data that allows the public to view the manner, speed, and effectiveness of ARPA spending. The state should create an American Rescue Plan Act funds dashboard, to provide up-to-date information about how recovery funds are being spent. The dashboard should show total dollars allocated and spent to date and sections that focus on spending as it relates to the key needs of our community.⁹³ This dashboard would not only increase transparency and accountability, but also increases public access to relevant information regarding ARPA funds.⁹⁴ These efforts are not only to monitor adherence to the goals and objectives, but also to safeguard that those funds are reaching Rhode Islanders who were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

By establishing an office within the Governor's office with authority over the distribution, implementation, and oversight of the \$1.1 billion in ARPA funds, Rhode Island will be well positioned to address barriers and provide mid-course adjustments ensuring the effective execution of ARPA programs. In five years, Rhode Island should look back and be proud of our accomplishments from this once in a lifetime federal investment.

⁹³ COVID-19 American Rescue Plan Act Funds | Maricopa County, AZ

⁹⁴ COVID-19 American Rescue Plan Act Funds | Maricopa County, AZ

Appendix

Stakeholder Organizations and Individuals Interviewed

Rhode Island Department of Education

Sophie Tan
Elizabeth Texeira

Housing Works*

Brenda Clement*

Building Futures of RI

Andrew Cortes

Department of Labor & Training

Matthew Weldon
Sarah Blusiewicz
Lisa D'Agostino
Angelika Pelligrino

Center for Freedom & Prosperity

Mike Stenhouse

Genesis Center

Shannon Carroll

YearUp

George Nippo
Brigid Newman

Hispanic Chamber

Oscar Mejias

Local Return

Jessica David

One Neighborhood Builders

Jennifer Hawkins
Kate Bramson

Providence Foundation

Cliff Wood

Rhode Island Business Coalition

John Simmons
Melissa Travis (RI Society of CPAs)
Mark Hayward (SBA)
Al Charbonneau (RI Business Group on Health)
Grafton "Cap" Willey (CBIZ)
Cheryl Rey (Employment 2000)
Dorothy Davison (American Council of Engineering Companies)*
Liz Catucci (Northern RI Chamber)
Nicholas Oliver (RI Partnership for Home Care)
Terry Martesian
Dave Chenevert (RI Manufacturers' Assoc.)
Christopher Carlozzi (National Federation of Independent Business)
Lenette Forry-Menard
Brian Dursi (RI Marine Trades Assoc.)
Steve Lombardi (East Greenwich Chamber)
Diane Quesnelle (Energy Marketers Association of RI)
Ralph Coppola (SBA Summit)
Erin Donovan-Boyle (Newport Chamber)*

Skills for Rhode Island's Future*

Nina Pande

Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner

Commissioner Shannon Gilkey
Amy Grzybowski
Catherine McConnell

Fuerza Laboral

Heiny Maldonado
Raul Figueroa

RI Black Business Association

Lisa Ranglin

RI Hospitality Association

Dale Venturini, CEO
Mike Bryan (Renaissance Providence)
Farouk Rajab (Providence Marriott)
Thomas Riel (Providence and Warwick Convention & Visitor Center)
Sarah Bratko (Hospitality Assoc.)
Colin Geoffrey (G Hospitality)
Heather Singleton (Hospitality Assoc.)
Paul Conforti (Mills Tavern - Encore Hospitality Group)
Sam Glynn (Chomp Kitchen & Drinks)
Damian Santoro (Ladder 133)

Rhode Island College WF Dev Hub

Jenifer Giroux

Governor's Council on Disabilities

Bob Cooper

Grow Smart

Scott Wolf
John Flaherty

NAACP

James Vincent

State Council on the Arts

Randy Rosenbaum
David Beauchesne (RI Philharmonic)
Stephanie Fortunato (City of Providence Art, Culture & Tourism)
Dominique Alfandre (RISCA Board member)
Howie Sneider (The Steel Yard)
Silvermoon LaRose (Tomaquag Museum)
Gina Rodriguez-Dix (City of Providence Art, Culture & Tourism)
Todd Trebour (Director of RISCA)
Kerstin Kastetter (Chorus of Westerly)

Rhode Island Housing

Carol Ventura
Amy Rainone
Kara Lachapelle

Crossroads

Karen Santilli*
Michelle Wilcox

RI Builders' Association

John Marcantonio
Carol O'Donnell (RIBA Pres./ CRM Modular Homes)
David Caldwell (Caldwell & Johnson)
Jhonny Leyva (President Black Contractors Assoc./Heroica Construction)
Alex Mitchell (Meridian Custom Homes)
Ronald Caniglia (Stand Corporation)
William Walsh

Tomaquag Museum

Loren Spears

Amos House

Eileen Hayes
Caitlin Frumerie (Coalition to End Homelessness)
Russell Partridge (Warm Shelter - Westerly)
Michelle Brophy (BHDDH)
Laura Jaworski (House of Hope)
Karen Santilli (Crossroads)*

Housing Works*

Brenda Clement*

NeighborWorks Blackstone River Valley

Joseph Garlick

United Way

Cortney Nicolato

Kristin Brown

Kyle Bennett

Larry Warner

Housing Network

Melina Lodge

Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies

Nic Retsinas - Director Emeritus

Community College of Rhode Island

Meghan Hughes

Tekla Moquin

Kristen Albritton

Newport Chamber of Commerce

Erin Donovan-Boyle*

Rich Overmoyer (Fourth Economy Consulting)

Center for Justice

Jennifer Wood

ARISE

Chanda Womack

Executive Office of Health & Human Services*

Benjamin Shaffer

Community Care Alliance

Benjamin Lessing

RI Hospital Association

Teresa Paiva Weed

Lisa Tomasso

National Alliance on Mental Illness RI

Beth Lamarre

Substance Use & Mental Health Leadership Council

Susan Storti

John Tassoni

Becky Boss (CODAC)

Jamie Lehané (Newport MH)

Alisha Bourdeau (CODAC)

Lionel Fernandez (MAP Behavioral Health)

Joan Salhany (Gateway)

Jason Costa (Newport Mental Health)

Tiffney Davidson Parker (The Prov. Center)

Mary Dwyer (Community Care Alliance)

RI Association of Realtors

David Salvatore

Bryant Dacruz (Mott and Chance)

Phil Tedesco

Brown University/Life Span

Dr. Megan Ranney

Childhood Lead Action Project

Devra Levy

Laura Brion

Oasis Recovery and Wellness Center

James McNaulty

Charles Feldman

Leah Geminara

Latino Mental Health Network

Sandra Victorino

Still on Main

Leslie Moore

Mental Health Association of Rhode Island

Laurie-Marie Pisciotta

Center for Women and Enterprise

Doris de los Santos

Skills for Rhode Island*

Melba DePena Affigne

American Council of Engineering Companies

Dorothy Davison*

Louis Ragazzino (Wright Pierce)

Jeff Lewis (Garofalo & Associates)

Robert Wright (AECOM)

Joseph Giordano (Gordon R. Archibald, Inc.)

Office of the Health Insurance Commissioner

Patrick Tighe

Courtney Miner

Executive Office of Health & Human Services*/Behavioral Health, Developmental Disabilities, & Hospitals

Womazetta Jones

Richard Charest

Ryan Erickson

URI Small Business Development Center

Diane Fournaris

Office of the Secretary of State

Melissa Husband

Department of Administration

James Thorsen

Tomas Avila

Dorinda Keene

Roger Williams University Law School Start-up Business Clinic

Katie Ahern

Urban Ventures

Ronald Crosson

Infant Mental Health Association

Susan Dickstein

Danita Roberts

DataSpark

Kim Pierson

Ariel Neumann

Hope & Main

Lisa Raiola

**Individuals/organizations have been interviewed/participated twice*

Summary of Ideas Submitted

The ideas below were submitted to the Rhode Island Foundation by email, or via the online toolkit, for consideration as part of Make it Happen: Investing for Rhode Island's Future. To determine which topic each submission aligned with, Rhode Island Foundation team members assessed the challenge each submission was aimed to address and categorized the idea with the closest-aligning area of work. This listing was last updated on October 5, 2021.

**Indicates where respondents did not provide an answer*

Arts

Invest in space for artists in Newport	Island Moving Company
Building on the collaboration between the state Arts and Humanities Councils to provide nearly \$1 million in American Rescue Plan funds through the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities (the program is called RI Culture, Arts, and Humanities Recovery Grants or RI CHARG), continue to provide these funds over multiple years to sustain the recovery of the cultural sector and to help it thrive and improve Rhode Island into the future.	Rhode Island State Council on the Arts, Providence Department of Arts, Culture, and Tourism, arts and culture alliances throughout the state, Rhode Island Historical Society, Office of Library and Information Services, and New England Museum Association
Develop a media lab center for young people to use as a creative space	Department of Modern Culture and Media of Brown University, the Harrington School of Communication, and Media Dept. of the University of Rhode Island.
Fund documentary film-makers	*
Develop a publication that is authored, edited, and published by community residents for community residents	*
Create a memorial to remember those who passed away from COVID19	The Avenue Concept
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Extend existing unemployment benefits and supplement for at least another year, including for freelancers and gig workers - Guaranteed income for artists: \$1,500 per month for 2 years for 500 artists that self-identify - Provide significant funding boost to the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts (RISCA) to support the work of both individual artists and arts & culture organizations. - Boost funding for after-school arts education programs for young people: such as Providence Youth Arts Collaborative organizations 	*
Support the Stages of Freedom non-profit through financing the creation of the first African American Museum in RI	Rhode Island Historical Society, Newport Historical Society, Redwood Library, and Athenaeum, New Bedford Historical Society
Hire more drama teachers in schools and create partnerships between schools and theater companies	Bristol Theater and Contemporary Theater Company
Establish Development Center in Education and in the small Puerto Rican Museum of Popular Arts in Warwick, RI. Continue the legacy of teaching in the learning for the Arts Antillanas and extend fostering collaboration and respect for artists RI and Puerto Rico.	"Accion Latina RI (ALR), Abogacia, Our World Chapter School, Segue Institute for Learning, Production Alebreke with Luis Arias, The New Millenium Art Factory, Institute for Culture of Puerto Rico, Department of Tourism, Loiza, PR

Business Development

Invest in RI cooperatives by developing a community controlled office and co-working space for the public to use Fund research and expand access to worker cooperatives education and technical assistance.	Fuerza Laboral
Provide training and wrap around services for small minority and women owned businesses	SupplyRI & The Building Trades
Develop a state version of the “Restaurant Revitalization Fund” (RRF) that provides monies to hospitality businesses that were not eligible or did not receive RRF funding.	Tourism regions, Local Chambers of Commerce, Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, and RI Business Coalition
Save local news institutions	Dan Kennedy - Prof. of Journalism at Northeastern University
Invest funds in businesses that want to convert to worker-owned cooperatives	*
Earmark funds for co-op startups and worker co-ops	*
Increase tourism to Rhode Island by beginning the process of establishing a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Providence	Independence Trail Educational Foundation, Heritage Harbor Foundation, WaterFire, RIPBS, JWU, Roger Williams Memorial, and Schools and Heritage Organization
Create a fund to offer innovation grants for small technology start-ups	*
Start a DE&I Impact Fund to a) educate under-represented (BIPOC, LatinX, Women etc.) aspiring entrepreneurs about the "Entrepreneurship by Acquisition" path to wealth creation b) provide resources and equity investments for them to find businesses to acquire, negotiate terms, obtain SBA loans to complement the equity and c) provide back-office support (accounting, HR, digital marketing) to help with running the operations of the businesses that they acquire.	Rhode Island Black Business Association, RI Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Center for Women & Enterprise, Skoll Foundation, Kauffman Foundation, Brown University's

Criminal Justice

Allocate funds for reeducating police officers and remodel the prison system to focus to rehabilitation	*
Invest in establishing a voluntary non-law enforcement and right based violence prevention program that's led by law enforcement officers, survivors of domestic violence, community members and community organizations. Establishing a voluntary program will give people the opportunities to work together to come up with creative solutions that will improve the system.	Local police department, city council, state senators, Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Health Equity Zones, and Housing Authorities.
The State should pay Rhode Island residents' court debts, an investment which will break court debt-related cycles of poverty, debt, and incarceration for the 50,000 Rhode Island residents with outstanding debt; enhance family, housing, employment, and medical stability; and improve the well-being of Rhode Island's poorest and most justice-involved communities	OpenDoors RI, The Formerly Incarcerated Union, The Center for Health and Justice Transformation, Direct Action for Rights and Equality, Project Weber/RENEW, Rhode Island Public Defender's Office, Chief Justice Paul Suttell, and Rhode Island Judiciary Committee on Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Courts
Overhaul the Bureau of Criminal Identification system to display only convictions	*

Criminal Justice *Continued*

Provide additional support for community-police partnerships to expand victim support by health professionals riding along on police calls, especially where children are involved or present, offers a bridge between police officers and community members to minimize trauma and maximize the utilization of immediate resources.	*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop the first women's halfway houses in the state—three halfway houses of approximately 15 women each for women serving sentences less than three years or awaiting trial on more serious charges, where they could engage in robust supportive programs, and continue to engage with their children. - Develop three women's transitional houses for approximately 15 women each. These would be for women otherwise serving shorter sentences (such as less than six months) or awaiting trial on lesser charges. - Develop two residential treatment programs for women. 	OpenDoors RI, The Formerly Incarcerated Union, The Center for Health and Justice Transformation, Direct Action for Rights and Equality, Amos House, House of Hope, Project Weber/RENEW, National Council of Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls, Rhode Island Public Defender's Office, Department of Corrections, 'Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Disabilities, and Hospitals,' Parole Board, State Police, Superior and District Courts, and Center for Justice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Invest in technology that allows those currently incarcerated to take courses for college credit. - Invest in adult education counselors for RI's Adult Correctional Institutions - Invest in peer specialists to support people through the reentry process across the state. 	OpenDoors RI, The Formerly Incarcerated Union, The Center for Health and Justice Transformation, Direct Action for Rights and Equality, Amos House, Project Weber/RENEW, Rhode Island Public Defender's Office, Center for Justice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Purchase of a server to secure RIDOC's expanded technology access, as well as store and monitor relevant data and needed electronic logbooks. - Make needed changes to RIDOC infrastructure (drilling and wiring required in each building) for broadband/wi-fi access to be prevalent in all facilities. - Purchase equipment, licenses and software needed for RIDOC to Expand all levels of programs and services, particularly educational and workforce training. - Purchase of telemedicine terminals to Expand connections between healthcare Providers and inmates and facilitate post-release services. - Provide the staffing and licensing necessary for RIDOC's computer lab to become a functioning State testing center, and the security measures needed to Provide more regular inmate-access to laptops and other virtual learning equipment. 	CCRI, Brenda Dann-Messier senior advisor at Education Strategy Group based in Washington DC, The RI Reentry Collaborative (RRC) - Core partners of the RRC currently include Amos House, the Nonviolence Institute, the Reentry Campus Program, the Lifespan Transitions Clinic, and the Center for Health and Justice Transformation.

Direct Assistance

Develop a financial assistance program for the elderly	*
Give all tax paying legal citizens a stimulus check	*
Provide stimulus checks to the elderly	*

Address the social determinants of health, largely through direct cash assistance to individuals, families, and organizations. Address the lack of income, financial insecurity, deficit of wealth building capacity and weakness of labor as an organizing force.	*
Reparations for all the qualified low income oppressed individuals who are still suffering from their ancestors unpaid labor which kept them from advancing in America.	Jorge Elorza, Harold A Metts, and Raymond Watson
Distribute \$600 stimulus checks to working class families	*
Expand Guaranteed Income Pilot being run by Providence	ASS220, BLM RI PAC, Providence Student Union, and DARE
Scale up wealth-creating strategies for lower wage workers - so many of the workers that we called "heroes" during our health crisis are constantly on a financial cliff. Use some of this funding to create, Individual Development Accounts(IDAs) or other matched savings tools to help people develop or acquire assets would help to provide some financial stability when a crisis hits.	*
Similar to California give RI residents an immediate \$600 stimulus	*
Provide stimulus checks to all Rhode Islanders	Governor and Lt. Governor
Elderly and handicapped people are living on social security and are unable to work. They definitely could use some help.	*

Education

The purpose of this proposal is to invest \$4 million dollars (four million) from the broad 2021 stimulus funding to authorize a 3 year pilot program to establish the Rhode Island Ombudsman for Special Education, independent of the department of elementary and secondary education; to ensure that school districts throughout the state meet the minimum standards required to comply with individualized education plans for students with disabilities; to make recommendations for future investments in a full delivery of services for special needs students grades pre-K through 12; and to collect data on the delivery of services to these students.	"RI ARC, RIPIN, Parents groups from across the state. And: Representative Lauren Carson – Newport, Representative Bob Craven – North Kingstown, Representative Greg Amore – East Providence, Representative Terri Cortvriend – Portsmouth, Middletown, Representative Kathleen Fogarty – South Kingstown, Representative Barbara Ann Fenton Fung – Cranston, Representative Justine Caldwell – East Greenwich, Representative June Speakman – Warren, Bristol, Representative Susan Donovan – Bristol, Representative Jason Knight – Barrington, Bristol
Fund an ecosystem of learning that greatly increases collaboration between private and public, and nonprofit and for-profit institutions in Newport County to provide underserved middle and high school students with sustained investments in academic and social supports.	*

Education *Continued*

Expand the Rhody Squash program in public schools in Newport County.	Newport Health Equity Zone, Star Kids, and Boys & Girls Club of Newport
Develop an Ombudsman Office, independent of RIDE, modeled after The Office of The Child Advocate which, has a critical role in protecting the child's health and wellbeing under the care of the state. The Ombudsman office will be that third independent party that ALL families, parents, grandparents could call once all other advocacy attempts to resolve differences at the local and state level have failed.	BHDDH
Invest in education, training, mentoring in a different manner, develop new curriculum, establish new connections and programs with corporate, family, unions, higher education institutions and social service organizations as well as the schools. Create a curriculum shift that is put in the hands of non-traditional educators. Funding for: personnel, curriculum materials, time and effort of partners, transportation.	"Boy & Girls Club of Pawtucket
YMCA of Pawtucket	
American Soccer League"	
Ensure that civics education is taught in a way that works and engages students	*
Provide universal pre-k and affordable child care	*
Hire more teachers for smaller class sizes	*
Increase civics education in k-12 schools. Incorporate teaching tools from Teaching Tolerance, Southern Poverty Law School and Amesty International.	*
Create schools to address the issues of dyslexia through implementation of a multi-sensory, phonics based approach, for the most severely diagnosed elementary school dyslexic children in the state.	Hamilton School
Hold in-person and virtual financial workshops in each of the 31 towns and cities of Rhode Island, in public spaces of education including libraries, schools and universities.	Conexión Latina Newport, Sista Fire , Social Enterprise Greenhouse, Venture Café, Hope and Main, Beautiful Day, FabNewport, The MET, Innovate Newport
Hire qualified and independent experts to examine and implement change for public schools	FreightFarms
Create and centralize out-of-school supports by building and maintaining a governmental office to provide monetary, logistical, and other forms of support to Rhode Island families with a focus on those that are experiencing poverty	*
Upgrade schools and childcare facilities	*

Develop a \$5 million state fund, the Civics for Democracy Trust Fund, that could be administered by RIDE or a community foundation, to infuse resources specifically for civic education across all public schools and youth programming in Rhode Island. Establish an oversight committee to help administer this fund made up of community stakeholders including educators and students.	Generation Citizen, RI Humanities Council, Young Voices, ARISE, RI Center for Justice in Prov, Common Cause RI, Providence Student Union, Secretary of State Office, Latino Policy Institute, Project Citizen, RI Kids Count, and League of Women's Voters RI
Expanding wrap-around services available in schools to positively impact students and their families helps to address factors that influence attendance rates and academic success, especially in the ongoing pandemic and loss of classroom learning time.	*
Provide access to experiential civic education programs in Washington D.C. for Rhode Island college students	RIDE, Office of PostSecondary Education, RI colleges and universities
Provide access to experiential civic education programs in Washington D.C. for Rhode Island college students	RIDE, Office of PostSecondary Education, RI colleges and universities
There needs to be more after school programs for our youth, especially in South Providence	*
Invest in preschool education and provide incentives for young children to attend school	*
Create a scholarship fund to truly influence change in the education gaps affecting our community. The scholarship fund could help college students working in a variety of fields (e.g., students of color trying to become teachers in Providence public schools or minorities pursuing degrees in STEM).	*
Develop various new smaller schools throughout the state for all grade levels and for different interests, including trade schools for various purposes, schools for the arts and music, schools for different levels of intellectual capacities and promote social entrepreneurship from elementary through grade 14. Make all secondary schools and colleges free to RI residents of all ages. Mandate community service after graduation as a way to repay the state for high quality education. Regionalize all pre K-14 school districts into 5-6 regions, with access available to different opportunities in every district.	*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop RI teachers to train Start With Singing (SWS) students in Kodaly method or equivalent. Details of Kodaly method are not yet a standard part of music teacher training in RI, but can be added, or addressed through supplemental training given in state, or provided by supplemental training opportunities nearby. - Explore and develop RI opportunities to add SWS to regular curriculum in schooling. Prior studies document math and verbal skill impact in spite of 1 hour per week taken from other classroom teaching. - Explore existing and further develop RI opportunities for SWS outside of school. - To assess impact at each stage as this initiative develops. 	Prof. Mark Conley Chair of Music URI, Assoc. Prof. Audrey Cardany, Director of Music Education URI, David Neves Coordinator of Music Education URI, Emma Hookway President Rhode Island Music Education Association, Providence Public Schools, Ryan Sanders Executive Director Chorus of Westerly, Joseph Pratt Executive Director/ CEO Boys and Girls Club of Newport, Kerry Schiff Director Vartan Gregorian Elementary After School Boys and Girls Club of Providence, Randall Rosenbaum Executive Director Rhode Island Council of the Arts, and Earnest Cox Supervisor of Advanced Academics, Fine Arts, and World Languages

Environmental

Treat the upper dam pond to remove invasive species and implement a program to maintain a clear usable body of water through the installation of a filtration system to trap phosphorus from area runoff.	Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, Pawtuxet River Authority, Save The Lakes Rhode Island, Rhode Island Rivers Council, Club Jogues, Keeping Kids Fishing, Boy Scouts of America, University of Rhode Island
Develop a charging hub for electric vehicles that is free of charge for the community and where electric cars can be rented. Funding would be used to also develop an electric vehicle and electric vehicle infrastructure job training program that would complement the sites development.	One Neighborhood builders, Rhode Island Office of Energy Resources, Green Energy Consumers Alliance, PPL Corporation, Rhode Island Municipalities, Rhode Island Housing, Rhode Island DLT, and LISC
Purchase and convert the Metacomet golf property into a solar farm and community green space. Roughly 40% of the 138 acres would be developed into solar, with the remaining space serving as either woodlands or public green space to preserve nature and enhance air quality. This is expected to meet the power needs of roughly 2,200 homes.	*
Conduct a pilot study to determine the primary sources of Variable-leaf milfoil in the Sand Reservoir Dam - especially areas of densest and continuing regrowth, even after application of expensive treatments.	Save the Lakes, Town Governments, Kayak Fishing and Associations, Conservation and Land Trust Groups, and possibly the RI Rivers Council.
Utilize funds to provide community engagement and education around water quality, human uses and climate change to diverse, and underserved communities	Save The Bay, Audubon Society of Rhode Island, RI Depts. of Health and Environmental Management, and URI Cooperative Extension Water Quality Program
Fund the URI Research Foundation to build critical partnerships including diversity based community programming, build facilities, equipment and tools to properly engage with business and community partners, and create new programming that will enable the workforce and drive economic innovation regarding the Blue Economy.	"Inspire Environmental, Moran Shipping, Raytheon, Fourth Economy, 401 Tech Bridge, Aretec Incorporated, Naval Undersea Warfare Center, Rite Solutions, Matunuck Oyster Bar, 11th Hour Racing, Brown University, Roger Williams, URI School of Oceanography, Polaris MEP, Progresso Latino, Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, CCRI, and Skills for Rhode Island's Future
Direct fed funds to the RI Clean Water Funds, for use as grants, not loans for municipalities to transition from urban drainage to green infrastructure stormwater management by 1) updating local regulations to implement Low Impact Development techniques as they required to do under the DEM stormwater rules and MS4 permit; 2) retrofitting municipal properties and drainage systems using green infrastructure to reduce polluted runoff and create more livable cities and villages, and 3) provide job training for design, installation and maintenance of green infrastructure.	RI Chapter American Planning Association, Providence Stormwater Innovation Center, and RI Green Infrastructure Coalition

Funds should be set aside to support the development and implementation of robust wastewater management programs for communities that rely on septic systems, that collaborate state-wide to support the adoption of effective wastewater treatment solutions. Funds should support database creation, management and sharing among communities to document septic system type, age, geographical coordinates, maintenance and repair/replacement histories to help inform community resilience planning efforts as our state grapples with a changing climate.	RI Dept. of Health, RI Dept. of Environmental Managements, Towns & Municipalities, and URI Cooperative Extension
Invest in green infrastructure projects to reduce the cost of living for Rhode Islanders	*
Implement a composting program and restore oyster populations	Clean Ocean Access, URI Master Gardeners, The Nature Conservancy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One-time investments in energy savings where savings more than cover any future maintenance costs - solar on roofs, insulation etc. - Smaller scale environmental programs that focus on areas with discernable savings/economic value - sewer updates, bay-cleaning/shore protecting oyster beds, kelp farm start-ups etc. 	Kleo Taliadouros of Ameresco and Wenley Ferguson of Save the Bay
Reclaim materials from the waste stream and re-engineer them to produce value added products for sale to end users. A major focus will be putting people to work in income-generating entrepreneurial economies.	Southside Cultural Center of Rhode Island, Rhode Island State Council of Churches, Stop Wasting Abandoned Properties (SWAP), and the Women's Business League Providence Chapter.
Operate all state buildings and facilities on renewable energy.	National Grid
Implement the Modern Intercity Rail Network proposed by TransitMatters in 2018 to address climate impact in the transportation sector.	*
Ensure schools teach environmental, climate, and sustainable principles and concepts	Rhode Island Environmental Education Association
Provide financial assistance to help people clean up malfunctioning septic/cesspool systems to clean the bay and provide solar panels for homes.	*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Invest in thorium nuclear reactors with Plutonium safety drains in event of overheating event for electricity and heat production; far more effective than solar farms or wind farms, eliminates carbon footprint of electricity usage and could potentially supply all of New England - Develop heated solar panel roads (in conjunction with nuclear electric grid) to move away from salt and plows which increase infrastructure repair costs long-term and pollute watersheds 	*

Food Insecurity

Triple the number of farms in RI	Food Policy Council, RI Association of Land Trusts, Infrastructure Bank
Invest in public emergency food infrastructure and address systemic disenfranchisement of BIPOC farmers from accessing public resources.	Hope's Harvest
Fund community based indoor agriculture	*
Use the American Rescue Plan dollars to fund a statewide Retail SNAP Incentive Program.	*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase rural/urban land access for food producers - Increase the # of urban gardens and farms to contribute to food security and economic mobility for people in the urban core. - Support small & beginning farmers through LASA Grant Program - Increase seafood processing capacity for commercial fishing industry - Grow institutional markets for local food, specifically farm-to-school 	Agricultural Land Preservation Commission, Southside Community Land Trust, Aquidneck Community Table, RI DEM, RI Food Policy Council, RI Seafood Marketing Collaborative, Commercial Fisheries Center of RI, Eating with the Ecosystem, Elisha Project, Women's Refugee Center, SunRise Forever, Inc., George Wiley Center, Hope's Harvest RI, Farm Fresh RI, Director of Food Strategy (Commerce RI, Supply RI), RI DHS, SNAP-Ed, SNAP Outreach, RIDE, participating farmers, fishers, food processors, and other participating food industry members.
Expand "Produce in the Parks." A program where subscribers are given a box of locally sourced vegetables. Full paying subscribers offset the cost of food for low-income subscribers	Family Services of RI, AmeriCorps volunteers, United Way of RI, PVD Parks Dept, PVD Recreation Department, Park Friend groups, Recreation Member Groups, City Council, and local farmers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Invest in programs to help farmers, people, and orgs to purchase urban and rural land and develop it for farms and gardens. - Investment in food processing facilities like healthy food hubs, commercial kitchens, cold storage at schools and food pantries so local farmers and others can process and fresh nutritional food in food deserts 	*
Reinvent Rhode Island's agriculture to be community-based, focusing on sustainable agriculture practices such as cycling complementary crops, avoiding monocrop, and culturing soil through less tillage and pesticide.	*
Build inner-city farms in retired lots to combat food deserts. Encourage residents to move away from lawncare into 'natural lawns' or self-sustaining farming; in other words, reconstruct the commons and repopulate a viable peasantry out of the currently unemployed.	*

Healthcare

Establish a robust medical respite program that can support individuals who are homeless or unstably housed during their recovery from illness or injury.

In response to this long-recognized yet persistent problem in Rhode Island, a group of ‘health and housing’ stakeholders started convening in February to discuss the concept of medical respite care. From the very first conversation, there was unanimous agreement that the time is now to craft a solution, even as we all continued to weather the demands of the pandemic as health and social service providers. So, we continued to widen the circles of conversation to engage additional stakeholders. Over a few short months, a non-exclusive group of stakeholders (listed as potential partners) have come together to design a long-term solution while also agreeing to launch a small pilot. Our group is currently planning an imminent medical respite pilot utilizing five motel/hotel rooms provided by the Rhode Island Coalition to End Homelessness that will last until September 30, 2021 (with a possibility of extension).

We recommend that ARPA stimulus funding be used to build on the pilot that is preparing to launch, facilitating program sustainability and program enhancements like 1) deeper integration of behavioral health services; 2) more robust care coordination, case management, and health home education; and 3) stronger connections to post-discharge housing placements including permanent supportive housing.

Specifically, ARPA funding can be used for additional bed capacity and/or build-out of new respite sites, dedicated staffing, standardized data collection systems across hospitals, and ongoing program evaluation. This is a complex and resource-intensive undertaking. Yet, such a unit would provide a much-needed medical respite option for individuals who cannot be served in a motel/hotel-based program, including those who require IV therapy, oxygen therapy, and/or pharmaceutical management.

Lifespan, Blue Cross Blue Shield RI, LISC, Crossroads, Providence Housing Authority, Integra, RI Coalition to End Homelessness, Providence Community Health Center, Horizon Health Care Partners, House of Hope, BHDDH, and Newport Mental Health

Increase the hourly rate of home healthcare providers

RI Partnership for Home Care

Invest in pediatric medical homes to support new parents and young children.

RIDOH, RI American Academy of Pediatrics, RIDE, RI Parent Information Network, Family Services RI, and the RI Association for Infant Mental Health

Provide access to dental care for older adults and adults with disabilities

RIDOH Dental Director, Long Term Care Coordinating Council Oral Health Subcommittee, CCRI Dental Program, RI Oral Health Coalition

Create outdoor space designated for people living with dementia

URI Master Gardeners and the Alzheimers Association

Healthcare *Continued*

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Analyze processes for eligibility for long term Home care - OHA, DHS and care Coordination Providers collaborate to redesign and streamline - Reimagine skilled Nursing facility physical plants and Develop financing capacity for conversion to private rooms and “Greenhouse” type environments - Improve, streamline process for intellectual or developmental disability funding decisions - Expand capacity of Mental Health Psychiatric Rehabilitative Residential programs - Create new Residential option for older adults, adults with physical disabilities who also struggle with behavioral Health challenges 	<p>Long Term Care Coordinating Council, Age-Friendly RI, URI's Geriatric Education Center, RIC's Health Care Management program, Brown University's School of Public Health, RI Elder Mental Health and Addiction Coalition, the Community Provider Network of RI, Leading Age RI, RI Health Care Association, RI's Partnership for HomeCare, and the Senior Agenda Coalition</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support newly emerging model of specialized skilled Nursing facility unit for residents with significant behavioral Health challenges - Develop specialized behavioral Health supports for all congregate care residents - Improve access to preventative care including prescription safety, fall prevention - Increase access to Community Health Workers and Peer Recovery Specialists 	<p>Long Term Care Coordinating Council, Age-Friendly RI, URI's Geriatric Education Center, RIC's Health Care Management program, Brown University's School of Public Health, RI Elder Mental Health and Addiction Coalition, the Community Provider Network of RI, Leading Age RI, RI Health Care Association, RI's Partnership for HomeCare, and the Senior Agenda Coalition</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase Support, and coordinated Support, to family caregivers of older adults and adults with disabilities - Engage high level stakeholder group to ensure cross departmental alignment for reform efforts are sustained - Review efforts in other states to Develop a social insurance program to help with cost of long term care (ex. State of WA) - streamline licensing and certification processes 	<p>Long Term Care Coordinating Council, Age-Friendly RI, URI's Geriatric Education Center, RIC's Health Care Management program, Brown University's School of Public Health, RI Elder Mental Health and Addiction Coalition, the Community Provider Network of RI, Leading Age RI, RI Health Care Association, RI's Partnership for HomeCare, and the Senior Agenda Coalition</p>
<p>Adjust congregate long-term care capacity to better meet demand, improve quality and reduce transmission of infectious disease.</p>	<p>Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, Executive Office of Health and Human Services, HUD, RIDOH, and National Grid</p>
<p>Establish a self-healing community. Create cohorts of 25 master trainers/coaches, coming from community, business, and faith-based organizations as well as town and school governments. These trainers and coaches will expand understanding of adverse childhood experiences throughout the community and support the development of community-based solutions that create resilience.</p>	<p>*</p>
<p>Reform the healthcare system, so departments are not competing for funding</p>	<p>*</p>
<p>Create affordable year-round facilities for every age range to address recreation and exercise needs</p>	<p>YMCA</p>

Provide an alternative response to 911 calls for non-violent behavioral health crises based on the Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets model in Eugene, OR. Vans staffed with a peer counselor and an EMT respond to calls for Behavioral Health Crises. These providers then resolve the issue, refer or request back up from higher level clinicians (via zoom or in person) or transport the patient. Police are not the primary responder but they are kept informed and used as required.	Horizon Healthcare Partners, Newport County Mental Health, BH Link. Parent Support Network, and HEAL RI - a grassroots community group that grew out of training in the CAHOOTS method that was provided January of 2021.
Provide free dental and vision care for uninsured and underinsured Rhode Islanders	Remote Area Medical, John Hope Settlement House, Clinica Esperanza, The Providence Center, RI Free Clinic, Providence Mayor's Office
Please consider investing in mental health treatment for all Rhode Islanders by establishing better pay rates for services provided by workers especially master's level clinicians with licenses (LICSW, LMHC).	*
Get more funds for healing therapy programs into Hasbro. There needs to be funding for musicians, artists, dance/ movement and various therapy providers to spend many more hours with the children. There also needs to be out patient programs for those children who are painfully distressed, but not sick enough to require hospitalization.	Arts at Lifespan, RI Arts in Health Network, Bradley Hospital
Establish, implement, and fund an Olmstead Plan.	*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop stratification guidelines based upon individual need as it relates to an array of services, including but not limited to, therapeutic foster care, group homes, residential treatment centers, substance use disorder treatment centers, transitional housing, supportive housing, recovery housing, assisted living facilities, skilled nursing facilities, etc. as well as support, medical and/or behavioral health services. - Identify partners and establish a Committee/Task Force to: discuss the development of a comprehensive continuum of care for individuals/families in need of varying levels of care and housing; examine network adequacy to ensure that providers and services that are needed are available; explore funding opportunities to design innovative programming that builds upon existing resources and/or programs; examine payment mechanisms available to determine if revisions can be made to provide reimbursement for pilot/ new programming/support existing programming; examine state-wide policies that create barriers to sustainability of successful programming and provide recommendations for revisions/modifications; provide system wide oversight of programming pertaining to housing; and monitor available data and provide recommendations. 	*
Invest in psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy and trauma reduction.	Boston Psychedelic Research Group

Healthcare *Continued*

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Award a minimum of 4 weeks yearly vacation for state health care workers. Award health care workers bonus vacation for those who worked through pandemic. - Consider part time work weeks for staff at the RI Veteran's home. - Provide more educational and leadership opportunities for Health Care Workers. Allow these opportunities to be accessed to workers working "Off shift." - Please consider immediate action in hiring and retaining Health Care Workers as they are currently working understaffed and we are not done with COVID yet. 	United Nurses & Allied Professionals
Expand family home visiting to be universal in Rhode Island, specifically the First Connections program.	*
Recommend repeating the successful Pediatric Primary Care Relief program under CARES Act funding to support pediatricians in doing enhanced outreach and sustaining capacity to catch children back up with vaccines, lead screens, and referrals (such as to Early Intervention).	RI American Academy of Pediatrics
Invest in the network of Early Intervention providers to support them in stabilizing the workforce, increasing outreach to families, and increasing retention of families.	*
Provide therapeutic and peer based counseling, alternative wellness services, and innovative childcare options for disabled parents and their children in RI	*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organize "Strong Roots RI" training on early relational health principles and practices - Organize trainings in Diagnostic Classification of Mental Health and Developmental Disorders of Infancy and Early Childhood - Organize provision of reflective consultation for providers - Develop a statewide registry of infant/early childhood mental health providers 	RI Kids Count, RI State Department, Alliance for the Advancement of Infant Mental Health

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Solidify a statewide insurance-blind, “no wrong door” approach for patients and families with HRSNs, and continue to strengthen community-clinical partnerships to meet challenges during COVID and beyond - Advance innovative work supporting high risk children and families - Build and demonstrate the value of further connectivity between pediatric primary care, schools, and other important community resources - Assess gaps and expand statewide partnerships to ensure that all Rhode Islanders have access to CHT services - Deepen and spread engagement with the EOHHS sponsored Rhode to Equity (R2E) and increase collaboration with health plans, hospitals, and Health Equity Zones (HEZs) - Pay people with lived experience (PLEs) to actively participate in program design - Work closely with RIDOH, Medicaid, and multiple stakeholders to reduce duplication of services and measure outcomes - Improve use of health IT to promote health system/ community integration and reduce administrative burden 	<p>*</p>
<p>Fund the implementation of the harm reduction center legislation that was passed into law in RI.</p>	<p>The Center for Health and Justice Transformation, Open Doors, the Attorney General's office, DARE, the Governor's Overdose Task Force Racial Equity Working Group, and many others.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Replace the 100,000+ lead service lines identified in RI by the federal Safe Drinking Water Information System & US Govt Accountability Office. - Expand existing lead abatement programs to fix hazards in soil, dust & paint - Boost enforcement capacity - proactive rental inspections: Increased funding for Code & legal staffing + resources boosts ability of cities, ensures rental unit safety prior to complaint or lead poisoning. Increased staff enables them to routinely inspect properties. 	<p>Childhood Lead Action Project, RIDOH, City of PVD Lead Safe Providence Program, City of Woonsocket Lead Hazard Reduction Program, RI Housing Lead Safe Homes Program, RI Center for Justice, RI Legal Services, Rhode Island Public Utilities Commission, and Housing Works RI at Roger Williams University</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support RI's regional community-based Family Care Community Partnerships (FCCP) providers to work with public schools to expand mental health services available to youth - Expand the FCCPs work with RI's juvenile hearing boards (JHB) to provide mental health services for at risk arrested youth - Expand the resources for these JHB community diversion programs to provide coordinators and the ability to fund services where youth need them - Expand the availability of after school programs so that every child who wants to participate, can. 	<p>RI Center for Justice, Brown University Watson Institute, DCYF, Nonviolence Institute, Juvenile Hearing Boards, Dept. of Health and Human Services</p>

Healthcare *Continued*

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Educational program for healthcare providers and non-clinical staff about engaging with patients who are deaf or hard-of-hearing, including but not limited to: (a) appropriate and effective communication, (b) alternative modes of communication (e.g., written, interpreting, real-time captioning), (c) providers' responsibility under the Americans with Disabilities Act and other applicable laws and regulations - There are many available real-time captioning technologies available now. For in-person encounters: a tablet such as an iPad could be provided to healthcare providers and have a real-time captioning app on it that could be used during deaf or hard-of-hearing patient encounters. 	*
Reform the Department of Children, Youth & Families once and for all by modeling Rhode Island after a state that has the best outcome for children it serves and including ensuring safe-staffing by implementing all recommendations of every Child Advocate Fatality report over the last twenty years and fully accrediting DCYF by the Council of Accreditation.	Child Advocate, House and Senate Oversight Sight Committees

Housing

Develop a shelter for youth	Dorcas/International Institute, RI Housing, The Diocese of Providence, and a Financial Institution that could help with the fiscal planning and accountability.
Provide housing for victims of hate crimes and funding for advocates	*
Repurpose abandoned and/or empty spaces for affordable housing.	Woonsocket Neighborhood Development Corporation
Convert McCoy Stadium to a homeless and social service center	RI Coalition for the Homeless
Provide long and short term housing options and shelters	RI Coalition for the Homeless
Create affordable housing options for moderate and middle income families unable to purchase homes and provide rent relief.	*
Invest in more efficient buildings that exceed required code	*
Invest in municipal housing authorities and the Narragansett Tribal Council to support maintenance, upgrades, and subsidized housing	RIDOT & MDOT

Invest in prefabricated housing units	*
Develop housing for transition age youth	The State Department of Administration and DCAMM
Invest in shelter for LGBTQ+ youth	*
Invest in preservation and creation of affordable housing	*
Invest in building multifamily affordable housing where the land is held in community land trusts.	Mayor of Providence, Pawtucket, Central Falls, Woonsocket
<p>- Community Land Trust Acquisition Fund: Create a fund to purchase land from private developers building single-family homes. Price paid for land would be the difference between full market value of house and the sale price to sell the home to a less than 80% AMI buyer. The land would be placed in a community land trust and leased back to the homebuyer. Resale formula would offer appreciating shared equity (i.e., after 5 years, sell to a 100% AMI buyer; after 10 years, sell to a 120% AMI buyer, etc.).</p> <p>- Community-Owned Property Act & Housing Accelerator Fund: Introduce legislation or policies (at state and/or municipal level) that require giving community development corporations (CDC) right of first refusal to purchase multi-family (5 units and more) properties. Use funding to seed a low-interest, 100% LTV bridge financing to acquire multi-family properties acquired via the Community-Owned Property Act.</p> <p>-Neighborhood Investment Trust: Provide seed funding to launch up to 10 place-based community investment funds. See excellent report produced by the Urban Institute, December 2020 “New Models for Community Shareholding: Equity Investing in Neighborhood Real Estate Investment Trusts” by Brett Theodos and Leiha Edmonds.</p>	Central Providence Health Equity Zone, Central Providence Opportunities - ONE Neighborhood Builders
Increase homeownership rates by allowing timely rent payments to be reflected in credit scores maintained by the credit bureaus.	*
Allocate funds to seed a program in which currently homeless individuals, are provided the professional and technical support and training necessary to acquire, rehabilitate, own and operate vacant, under-utilized, or publicly owned land and buildings.	House of Hope CDC, RI Homeless Advocacy Project, The RI Coalition to End Homelessness, DARE, PrYSM, SistaFire, George Wiley, ARISE, Fuerza Laboral, and AMOR
Working low income mother's should get either a monthly income to help with rent or get help with low income housing	*
Invest heavily in housing (renovations, construction, increased voucher availability, etc.)	BLM RI PAC, Dare, Amos House, Open Door Health, and Dorcas

Housing *Continued*

Purchase ready to move in property for people 16-24 at low/no cost rent based on income, work with human service agencies around Rhode Island to ensure health care and emergency services can be provided to those in need. Additional funding can be used to offset the cost of those living in the house who have no means of income.	Sojourner House, AS220, and Project Webber Renew
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop and implement plans (including an Olmstead Plan) that address housing issues for our most vulnerable populations like seniors, individuals with physical and developmental disabilities and our homeless population. - Use funding to capitalize a real estate fund to acquire property that can be land banked for development and sale to individual buyers or developers. - Create career paths in the housing and construction and building trades specifically targeting individuals who currently reside in affordable or public housing. 	*
Invest in permanent supportive housing for people getting out of prison who will be homeless and have no diversion options.	RI Coalition to End Homelessness, Transitions Clinic care team, House of Hope, Amos House, and Open Doors RI.
Leverage \$5M to fund affordable housing and supportive services for individuals served through the Rhode Island Pay for Success project. These individuals would be Rhode Islanders experiencing chronic homelessness who are also the top 125 highest utilizers of emergency services such as emergency shelter, hospital emergency room, and correctional facilities.	*
Repurpose State properties to create housing opportunities staffed with teams to provide personalized attention, mentoring, coaching and access to education, apprenticeship programs, employment and other types of opportunities, basic life skills, supportive services, behavioral health services, etc.	*
Provide housing assistance for seniors	*
Use a portion of the federal funding to convert old mill buildings into affordable housing - perhaps in public/private partnerships. Also fund a prototype conversion of an underused mall into residential space.	*
Create affordable housing and a safe space for LGBTQ+ community members	*
Provide housing and utility assistance for lower-income people and households in danger of foreclosure	Health Equity Zones

<p>Create a low-rise senior village on the McCoy campus, complete with medical center, public spaces, social services, fitness, grocery, pharmacy. Incentivize seniors now residing in downtown towers to relocate, and provide a renovation fund to induce private owners to renovate the high rises for a younger population, families and newcomers to the city.</p>	<p>*</p>
<p>Create more affordable housing, particularly for persons who are homeless and/or extremely low income (at or below 30% of area median income, \$20,150.10) to address Rhode Island's homeless and housing crisis. To solve this crisis we need a variety of solutions and housing types, including but not limited to permanent supportive housing, recovery housing, housing for persons fleeing domestic violence, housing for persons with mental health issues, and so on.</p>	<p>Rhode Island Continuum of Care</p>
<p>Purchase a plot of land and build small one or two room homes for homeless veterans to help them get on their feet.</p>	<p>Wounded Warrior Foundation</p>
<p>Remove Access Barriers and Promoting Housing Stability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create a statewide pre-filing eviction diversion program with funding for mediation and legal services for tenants, housing counseling, rental assistance to cure arrearages, and support for small landlords to navigate rental assistance - Build on the infrastructure of Rent Relief Rland establish a permanent statewide emergency rent and utility assistance fund to help low and moderate income families with short-term crises (that are not necessarily COVID related) remain stably housed - Bolster funding for housing vouchers and rental subsidy to bridge the gap in rental affordability for the lowest income households - Invest in the coordination of services among providers, and with housing development partners such as property managers to address gaps between finding and retaining stable housing for individuals and families who benefit from supportive services - Fund additional housing navigation and stabilization services targeted to support people with mental health and substance use issues, criminal legal system involvement, and survivors of domestic violence - Establish a landlord risk mitigation fund for landlords renting to people exiting homelessness that would offset potential operational and physical costs in order to expand access to available housing units and promote partnership between landlords and service providers 	<p>*</p>

Housing *Continued*

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Invest in the state's newly created Housing Production Fund to develop and preserve affordable homes, targeting investments to households below 50% AMI - Establish a fund to support the acquisition of land and existing property (including multifamily housing, commercial buildings and abandoned and foreclosed properties) for housing development - Capitalize a fund to help developers convert existing commercial properties or temporary shelter locations (e.g., hotels, nursing homes, schools, office buildings) into long-term affordable and mixed-income residential housing - Set up a fund to assist affordable developers with predevelopment costs 	*
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Incentivize the construction of Accessory Dwelling Units - Create a Fund for down-payment assistance and closing costs to Support homeownership among Black, Indigenous and people of color and first generation buyers - Invest in incentives and technical assistance to Support cities and towns in revising Land use, zoning and other policies to Develop more low and moderate income housing in their communities and to revitalize villages and downtown areas - Invest in expanding, preserving and rehabilitating existing long-term affordable housing stock, including public housing 	*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Capitalize a robust statewide Home repair Fund for low and moderate income households and small landlords to Support healthy housing and aging-in-place - Create a dedicated Fund for Home weatherization and energy efficiency upgrades, prioritizing multi-family homes - Invest in Rhode Island's drinking water infrastructure, prioritizing replacement of Residential lead service lines 	*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Infuse funds to existing State and municipal lead hazard reduction financial assistance programs for property owners - Invest in job Training to Build capacity of building code and Home inspectors - Establish a statewide rental registry program that would require property owners to certify private market rental Units meet suitable Health and safety standards 	*

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide an infusion of funding to the existing State municipal infrastructure Grant program to enable cities and towns to utilize the program to Make infrastructure upgrades to Support housing development - Invest in expanding broadband access and free wi-fi networks to communities in Qualified Census Tracts and those that have been disproportionately impacted by COVID 	*
Develop a community center to provide people access to housing resource specialists, medical providers, and wellness activities	*
Create a tiny home village	*
Renovate the "Superman Building" into mixed income housing	City of Providence & State of Rhode Island
Incentivize RI Hospital to build a parking structure and turn most asphalt lots into green space or mixed income housing. Same for underutilized parking spaces in downtown Providence.	Lifespan, South Providence Neighborhood Association, West Elmwood Housing, One Neighborhood Builders.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create a master plan to provide small clusters of quality moderately priced housing offering communal benefits (nature reserves, recreation, entertainment, shopping, educational opportunities, etc.). - Put together a team of representatives from every RI community, representing all ages and types, and promote exchanges for experiences, ideas, and strategies to create more cohesion and understanding of the needs of all people across the state. 	*

Infrastructure

Build a performance/concert venue to compete with Hartford, Foxwoods, Mohegan, XFinity, or Boston's TD Garden.	*
Improve infrastructure in marginalized communities. This includes improving roads, sidewalks, parks, community centers, schools; free WIFI access; and addressing blighted properties.	RIDOT, Providence Community Development Office, Neighborhood community centers
Assist the City of East Providence or the State of RI to acquire the former Metacomet Country Club (500 Veterans Parkway, East Providence) to turn into a state park. It is 138 acres of greenspace.	Keep Metacomet Green, The Nature Conservancy, RIDEM, RI Coastal Resource Management Council
Improve all parks and state beaches	*

Infrastructure *Continued*

Renovate the Industrial National Bank building, improve the hurricane barrier, or develop a high speed train system in Providence	*
Improve and modernize Rogers High School	Community Members; School Committee; School Staff; Superintendent; City Staff; City Council; Elected State Officials; New Rogers High School Building Consultants and Contractors
Build new and renovate current community centers that are open seven days a week and offer broadband technology.	The Health Equity Zones across the state
Partner with NBC and expand upon the \$1.5B CSO tunnel underway designed to meet the overflow demands that face the city now. The combined sewer piping under the downtown streets that bring the flow to the new tunnel, are at capacity now and will not support the 1000+ new units around the transit hub. Solving one problem, also solves the city's need for green infrastructure for a connected storm water management system. Pawtucket's high level of paved, hardscape streets and lots from the transit hub to the river, would be replaced with permeable surfaces, including digging up Main Street to make a "Complete Street", adding desirable public, open spaces, trees, bikeways along the route from the commuter rail station to the riverfront.	"Collette Travel
Hasbro	
RI Infrastructure Bank	
Narragansett Bay Commission"	
Ensure neighborhood residents benefit from local infrastructure improvements	*
Improve roads on I-95	Sojourner House, Project Weber-Renew, Thundermist, TGI Network, Youth Pride and House of Hope.
Connect Allen's Ave to downtown	PASA
Invest in the Armory located in the West End neighborhood in Providence	*
Invest in individuals to maintain infrastructure	*
Repair and replace infrastructure	*
Establish a state program for green and complete streets similar to Massachusetts' complete streets program	Tri-State Transportation Campaign, Grow Smart Rhode Island, American Planning Association - Rhode Island Chapter, RIDOT, RIDEM
Fix and monitor roads	*

Renovate elderly/disabled assisted living facilities	*
Fix RI Roads	RI DOT, General Assembly, Governor's Office
Utilize funds to renovate school buildings and purchase new firetrucks and ambulances.	*
Transform the vacant land surrounding Saint Joseph's Hospital into an indoor/outdoor community recreation facility.	City of Providence Parks Department, Planning and Development, Trust for Public Land, Elmwood Neighborhood Association, S. Providence Neighborhood Association, South Providence Cultural Center, Providence Revolving Fund, Southside Community Land Trust.
Technology and Innovation - Investment in monitoring devices and efficient methods of delivering services - Investment in home and community-based organizations to sustain newest technology and innovative practices of care support and treatment methods (much like was done for Primary Care/CTE/EHR)	*
- Rehab and design public school structures to Make them comfortable and suitable for learning and innovation. - Plant trees throughout overlooked neighborhoods without ample trees or green space. Lower temps of our poorest urban neighborhoods. - Fund Providence Community Libraries and underfunded Libraries throughout the state.	RIDE, PVD Streets Coalition, Providence Planning, Providence Public Library, Providence Community Library
Invest in cyber vulnerabilities in RI	RI League of Cities and Towns
- Develop and promote "live-in" volunteer fire stations - Develop statewide incentives to provide financial relief for volunteers - Inject funds into the departments struggling with adequate funding	Cities and Towns Leadership

Misc.

Address domestic violence in Central Falls. Expand the initial work of the Domestic Violence Task Force in 4 important ways: first, to include the City of Pawtucket and its police and prosecution teams so that nearly 100,000 Rhode Islanders would be beneficiaries; Second, to include the Attorney General's office so that felony domestic violence cases could also be tracked and included; Third, to include a community education component on the U-Visa which allows undocumented immigrants to report a crime such as domestic violence and be safe from deportation and have a path towards legalization; Fourth, to make the law enforcement advocate, who currently covers 4 communities in each 5 day work week, a full-time position covering just Central Falls and Pawtucket.	City of Central Falls, City of Pawtucket, CF Police Department, Pawtucket Police Department, Blackstone Valley Advocacy Center, Day One, the Central Falls School District, the Pawtucket School Department, the Center for Justice, the Office of the Attorney General, SOAR Sisters Overcoming Abusive Relationships
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Misc. *Continued*

Put up 10 million in each city and towns pension plan to shore up the unfunded liability	*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Statewide website for all state and local permit applications. Local authorities would review and process the applications same as they currently do, but a single platform statewide streamlines processes - Self insurance - move all government employees into a single self-insured healthcare plan. Upfront cost is large, long term savings is huge. After stabilizing the government employee program it can be scaled by offering it to all Rhode Islanders 	Heather Kilkenny, former Director of City of Providence Licensing and Martin Otto of Heb Grocery Co LP
Promote and invest in programs that spotlight intergenerational volunteerism in support of older adults to help them remain healthy, connected, and able to live independently at home.	Office of Healthy Aging, state Long Term Care Coordinating Council, the Executive Office of Health and Human Resources, Tufts Health Plan Foundation, Rhode Island Foundation, Blue Cross and Blue Shield, AARP, Age Friendly Rhode Island, Senior Agenda Coalition, senior centers, community centers, SAGE, communities of faith, community health centers, Health Equity Zones, URI's SNAP and SNAP Ed, Meals on Wheels and The Village Common of RI.
Replenish the pension fund	*
Build an amusement park for the kids and family.	*
Redesign gaming controllers for the disabled	Able Gamers, Xbox One, Sony Playstation, Hasbro Hospital
Re-establish town and city centers into vibrant colorful safe places with more open spaces, parks, colorful murals, sculptures and greenery within close proximity to schools and retail vendors.	*
Re-establish town and city centers into vibrant colorful safe places with more open spaces, parks, colorful murals, sculptures and greenery within close proximity to schools and retail vendors.	*
Replenish Rhode Island Unemployment Insurance	*

Transit

Provide additional Rapid Transit routes and promote a free all electric DownCity Circulator shuttle	GrowSmart RI, RIPTA, Providence Dept. of Planning & Development
Improve transit in underserved areas such as Northern RI	*
Create a public transportation system with commuter travel lines directly to URI	*

Utilize electric vehicles as a flexible supplement to public buses	*
Use funds to implement the RI Bicycle Mobility Plan	Paths to Progress Coalition, RI Statewide Planning, the Office of the Governor, and the RI Department of Transportation.
Implement the Bicycle Mobility Plan	Paths to Progress, Providence Streets Coalition, the East Coast Greenway, Rails to Trails Conservancy, Grow Smart Rhode Island, the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, and the Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council
Improve the public transportation system with new buses, app that can live time update travelers, and most importantly, more routes that don't all just go into Kennedy plaza	RIDOT and Army Corps of Engineers
Develop electric trolley buses that are implemented in intra-city circuits in each area of the Providence metropolitan area, with inter-city electric rail connecting the Providence metropolitan areas to each other and the whole area to rural Rhode Island.	*
Invest in transportation and recreation infrastructure that will complete a connected network of multi-use trails from north, metro Providence, east, and west across Rhode Island, and the East Coast Greenway in the state.	Paths to Progress, Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council, Bike Tiverton, Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, Rhode Island Bicycle Coalition, Providence Streets Coalition, City of Providence, Bike Newport, Keep Blackstone Valley Beautiful, Grow Smart RI, South County Bike Path, Teresa Tanzi - RI State Representative, RIDEM, RIDOT
Finance the develop of the Conant Thread	*
Strengthen role with MBTA to increase regional train activity and the transition to electrification.	RIDOT

Workforce Development

Establish a fund for DACA students to attend college or trade schools and a grant program for students struggling to pay for college	Dorcas International, DCYF, RIDE, Department of Work Force Development, Institutions of Higher Education, Trade Organizations, Community agencies and servicer/agency that could originate and service these programs.
There should be a substantial investment must be made in improving our workforce infrastructure, with a specific focus on affordable housing, access to reliable and affordable childcare and access to adequate transportation. There also needs to be continued investment in workforce developing training, such as the Real Jobs program.	
Increase the wages of CNAs, provide free training contingent on continued employment in RI, and provide free childcare	*

Workforce Development *Continued*

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Living wages for all direct care staff, Home Health Aides, Personal care Attendants, Certified Nursing Assistants - Innovative benefits – childcare, education, etc - Training opportunities - easily available with open access - Review scope of practice so staff can function at highest levels. - Develop improved data system for monitoring staffing needs, wait lists, salary info - Continue No Wrong Door effort to promote badly needed outreach and education about long term care options - Improve reimbursement for case management - Restructure Medicaid rates to adequately reimburse primary care, behavioral healthcare, dental and other specialty care 	<p>Long Term Care Coordinating Council, Age-Friendly RI, URI's Geriatric Education Center, RIC's Health Care Management program, Brown University's School of Public Health, RI Elder Mental Health and Addiction Coalition, the Community Provider Network of RI, Leading Age RI, RI Health Care Association, RI's Partnership for HomeCare, and the Senior Agenda Coalition</p>
Offer free classes for an associates degree in nursing	CCRI/URI/RIC schools of Nursing and all hospitals or nursing facilities
Invest in workforce developmet programs through direct investments in companies	DLT, Commerce RI, RI Office of Innovation
<p>Establish hubs throughout RI in our urban core and extremely rural areas that offer free tech and internet access to community members, resources to find employment, along with **systemic support** for individuals and families in need. Systemic support could include things like housing, mailing address and phone number for job applications, access to business and business casual attire, daycare for working parents, monetary funds or stipends for supporting individuals and families while they look for work (not everyone qualifies for unemployment benefits and even if they do it's not always enough), counselors who can work with people dealing with abuse, addiction, and depression, support for individuals interested in pursuing learning (whether it be sharing job training programs available in the state or info on enrolling in school). Having a centralized place that can support and redirect people as needed– and most importantly, that is sustainable for the communities it's in, will allow for economic mobility of those most in need.</p>	*
Create a center for spanish speaking individuals that offer access to social services and childcare	*

Provide supporting grants to organizations creating local jobs in green stormwater infrastructure installation and maintenance, tree care, and composting - administered through DEM, DOH, RI Infrastructure Bank, and/or other oversight entity, including providing funding for infrastructure and equipment purchases, which is more difficult to come by for nonprofit entities	RI Green Infrastructure Coalition, Zero Waste Providence, Providence Office of Sustainability, Open Doors, Garden Time, Building Futures, Children's Friend, Progreso Latino - these are all partners that we collaborate with already on our job training program. The Providence Parks Department and Forestry Division, Providence Neighborhood Planting Program (PNPP) , West Elmwood Housing Development Corporation
Transitional housing & job training programs for convicted felons	*
Summer jobs for providence youth	*
Create more jobs in central providence and raise wages	*
Create a program to connect independent contractors and gig economy workers to jobs	*
Allocate at least \$2 million of American Rescue Plan funding to pilot a statewide Child Care Educator Recruitment and Retention Award Program. A wage supplement program that we believe would help retain qualified and effective educators in child care programs. The program should be available statewide and criteria be set for participation and that the retention bonuses be significant so they meet the bar of similarly qualified K-12 educator wages.	Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, Department of Human Services, Governor's Early Childhood Policy Advisor, Rhode Island Early Learning Council, Permanent Legislative Commission on Child Care, legislative leaders sponsoring the Early Educator Investment Act - Senator Sandra Cano and Representative Julie Casimiro
"Invest financially in the workforce to increase equity and accessibility for marginalized people to continuously development professional skills and credentials ensures a workforce that is rich in diverse talents and voices in all positions and a thriving community that is proactive to needs of the workforce and communities. For example,	
the community of providers surveyed indicated transportation assistance, educational support, and resources for non-English speaking families as needed supports. "	*
Develop a campaign to make it more attractive for people to get back to work	*

Workforce Development *Continued*

There is a lack of investment by Rhode Island payer (Medicaid) to sustain cost of competitive wages for the workforce providing home and community-based services. Rhode Island needs to standardize a process for pricing cost to provide services and fund the market price and demand.

- Fund actuarial and financial analysis of the cost to provide home and community-based services in current labor market.
- Fund a projection based analysis to allow the State to project long-term investment strategy needed to stabilize and sustain the delivery system
- Fund a data collection system of reporting on demand and capacity of the system to respond.

Workforce Development Programs:

- Fund the development of formal training for various health and human service worker categories
- Fund comprehensive Apprentice expansion to cultivate career pathways
- Fund Higher Education diploma tracks to the health and human service industry
- Fund demand based workforce programming (i.e. bachelor level clinicians or BCBAs)

*

Hire more employees to expedite the approval of SSDI

*

Tally by municipality

Municipality # of ideas

Barrington	1	North Kingstown	2
Bristol	1	North Providence	2
Burrillville	2	Pawtucket	19
Central Falls	2	Portsmouth	1
Coventry	5	Providence	83
Cranston	7	Scituate	1
Cumberland	3	Smithfield	3
East Greenwich	3	South Kingstown	1
East Providence	14	Tiverton	1
Foster	1	Wakefield	2
Glocester	1	Warren	2
Hopkinton	1	Warwick	15
Jamestown	1	West Greenwich	1
Kingston	5	Westerly	2
Lincoln	5	*Other	23
Narragansett	1	Total	223
Newport	12	<i>*respondents outside of RI</i>	

Tally by topic

Topic	# of ideas
Arts	11
Business Development	9
Criminal Justice	8
Direct Assistance	11
Education	23
Environmental	17
Food Insecurity	9
Healthcare	31
Housing	41
Misc.	10
Infrastructure	24
Workforce Development	18
Transit	11
Total	223

Focus Group Findings

Rhode Island Foundation Research American Rescue Plan Act Findings by Global Strategy Group



Methodology

Global Strategy Group (GSG) conducted five focus groups among Rhode Island residents from July 27-July 29, 2021.

- Excluded college educated residents
- Excluded residents whose combined household income is more than \$75,000
- Each group had about 5-6 participants

White
seniors

Disabled
persons

Hispanic
residents

Multiracial
women


Black
residents

Broad Areas of Investment

Across groups, residents were drawn to issues surrounding health care and housing as key priorities

You are going to see a list of topics the state of Rhode Island could invest money and resources into improving—specifically to help people like you. But for the purposes of this game, only one topic can remain on the island. Let's go around the room and together, as a team, discuss which topics we want to vote off the island until there is only one left.

SURVIVOR ISLAND



For **residents**, health care and more affordable housing options are most important to a good quality of life

"...I find that as I'm getting older, **the medical surroundings that we have available to us are extremely important.**" – Female, 67, White

"...if you're on a **list for subsidized housing** trying to live, even with a roommate, is still like \$600. **How can you afford that on disability?**" – Female, 45, White, Disabled

"There's just **so many variables with health care** that I feel like if we have maybe more options or **if everyone is able to have access to that, then we'd be better off...**" – Female, 31, Black

"...if they're going to use that money do something about housing, the **rent is sky high, the amount of pay that these companies want to pay doesn't seem balanced out with the rent at all.**" – Male, 48, Hispanic

4

Since education does not directly impact some residents, it was de-prioritized. However, among parents and Black residents education investment is key

Not a priority

"...most of these affect me in some way except well, probably not education because I'm not in the system and don't know anybody in the system."
– Male, 56, White, Disabled

"...I feel like you can take education and use that aspect to have the training for the job that you like. For example, I'm in school for occupational therapy right now. I have an internship that's going to help me succeed in my field."
– Female, 29, Hispanic

Major Priority

"Schools in Providence aren't safe, and the quality is bad compared to other schools in the state."
– Male, 20, Black

"...you have to have some form of foundation or education to do things...."
– Female, 49, Hispanic

"...since everyone has to go to high school those fundamental accounting or math things that you're going to use in everyday life, [should be] taught in the classroom."
– Female, 31, Black

"...start off young...some people have no interest in going to college, so it's nice to have an avenue in school, you know where they can pursue, like skilled jobs like the blue the blue-collar workers..
– Female, 55, White/Asian American

5

Economic development and job opportunities were seen as less of a priority– strong sense across groups employers can't fill existing positions

Not a priority

"...Economic development is least important because you need everything else in order to actually have economic development."
– Male, 37, Hispanic

"...I would [remove] economic development only because there are so many places already looking for employees everywhere I go. People are hiring..."
– Female, 45, White/Native American

Major Priority

"...I can't afford to get a job. My mental health would be so much better if I had something to get up and look forward to every day and not have to worry about all that money going to pay for my medications."
– Female, 56, White, Disabled

"...[there was a] training program. And you go for like four or five months. And after that they put you right to the job force. They need more programs like that..."
– Male, 48, Hispanic

"...historically we've had very high unemployment rates and we have very large companies in Rhode island, but it's very hard to get jobs, so we're not progressing. They have all these companies all these initiatives, but there's still a high unemployment rate. So obviously what we have, our tools, they're not working..
– Female, 36, Black/Hispanic

"...what about transportation to the places to work? What about facilities that allow for physical needs that the elderly have, let's say, versus a younger population..."
– Male, 74, White

6

While some residents see value in investing in technology and environmental programs, relatively speaking these needs seemed less urgent

Not a priority

"...I feel like right now we're living in what, we've created. So a few more years then living in what we have is not going to make things worse or better..."

– Male, 37, Hispanic

"...technology is so advanced right now from what it used to be that I think people are so dependent on technology. I think a pause on that wouldn't devastate us."

– Female, 49, Hispanic

Major Priority

"...If we lose the environment, we lose our water supply, we lose clean air, we lose, you know, ability to have a good farmland in the light, **and that's also the base for economic development that sustains the state...**"

– Male, 67, White

"...**technology goes with the new jobs and training because many jobs need it...**"

– Female, 45, White/Native American

"...**we have to eliminate all the litter I see, it's a mess.** and I'm not trying to beat a dead horse, but it's troubling to see people just throwing stuff out of their windows."

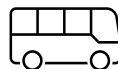
– Female, 51, Black

"...I am retired, but I want to go to my senior center and I want to network...or I want to, **you know, take free classes to learn technology...**"

– Female, 67, White

7

Senior and disabled residents expressed major frustration with the lack of reliable transportation in the state. For these groups, transportation is very important to their quality of life



Transportation among seniors and disabled residents

"...if someone's in the northwest corner of the state **and doesn't have access to transportation, somebody needs to advocate for them to find the services...**"

– Male, 56, White, Disabled

"...**transportation to appointment services is so important. That has been a terrible problem where people had appointments and they do not get their transportation and people missed appointments...**"

– Female, 86, White

"...**I have to live in certain areas...**I used to be from Cumberland, that's where I grew up in a beautiful area, **I had to move from the apartment, I had, I couldn't physically drive anymore...**"

– Female, 45, White, Disabled

"...we need to **make our communities more walkable for seniors so they can access services...a more seamless transportation system that provides services** that lets people walk if they're able in their neighborhoods and then provides other means if they can't walk...."

– Male, 67, White

8

Health Care

When it comes to health care, the four major pain points are:

Trying to
navigate a
complex system

"... **the way it's organized**... it's almost impossible to choose between all these things. **Picking a plan is ridiculous.**"
– Female, 67, White

"...there could be a **qualified, well-respected provider** that you want to see in Rhode Island...and that person doesn't take your insurance..."
– Female, 36, Black/Hispanic

Quality of care

"**The standard or level of care shouldn't be different because of a lack of funds.**"
– Male, 48, Hispanic

"...I don't think we have a really good health care system. I don't think it's fair. **A lot of people just have terrible health insurance and can't get the doctors that they need here.**"
– Female, 30, Hispanic

The high cost of
prescriptions

"...the rules change a lot with prescriptions...**I fight with the insurance company every month** because the cost of my daughter's insulin changes constantly..."
– Female, 51, Black

"...a lot of our prescriptions are high, **even with the extra help from the Medicare part d it still is not enough...**"
– Female, 45, White, Disabled

Accessibility

"Being able to have **access means being able to afford to go to the doctor and seeing someone**...like I've gone to urgent care and I haven't seen a doctor, I get a PA."
– Female, 55, White/Asian American

"...[health care] looks just as you described it, **something that isn't a hassle to receive, something that is available to everybody...**"
– Female, 31, Black

Participants volunteered advocacy, cultural competency, investing in staff as helpful solutions

Advocacy for patients



Cultural competency



Investing in staff



Accessibility and Affordability



Residents find that the more assistance they have navigating the nuances within the health care field (e.g., insurance, appointment making, etc.), the easier it is for them to understand terms of their care without worry. This is especially true for seniors and disabled residents.

Cultural understanding in health care is key for many residents of color. The more medical staff can relate to or understand these patients' backgrounds, the more likely they are to feel comfortable in their care.

Increasing staff numbers is important across all groups. Many residents discuss being unable to see a physician when in need or only having minimal time for appointments. By increasing staff numbers, residents believe there will be better experiences with hospital and urgent care visits overall.

Making sure services are accessible was a common factor among groups. Accessibility ties heavily into affordability as participants believe insurance (or a lack thereof) should not determine who receives quality care.

11

When forced, to choose, residents would like to see the state prioritize...

Hiring advocates to make the processes around health care easier.

"I've had **advocates reach out to me due to my disability and they have been very helpful**. Without their services things would have been more difficult."

– Female, 56, White, Disabled

Assisting with health care costs.

"...I feel it's not right because somebody will have zero copay and then one person will have \$179 per visit. How can you afford that, **who makes that decision...**"

– Female, 30, Hispanic

Providing diverse provider options.

"...it would be helpful and more effective to talk to people in your native language."

– Male, 30, Black

12

Housing

When it comes to housing, the major pain points are...

Lack of
subsidized/public
housing and
incredibly long wait
lists

"...I heard from clients of **long waiting list of people to be placed**... even if I've got the voucher in my hands, **where are the places...**"
— Male, 67, White

"...there should be programs for young adults, like section eight or something...**you have to wait like 20 years to get on it. The waiting lists are so long...**"
— Male, 48, Hispanic

Qualifying criteria

"...**we need to get rid of the criteria**...they have to check your credit, your background if you got animals, if you've got kids, how much you make...**it's like if I have the money just let me move in...**"
— Female, 30, Hispanic

The high cost of rent

"...good quality of life means **being able to pay your rent** and buy what you need with the money that you earned from your job **without having to do other things for money...**"
— Female, 62, Black/Hispanic

"...**the rents are more than my mortgage, a lot more like double...**"
— Female, 67, White

The condition and
location of some
affordable/public
housing units

"...**don't just corner us all in one area [with] affordable housing**...they want to stick people in you know, high crime areas and areas that maybe less than suitable to them..."
— Male, 56, White, Disabled

Some residents expressed being on wait lists for more than five years, despite qualifying for subsidized housing— this is especially problematic among the disabled community



Subsidized housing waitlists in Rhode Island

"...there was a time I had problems with paying my rent... **I think [people with] a disability should maybe not just be charged like the other people...**"
 – Male, 26, Black

"...if you're not homeless, getting housing help is nearly impossible. I'm on disability, as is my daughter. We have both been on section eight housing lists for eight years..."
 – Female, 56, White, Disabled

"...if I hadn't been lucky enough to find this job and get this apartment, **I would more than likely be homeless because there was no way to find affordable housing...no way to get on any kind of list fast enough...**"
 – Female, 61, White, Disabled

"...if we're going to fund affordable housing it needs to be equal for everyone...I was told I wouldn't make it off of the waiting list and that I made too much..."
 – Female, 30, Hispanic

"...I think it's kind of **hard on the mental, you know, trying to find, proper housing and also trying to afford it...**"
 – Female, 30, Black

15

Residents volunteered advocacy and construction of new housing options

Assistance for renters/owners



Most residents believe having some guidance around where to find housing, mandatory criteria needs, and appealing decisions would help them in obtaining an apartment or even a home. The process of obtaining affordable housing is viewed as confusing and unnecessary.

More affordable housing



Another way residents believe the housing situation in the state can be fixed is to provide more options. Residents discussed the continued building of luxury hotels and apartments that do not take vouchers for those on public assistance.

Incentives for contractors



By providing contractors with incentives to build more affordable housing, residents believe the state can improve the quality of life for many. At the same time, they believe community issues in some areas may improve.

16

When forced, residents would like to see the state prioritize...

Creating new housing or repurposing old housing.

"...there should be incentives or maybe it's an information program that would **help seniors, downsize** too, if they had an opportunity to move to a more urban, more accessible location, **they may sell their bigger home and that could free up some supply for younger families...**"

– Male, 67, White

Helping people stay in their communities.

"...by giving incentives to live and take care of the community you have a safer community..."

– Female, 29, Hispanic

Focusing on financial help to rent or own.

"...I wish there was a way people on disabilities could own a home. I wish there was a program for us, so we don't have to be stuck in apartments."

– Female, 45, White, Disabled

17

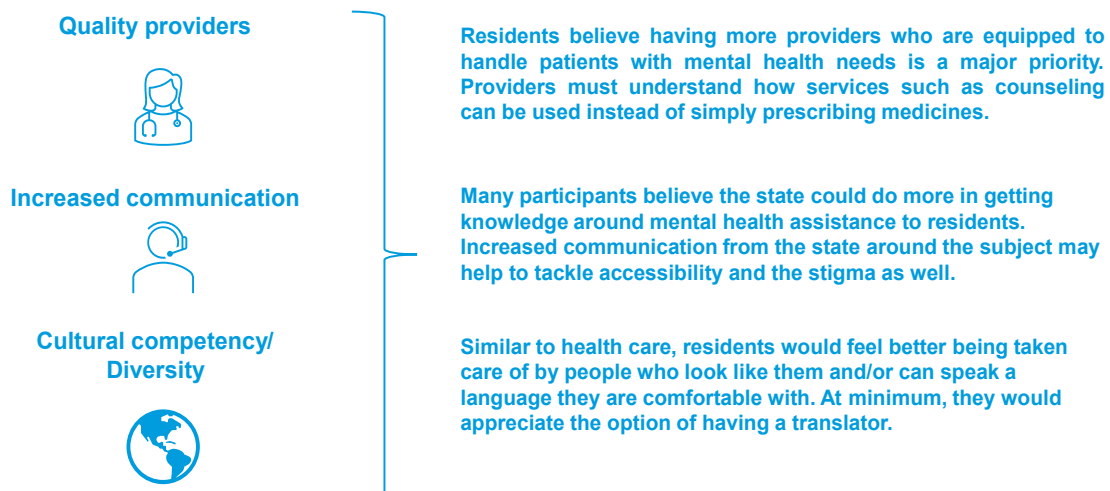
Mental Health Care

When it comes to mental health care, the four major pain points are:



19

Participants volunteered increasing the number of providers, particularly of color, and an awareness and information campaign



20

When forced, residents would like to see the state prioritize...

Communicating the options for mental health care.

"...send everyone [with a smartphone] messages just so people know where to go for help and so more people would feel comfortable to talk about it..."

– Male, 20, Black

Increasing the availability of providers.

"...one of the problems that I have is I get a 15 minute appointment. As I've gotten older, I need more than 15 minutes, you know when you're seeing somebody once or twice a year..."

– Male, 65, White

Offering more options for translation and/or increased diversity.

"...my mother, she feels very comfortable knowing that her doctor's Cape Verdean because then she understands her culture and can help her better."

– Female, 40, Black

21

Job Opportunities and Training

When it comes to job opportunities and training, the three major pain points are...



"...[training] is needed if you are someone with educational gaps here and there, as far as computers are concerned...we have to keep up with the new programs out there..."
– Female, 67, White

"...there were a few [trainings] available, but none of them which I was interested in and actually because they were low paying jobs..."
– Male, 37, Hispanic



"...[help] for small businesses because that would definitely motivate them to hire..."
– Male, 25, Black

"...I believe it should be around small business assistance because if they're given the help that they need, they'll grow and be able to hire more people..."
– Male, 65, White

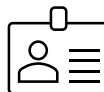


"...what I need right now is just a job, a job that I can do...training isn't always helpful, we just need to account for what people can do and have them do it..."
– Male, 26, Black, Disabled

"...with being on disability I find myself at home and you know, on the computer, so job training that's online, physically, I literally wouldn't be able to do it..."
– Female, 45, White, Disabled

23

Disabled residents face the unique problem of not being able to live off their SSDI, but risk losing their benefits if they attempt to work



Job opportunities for disabled persons

"...I would like to advance my financial situation by having some type of an income, but I'm very limited due to the fact that if I make any more money, then I will not have health care."
– Female, 56, White, Disabled

"...[a challenge to better my financial situation] is always having a job...trying to secure your ends meat..."
– Male, 26, Black, Disabled

"...for someone with mental health challenge or a disability challenge [we need] access, you know, more access to facilities and jobs..."
– Female, 61, White, Disabled

24

Participants find more value in assisting small businesses than in training specifically

More technical training



Providing technical training for positions outside of a school setting is important to residents. Many believe that by having the ability to learn on the job, they are more likely to be able to feel prepared to keep it.

Small business assistance



All groups believe that providing more assistance to small businesses in the form of grants and small loans is incredibly valuable. This is the first step when it comes to creating job opportunities, but also the

Access to certificates



Some participants discussed how they were able to obtain their positions because of professional certificates. By having more opportunities to be certified, this provides residents with more career options.

25

When forced, residents would like to see the state prioritize...

Giving more monetary assistance to small businesses

"...1 on 1 counseling for loans and outreach to small businesses would be helpful..."
– Male, 67, White

Providing more information around job opportunities.

"...I think the state could do a better job at job fairs in minority communities' for example, if somebody wants to be an engineer maybe providing some kind of mentorship..."
– Female, 51, Black

Increasing opportunities for training designed for better jobs or around the needs of the disabled.

"...prioritize trainings because it can give you different skills, webinars are helpful from the state."
– Female, 45, White, Disabled

26

Education

The four major pain points when it comes to education are...

Outdated
curriculum

"...it would be nice to have something [else], if they choose not to go to college..."
– Female, 55, White/Asian American

"...we need to update our curriculum [to be] more diverse..."
– Female, 51, Black

Lack of teachers
and teacher
capacity

"...I think there needs to be more resources for teachers because they're very stressed out and I think they go into school with their own personal issues, and they don't have anywhere else to turn to..."
– Female, 40, Black

"...not enough teachers...there's no consistency for these kids they may get split up into different classrooms because there's just not enough people."
– Female, 36, Black/Hispanic

School building
infrastructure

"...quality of the buildings and just things are breaking down [in] some of these rooms... who wants to go to work in some place that they don't feel comfortable? It's the same with the students..."
– Female, 28, Black/White/Hispanic

"...the buildings are falling apart."
– Female, 36, Black/Hispanic

Lack of diversity
among educators

"...I think something more diverse because I went to high school that had like 40 different cultures in it...And also that taught about diversity..."
– Female, 31, Black

"...there should be more recruitment, recruit new teachers, train them more and then you get more diversity..."
– Male, 30, Black

Investment in teachers is a top priority for most groups. During discussions, groups opted to give teachers most of their coins

Investing in teachers



Alternate curriculum options



Funding



Residents understand that the pandemic has caused a burnout in teachers. By the state investing in hiring more diverse teachers and providing more resources to them (ex. mental health counseling), they'll be able to work more efficiently.

Most groups mentioned the need for additional curriculum around everyday needs like financial planning. Many also expressed a need to see trades being taught.

Participants volunteered there is a need for increased funding for schools. Many believe that schools in certain areas of the state are not comparable to others in various ways. By providing more funding, these schools become more competitive.

29

When forced, residents would like to see the state prioritize...

Expanding trade and vocational offerings.

"...there should be more offering of skills and trades in school..."
– Female, 36, Black/Hispanic

Investing in teachers well being.

"...there's a lack of motivation coming from teachers to students ..."
– Female, 62, Black/Hispanic

Increasing education funding overall.

"...teachers here don't get paid like they should because schools lack funding ."
– Female, 29, Hispanic

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Summary

The top programmatic areas for investment

- Advocacy programs in both primary health and behavioral health
- More subsidized housing
- Increased diversity and language offerings among health care and behavioral health providers
- Job training opportunities specifically designed for disabled communities
- Investment in small businesses or people who would like to work for themselves
- Increased financial assistance to help with high cost of health care and prescriptions

Community Visioning Sessions Summary

MAKE IT HAPPEN:
INVESTING FOR RHODE
ISLAND'S FUTURE

Summary: Community Visioning Sessions

Visioning Sessions

- 6 partner organizations
- 12 sessions
 - Progreso Latino (2 – in person)
 - United Way of Rhode Island (1)
 - Community Action Partnership of Providence (CAPP) (2)
 - West Bay Community Action (2)
 - Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Center (2)
 - Jonnycake Center for Hope (2 – in person)
 - Facilitators from all organizations (1)



Visioning Sessions

- We heard ~125 community voices
- At 12 sessions held between August 31 and September 10
- Some sessions resulted in multiple conversations (larger sessions breaking into smaller discussion groups, for a total of 19 discussion groups)
- Range of 3 to 20 people per discussion, most discussions included 6 to 8 people

3

Takeaways



- Each discussion was anchored in participants sharing their personal stories and experiences – illustrating the needs, challenges, and potential solutions that exist.
- Each session was also intersectional – there was not one conversation that didn't touch on how people are affected and challenged by many factors.
- There were tonal themes across the discussions –
 - Openness to sharing personal experiences
 - General agreement that challenges seem (and feel) intractable
 - Some optimism that we can and should be able to meet people's needs with the resources the state has – if we prioritize
 - General agreement that navigating systems should not be so challenging, particularly for those in need

4

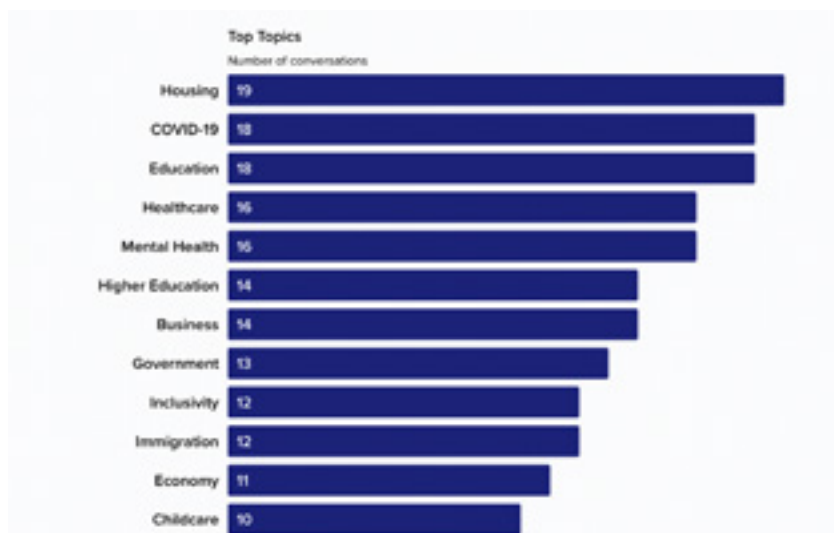
CONVERSATION HIGHLIGHT

Lindsey • Sept. 9 • [Community Action Partnership of Providence County Session #7](#)

Yeah, and I think my takeaway is, so Dayanarah and I have done this together twice now. And last time, we talked about housing and health care and today's conversation was about economic opportunity and **workforce development** and yet, we're still talking about housing and healthcare. And so I think for me, one of the takeaways is just I know this on like an intellectual level, how interconnected everything is and all of the community needs. But to hear it through stories, I think just reinforces how much everything is related to one another and how all of the barriers are interrelated, which means a lot of how a lot of the solutions need to be interrelated in order to give people and communities the supports they need. So thank you so much for participating. It was really lovely to chat with you. Does anybody else have anything else they want to add or say before we adjourn?

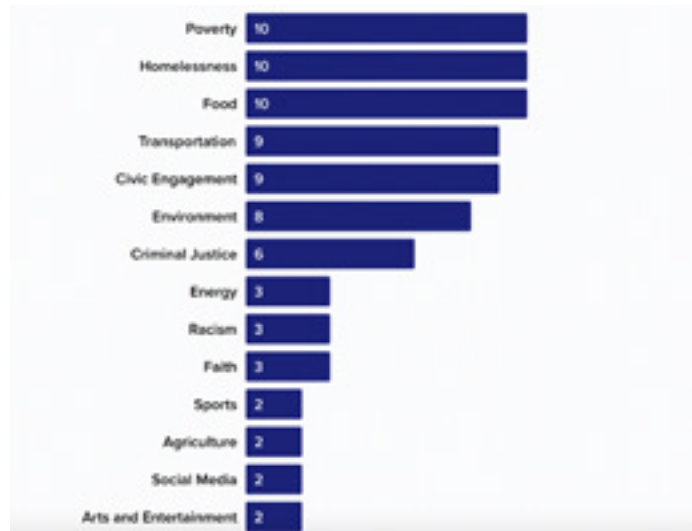
5

TOP DISCUSSION TOPICS



6

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION TOPICS



7

TOPIC DETAIL

Housing

- Housing was the most-discussed topic among participants.
- There was consistent dialogue about the lack of, or subpar condition of, housing stock, lack of affordable housing, transitional housing, the importance of a safe place to live and the impact that has on a person or a family's trajectory, and the opposite, how hard it is to break out of economic insecurity without stable housing.
- There was also additional dialogue about prioritization – that decisionmakers and developers aren't prioritizing those most in need or are not being bold enough in prioritizing those most in need.
- And, there was consistent conversation about wrapping services around accessible and affordable housing – creating opportunities for residents to access supportive communities, healthcare, behavioral healthcare, educational opportunities (including workforce development), affordable childcare, and more.

8

CONVERSATION HIGHLIGHTS

Housing

Jean • Sept. 10 • [Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Center Session #2](#)

Yes, thank you. In the case of the North End in particular there's a very strong combination of race and class in the sense that any attention being paid to **housing** right now in the context of this massive development is something called workforce **housing**. Affordable **housing** is something that has a very particular resonance to many people who define that as **housing** for people. "We have enough of already thank you very much." Workforce **housing** implies new people who are going to come for the jobs that are going to be generated by this massive development such that the kind of median income for which that **housing** would be built is somewhere close to a hundred thousand dollars. \$93,000 is the mark.

Chris in Rodman Crossing • Sept. 1 • [Jonny Cake Center Session #1](#)

There is a large group of people, through organizations like Jonnycake. Or through the faith community, be it Pastor Angela and the Church of God, or Peace Dale Congregational Church, or organizations like the Y. Which has started to turn its -- to change its direction back toward reaching out, to being less of a health club, their direction is changing. And so there are opportunities here to bring all of these supports to this community together. Because that's really important, in terms of both serving as advocates for the need for **housing**. But also helping to provide people who perhaps, for example, need programs like **housing** self-sufficiency. To understand, "How can I own my own house? And how can I get any opportunities to own a house? How can we do that?" We have a lot of the resources already here, but in terms of bringing them together to work collectively for **housing**, we could do a lot more.

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CONVERSATION HIGHLIGHTS

Housing

Melanie • Sept. 10 • [Westbay Community Action #2](#)

Yeah. And I'm glad you brought up the homelessness too, because that's really a challenge and reviling as well, **affordable housing** and the resources to get back on your feet. Sometimes you have to be evicted or close to eviction, or like there's certain regulations that are put in place that isn't really a safety net. You have to get so desperate. And then you have to climb up so much further where if you could intervene earlier and stabilize, it would have been more successful, but with so many funding regulations and restrictions

Patti in Rhode Island • Aug. 31 • [Community Action Partnership of Providence County Ses-- #3](#)

It feels like to me that there needs to be a multi-tiered approach to this so that we can address immediate needs with some innovative strategies to try and deal with the number of people that are currently homeless, the number of people who potentially could be added to the homeless population once the moratorium actually ends, and then sort of medium and long-term strategies for Rhode Island in being able to increase and invest in **affordable housing** for everyone.

10

CONVERSATION HIGHLIGHTS

Housing

Kathleen in Rhode Island • Aug. 31 • [Community Action Partnership of Providenc... Session #3](#)

So, I feel like a strength would somehow be trying to get ourselves back to **affordable housing** that would allow young people, families to get in a house, a home, an apartment, something that they could sustain on their livable wage. And I think the same for health care. I've gotten so many calls, people looking to come out of hotels, looking to come out of shelters, and used to pay \$900, \$1,000 a month in rent but have recently lost jobs or have been sick due to COVID, and just now can't get themselves back in there.

11

TOPIC DETAIL

Education, Workforce Development

- The topic of education was raised in a variety of contexts throughout these conversations, but there was a distinct focus on preparing students to enter the workforce and succeed.
- Participants also keyed into the need to make good quality education more accessible for all traditional and non-traditional students, and to ensure that educators are culturally competent and connected to the community of students they teach.

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CONVERSATION HIGHLIGHTS

Education, Workforce Development

Elizabeth C • Sept. 9 • [Community Action Partnership of Providence County Session #5](#)

I think the root of it all comes down to **education**. I think that when we have children receiving a high quality **education** with access to career exploration and career readiness and workforce development along with the staples that you need as part of a well-rounded **education**, I think you find successful adults that have what's necessary to be productive and make decisions about whether or not they're going to go into a trade, make a decision about whether or not they want to go to college.

Melanie • Sept. 10 • [Westbay Community Action #2](#)

And just one thing that maybe it fits into the question before, but I'll just say it now because I say this a lot in meetings whoever's listening to this will be like, oh yeah, there she goes. I love the idea of having a mobile unit that would be able to go to various communities to reduce the barrier of transportation, but having a mobile unit to be able to do for one thing, testing. So for the adult **education** world, for the workforce world who has to do assessments, having the ability to go out into the communities to do assessments and to do **education**. So you might be able to do a pop-up in a certain community. And if you have all the technology, you have your satellite or WiFi or whatever, you have the laptops people can be there in the mobile unit and be able to get the training that they need.

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CONVERSATION HIGHLIGHTS

Education, Workforce Development

Kristen in Rhode Island • Aug. 31 • [United Way of Rhode Island Session #2](#)

The main value that I really have is making sure that the **education** suits the individuals who are getting it. In other words, that there's not one kind of **education** or paradigm that's being embraced where internships or apprenticeships might be just the thing for certain groups of folks or for some individuals than other folks will thrive in a traditional environment. So I'm very much interested in and have to be interested in, and I'm invested in **education** as a value, but also arts and culture as a sort of engine for community and community rebuilding because those can sometimes be the carrot to the stick. Obviously it represents where really engaged in getting kids, making and doing being creative as well as supporting their academic work because Woonsocket has the second lowest high school graduation rate in the lagging only behind Central Falls. And so we really want to make sure that we are getting the kids to stay in school.

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CONVERSATION HIGHLIGHTS

Education, Workforce Development

Elizabeth C - Sept. 9 - [Community Action Partnership of Providence County Session #5](#)

I think the root of it all comes down to education. I think that when we have children receiving a high quality education with access to career exploration and career readiness and **workforce development** along with the staples that you need as part of a well-rounded education, I think you find successful adults that have what's necessary to be productive and make decisions about whether or not they're going to go into a trade, make a decision about whether or not they want to go to college.

Naiommy in Rhode Island - Aug. 31 - [Community Action Partnership of Providenc... Session #1](#)

Education in general. So, if it's workshops, if it's **professional development**, if it's certification in certain areas that are free of cost, or at a low rate, right? Because not everyone is going to be able to afford to go and get those trainings. And if you want the economy to grow, I would think you want to provide these free workforce opportunities to individuals in English and Spanish, right? Because you know what, in New York, they give CNA classes in Spanish. We haven't even gotten there yet.

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TOPIC DETAIL

Health and Mental Health

- Health and mental health were frequently discussed topics among participants.
- There was significant discussion around intergenerational trauma, and access to services and providers that are reflective of the community, as well lack of empathy on the part of traditional structures (employers, schools, etc.) in assisting folks who are experiencing physical health, behavioral or mental health challenges.
- There was also conversation around ways to coordinate across the nonprofit sector to help folks navigate and learn about the health system.

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CONVERSATION HIGHLIGHTS

Health and Mental Health

Melissa • Sept. 9 • [Progreso Latino - Session #2](#)

The doctor that goes to school, or whatever, don't even know about herbal, the **treatment**. They don't know about herbal **treatment**. They don't know about emotional **treatment**. They don't know about **psychiatric treatment**. And we do need, I believe 100% [inaudible] not to segregate us. But we do need black and brown doctors that treat black and brown people. We need that, not to make it anything, but we need our own to help build up in our **mortality** rate, to stabilize or lift more. Because we have our people and our doctors who understands us, get us, know us, and are trying to save us.

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CONVERSATION HIGHLIGHTS

Health and Mental Health

Jean • Sept. 10 • [Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Center Session #2](#)

One thing I want to add to the health bucket that I had been talking about before is that for the North End access to **mental health** resources has been limited and frustrating. There have been some recent efforts for outreach into the community about what does culturally appropriate care look like? What are people actually willing to trust in terms of that care? But that has been a huge gap in terms of the overall picture of what health is in the North End and Broadway.

Tarshire in Rhode Island • Aug. 31 • [Community Action Partnership of Providence - Session #3](#)

Not necessarily, I haven't had any problems with any of the individuals I work with in terms of **health care**. It's mostly been mental health. Our mental health centers that we have, the few that we have that I used to refer people to are overloaded with the amount of clients. And so, I think we need another one, another one that's close by other than Gateway Providence Center, because they can't handle the number of mental health cases coming through. I haven't experienced any problems with anybody having issues with getting **health care**. It's been mental health. My background's mental health. So, that's just what I've seen.

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TOPIC DETAIL

Business, Jobs, and Economy

- Participants spoke at length about barriers to employment and difficulty accessing living wage jobs or advancing in a career.
- There was significant conversation around the importance of access to reliable transportation and affordable childcare, as well as safe, affordable housing.
- Discussion regarding small business and entrepreneurship focused on access to education and information regarding how to start and manage a business, and support for small local businesses.

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CONVERSATION HIGHLIGHTS

Business, Jobs, and Economy

Rocky in Rodman Crossing • Sept. 1 • [Jonny Cake Center Session #2](#)

Definitely, definitely. We need **jobs** and opportunities and the youth need that structure, that structure and the tradition and culture.

Dayanarah • Sept. 9 • [Community Action Partnership of Providence County Session #7](#)

And sometimes because of the lack of the communication, lack of language barriers and knowledge of how to do things faster than better preventing them to grow or to work smarter and not harder. So I strongly believe that it would be like something like when you go to City Hall of this state or Secretary State House to register your **business**, it should be something minimal requirements to start a **business** of like some type of knowledge of the **businesses**. I seen in our community a small bodega, home owners struggling because they barely can communicate for the things that they really looking for.

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CONVERSATION HIGHLIGHTS

Business, Jobs, and Economy

Amelia in Rhode Island • Aug. 31 • [United Way of Rhode Island Session #2](#)

The biggest barrier that I've seen is transportation is the number one barrier for people to be able to get a job is either being able to get to a job or to have a driver's license and having a driver's license you can definitely get work but a lot of people just can't get that step. And it proves to be a huge it's like the **jobs** that you need, a driver's license and then all these low wage **jobs** that where you don't need a license necessarily.

Cynthia • Sept. 10 • [Westbay Community Action #2](#)

I agree. And sometimes you can get the gist of that from case management, but sometimes you can't, they're very good at hiding it. I'm going to talk about two tangibles that I've worked in, I don't know, we have half a dozen different training programs, all different age groups and economic backgrounds, from IT guys that needs six figures down to blue collar workers. Transportation is humongous and childcare. There's so many people that wanted to come into our programs, but they couldn't get the childcare or they knew that we were trying to fill **jobs** over at **EB** or someplace where it's not accessible by the bus and they don't have a car. They couldn't afford insurance, whatever. Those were two of the huge things that prevented a lot of people from coming into our programs.

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CONVERSATION HIGHLIGHTS

Business, Jobs, and Economy

Lindsey • Sept. 9 • [Community Action Partnership of Providence County Session #2](#)

He does a really good job of sharing labor but it's still... There's a lot of the expectation that it falls to me and that, I work with a lot of people who are single parents, single female parents and I see that having a lot of impact on people's economic decisions. I've had staff members who have had to leave their **jobs** because they couldn't balance childcare, or who had to take a position that was not one where they were able to grow because it didn't align with childcare needs and there weren't childcare needs in the community to meet it as well. Does anyone have any other things related to barriers intersecting with social identities or other identities that they want to add to this conversation?

Melissa • Sept. 9 • [Progreso Latino - Session #2](#)

I agree 100% with it. If you wanted to go out and get employment, and your barrier is a lack of transportation, the government or your **employer** should say, "You know what? I'm going to do three months," even if the government and the **employer** split it, "Three months. I can do three months bus pass. Three months [inaudible]. Six months we're going to give you a trial. If that works, and you're consistent and your still on the job, then we know that that was your barrier for you to elevate yourself and change your life, and feed your family, and feed yourself. And be an outstanding citizen, contributing citizen." So I think bus pass, the cellphone. Because now they're saying you're going to need an app. Give people the cellphone. Pay a bill for six months. "We do this for six months. Now we know you saved a little money. We know you could sustain yourself!" Those are all barriers to opportunities.

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Project Team

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