

NJACSW Report – *Equity for Women in New Jersey: Identifying Needs and Priorities* Executive Summary

Partners

- New Jersey Advisory Commission on the Status of Women
- Department of Children and Families – Division on Women
- Rutgers Center for Women and Work
- NJ State Employment and Training Commission – Council on Gender Parity in Labor and Education

Report Background

- The New Jersey Advisory Commission on the Status of Women (NJACSW) in partnership with the Department of Children & Families - Division on Women (DCF-DOW) released a brief survey in 2022 to help identify the top issues of concern for New Jersey's women.
- The survey received over 3,000 responses. Identified concerns included:
 - Access to/cost of child care
 - Access to/cost of healthcare
 - Gender Parity/Equal Pay
 - Career Development and Opportunities
 - Gender based violence-domestic and sexual violence

Phase II / Community Conversations

- Focused on expanding opportunities to gather additional data and information to inform the development of a multi-year action plan that responds to the issues identified via the survey.
- NJACSW and DCF-DOW partnered with the New Jersey State Employment and Training Commission– Council on Gender Parity (NJSETC-GPC) and Rutgers – Center for Women & Work (CWW) to host a series of community conversations throughout the State, partnering with in-community organizations to host these conversations.

Overall Goal of Community Conversations:

- To secure meaningful engagement around the priorities identified from the survey and possibly identify additional issues, specific to certain communities.

Priorities Identified:

- Access to/cost of child care
- Access to/cost of healthcare
- Gender Parity/Equal Pay
- Career Development and Opportunities
- Gender based violence-domestic and sexual violence

Methodology

- Developed sessions protocol
- Identified host agencies
- Recruited working partners

Target Audience

- Intergenerational focus
- Municipal Revitalization Index (MRI) identified communities (*the MRI “serves as the State’s official measure and ranking of municipal distress” - NJ Department of Community Affairs*)
- At least 8-10 practitioners per group
- Varied voices from practitioners: business sector, grassroots organizers, healthcare staff, etc.

Shared voices

- The goal of the community conversations was to hear from the following:
 - Service recipients
 - Leading women’s organizations
 - Practitioners with lived experiences
 - County-level women’s commission members
 - Local & statewide elected officials
 - Private sector / business community
 - Grassroot organizers

Child care Recommendations

- Increase home-based services
- Offer technical assistance so that more providers can get licensed
- Expand childcare tax credits and subsidies, stipends, etc...
- Re-evaluate income requirements for child care assistance
- Create a one-stop portal to access child care resources (include info on subsidies, local child care centers, etc.)
- Make application and eligibility requirements more accessible

Healthcare Recommendations

- Create a healthcare navigator program to explain things to clients (Center for Family Services, Camden)
- Implement shuttle services in counties that lack prenatal care (Sussex and Cape May)
- Develop a tool to help people determine what is a healthcare emergency and what is not
- Provide assistance and guidance on filling out applications

Gender Parity/Equal Pay/Career Development Recommendations

- Improve advertising of existing programs
- Educate women on what jobs and industries are paying
- Create education and public awareness campaigns around available resources
- Be transparent regarding salaries, job postings, benefits, etc...

Gender Based Violence Recommendations

- Educate women on existing resources (can use social media for this)
- Educate people on reporting processes, especially for the undocumented because they fear being deported.
- Work with fathers more, especially young fathers
- Provide more support groups / victim services
- Create ride-share opportunities (Uber / Lyft) when women are in danger or need help

Additional Themes

- Housing
- Transportation
- Immigration
- Inflation
- Eldercare
- Maternal Health
- Paid Family Leave

Additional Takeaways

- Government / Public Sector Interventions are required to effect significant changes. These should aim to support and leverage actions initiated by the public sector, including individual employers.
- Livable wages based on number of adults working in the household would make a significant impact for the family. State and Federal minimum wage requirement do not account for these factors.
- The federal poverty level is a vital policy issue. The levels are excessively low, precluding many from receiving benefits and programs. In addition, it does not consider the great variations in the cost of living by state. This has huge implications as NJ ranks as one of the more expensive states to live in.
- Government collaboration with the private sector regarding requirements for tracking and monitoring companies on their equality metric (equity audits)
- Degree validation requirements for people who have credentials from other countries is a significant barrier for employers across all industries. The process is lengthy and very expensive. Interventions that simplify and provide more assistance for this process could potentially address the wage gap and worker shortage challenges the state is facing.
- Food deserts and insecurity to housing and transportation are top considerations to incorporate as these challenges are at all time high due to inflation and reduced SNAP benefits after the pandemic.
- Medicaid services have an overwhelming negative impact to the extent that many would rather go without health insurance than to seek these services. Quote from a participant: “state services are violent and abusive.”
- Charity Care processing is lengthy and slow. Clients frequently end up in collections due to unpaid bills. Government regulations to alleviate the process are needed.

- To address the shortage of well visits and routine care, and to shift to strongly favored models of preventative care, the recommendation is to create “wellness hubs” in local communities, expanding the use of mobile van services, and attaching clinics/urgent care centers to hospitals.

Things to Consider Moving Forward:

- **A targeted community level approach**
 - Participants stressed the importance of “meeting people where they are,” both literally and figuratively.
- **Access to information**
 - There are many programs that currently exist that people don’t know about; thus they may be underutilized by those who need them most.
- **Focus on overlooked or “forgotten” communities**
 - Rural and hard to reach towns (such as Paulsboro, Newton, and Cape May) don’t always receive the same attention and funding as bigger urban areas.