

2022 New York Policy Agenda

As the Covid-19 global pandemic continues to exacerbate systemic barriers for all New Yorkers, the challenges young adults face, from tuition and non-tuition-related costs, unemployment, health care affordability, and rent, are rising exponentially. Despite New York’s increasing vaccination rate, the long-term impacts of the pandemic and variants to come are a clear sign that we must act now to advance more equitable policy initiatives for current and future New Yorkers.

The following recommendations are aimed at expanding overall economic security and access for today’s young adults; improving the affordability and accessibility of higher education, strengthening economic security and basic needs resources. We aim to ensure that all young adults have access to vaccines and comprehensive affordable health care, in general. YI-Northeast’s policy priorities for 2022 are a multi-pronged approach to promote policy solutions that increase the long-term health, financial stability, and opportunity of all young New Yorkers and our state economy.

Higher Education

Address Student Basic Needs on NY’s College Campuses

Increase Access to Campus Food and SNAP Benefits

Invest \$2 million in Transforming Food Pantries into Resource Hubs *

In 2018, Governor Andrew Cuomo launched an initiative to create food pantries on all public college campuses in New York — but the program has not been funded since. NYS must re-invest in this program to ensure campus food pantries are fully stocked, staffed, and can connect students to other resources. In addition, pantries must be transformed into centers where students can be assessed for eligibility in food and essential needs resource programs.

Provide Targeted and Effective SNAP Enrollment Education and Outreach *

Invest in public institutions to launch a campaign targeted to college students to support student SNAP enrollment. This would help erase the stigma of hunger and increase awareness of campus food resources. Professional development for faculty and staff will be included in the rollout of this campaign so that they can also inform students of resources and support. Students should have an active role in designing and implementing this campaign and at least 40% of funding should go to paying students to act as educators and advocates for SNAP enrollment.

Create a System-Level Essential Needs Advisory Board at CUNY and SUNY *

The advisory boards will work to identify and remove barriers to accessing essential needs as well as develop systems solutions. This also includes identifying the administrative obstacles that institutions face in implementing benefits programs such as SNAP enrollment. It will also help better inform students on resources taking the virtual nature of schooling into consideration.

Require Data Collection and Reporting on Students' Access to Resources *

Require CUNY and SUNY to develop a mechanism for measuring essential needs' impact for students. In order for this to materialize, data and outreach partnerships with local government organizations, such as NYC's Human Resource Administration (HRA). In addition to data sharing agreements, these organizations would also help educate students on benefits and help them enroll. Any such system should be designed to protect student confidentiality.

Support the Hunger-Free Campus Act, [S1151B/A6881](#)

This \$20 million competitive grant program provides funding for colleges and universities to build the campus infrastructure to better meet student needs. In order for campuses to participate they must establish a hunger task force, designate a staff member to support SNAP enrollment, and increase campus usage options for SNAP. In addition, it requires that campuses establish food pantries and a meal credit sharing program or expansion of vouchers to better meet student needs. It also requires that campuses perform outreach and conduct student surveys.

Increase Access to Campus Mental Health Supports***Invest in Campus Mental Health Counseling (A302/S844)***

COVID-19 has had a serious impact on college students' mental health, with nearly half of CUNY students reporting an increased need for mental health services. To support students' and their ability to persist in college, state lawmakers must increase their investment in mental health counseling on public college campuses, and guarantee at least one counselor for every 1,000 students — with a priority for hiring more Black and brown counselors. These additional counselors can help sustain virtual mental health services during the pandemic.

Support Students Experiencing Homelessness***Create On-Campus Liaisons Who Support Students Experiencing Homelessness *****

Nearly 15 percent of New York's public college students experienced homelessness even before COVID-19. As more New Yorkers are on the brink of losing their housing, students need campus-level support to help students navigate the financial aid process and existing campus resources, while collecting critical information about the number of students experiencing homelessness on campus. States like California, Maine, and Tennessee have all passed legislation creating liaisons to help unhoused college students. New York should follow suit and create liaisons at CUNY and SUNY. [\(See our related Report and Executive Summary for more information and recommendations for addressing youth homelessness\)](#)

Support New York’s COVID-19 Recovery by Making College More Accessible and Affordable

Invest in New York’s Opportunity Programs *

New York’s Opportunity Programs are a lifeline for low-income college students and students of color, providing financial aid, support with non-tuition costs like textbooks, and academic support for eligible students. New York will need a strong, educated workforce to recover from COVID-19, and opportunity programs are key to ensuring that Black, brown, and low-income students are supported through the recovery and beyond.

Pass the New Deal for CUNY, [A5843/S4461](#)

Our state has disinvested in CUNY for decades, pushing costs onto students while cutting critical services. The time is now to invest in CUNY and make it a driver of an equitable COVID-19 recovery for New York. State lawmakers should sponsor the New Deal for CUNY legislation, which provides students with free tuition, increased mental health and academic counseling, more full-time faculty, and provides desperately needed investments in campus buildings.

Expand TAP to Cover Additional Semesters, [S5692/A7323](#) and [S6874](#)

TAP is New York’s biggest financial aid program — but only supports students through a maximum of eight semesters of college. In comparison, the federal Pell Grant provides up to 12 semesters of financial aid support. As students navigate the uncertainty of COVID-19, New York should expand the number of semesters available to students to make sure that they have the financial support they need to earn their degree, especially as the pandemic disrupts students’ academic progress. [S5692/A7323](#) expands TAP to six years aligning with the federal Pell grant and [S6874](#) expands TAP to five years.

Increase Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) Awards + Close the TAP Gap *

Before Gov. Cuomo took office, the maximum Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) award matched the cost of tuition at New York’s public colleges. That changed in 2011, when the Governor and the legislature passed legislation that authorized five years of tuition hikes at SUNY and CUNY. Today, the maximum TAP award is \$765 less than the cost of tuition at CUNY’s four-year colleges, and \$905 less than tuition at SUNY four-year colleges. This is bad for both students and our state’s public colleges, who must cover the cost of tuition for students receiving full TAP — meaning colleges must pay for the difference, known as the “TAP Gap.” The state should eliminate the TAP Gap, and increase the maximum TAP award to match the cost of tuition.

Support [A8520/S6873](#) which increases TAP for Students Experiencing Homelessness

Homeless students in New York are classified as independent when it comes to TAP. As such, they are eligible for less state financial aid than their stably housed peers, who are classified as dependent students. Today, the maximum independent TAP award is \$3,025, compared with the maximum dependent TAP award, which is \$5,165.

Build Equitable Pathways to College Completion

End Transcript Withholding, [S5924A](#) /[A6938A](#)

When students leave school and owe a past debt to their college — whether an unpaid tuition bill or an overdue library fee — New York state policy allows colleges to withhold official transcripts. The consequences of losing access to their transcript are severe: transcripts are often needed to transfer to another college, complete degrees, obtain certain professional licenses, and secure a job. New York should end the poverty cycle created by this hidden, punitive, and discriminatory debt collection practice, and ban transcript withholding at all postsecondary institutions.

Adopt an Equity-Driven Postsecondary Attainment Goal & Implementation Plan¹

Setting an equity-driven attainment goal creates a clear and explicit target for the state, higher education sectors, and regions. An attainment goal also requires leaders at all levels to focus on the postsecondary needs of students who are too often underserved by the education system. Committing to an attainment goal of 60% New Yorkers, among all races and ethnicities, by 2030 would mean that 6.5 million residents would hold a postsecondary degree or credential by 2030 — representing a 484,000 increase in postsecondary attainment over current projections.

Use Data to Support Better Outcomes for Students *

The state should establish statewide early childhood-to-workforce data connections that include college persistence and completion, wage and employment data, and data on whether students make it “to and through” college from each high school. This data can help identify and address equity gaps in the educational pipeline, assess how the pandemic is impacting the education-to-workforce transition, and support policymakers and institutions in prioritizing policies, programs, and services that will be most supportive for students.

Health Care

Expand Comprehensive Health Care Access to All New Yorkers, Regardless of Immigration Status

Create Emergency COVID-19 Essential Plan for Immigrant New Yorkers ([A1585/S2549](#))

Immigrant New Yorkers have been at the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic, risking exposure to keep New York running. Yet, as many as 400,000 undocumented New Yorkers are prevented from accessing health care coverage in New York. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, New York must ensure all New Yorkers, regardless of their immigration status, can access COVID-19 treatment. New York should create a temporary state-funded Essential Plan for New Yorkers up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level who have had COVID-19, and are currently excluded from coverage because of their immigration status.

Pass the New York Health Act ([A.6058/S.5474](#))

The Affordable Care Act helped expand health coverage to millions of New Yorkers. Yet, we know uninsured rates are much higher in Black and brown communities, and hundreds of thousands are blocked from accessing care due to their immigration status. The New York Health Act would eliminate New York’s coverage gaps and affordability burdens, and provide comprehensive health coverage for all New Yorkers.

¹ 2022 New York State of the State, p. 185 <https://www.governor.ny.gov/sites/default/files/2022-01/2022StateoftheStateBook.pdf>

End Medical Debt for all New Yorkers

Pass the Patient Medical Debt Protection Act (A.3470-A/S.2521-A)

Ballooning medical debt contributes to the instability New Yorkers are facing, harming both those with health insurance and those without. New York State can address the real financial impact of health care costs by passing the Patient Medical Debt Protection Act which ends unfair medical billing practices such as requiring consolidated, clear hospital bills and capping interest on medical debt to 3 percent. It would also protect consumers from surprise out-of-network bills caused by provider or plan misinformation and protect patients from unfair facility fees.

Expand Strategic Covid-19 Outreach & Reporting

Targeted COVID-19 Outreach and Education to Young Adults *

Young adults across the nation and throughout New York have expressed their skepticism and distrust of the government, medical system, and vaccines. Hundreds of thousands of young New Yorkers lack accurate information on vaccines, boosters, and masking. To combat COVID-19 misinformation, distrust, and information gaps, it is crucial that New York launch a COVID-19 information campaign targeted at young people (18-34), strategically planned to meet young people where they are (places of work, campuses, nearby museums, and restaurants).

Addressing the Burden of COVID-19 in Young Black and Hispanic People *

New York has confirmed the inequalities and health risks that exist amongst minority groups as a direct result of the pandemic. Black and Hispanic New Yorkers have a far higher risk of exposure, hospitalization, and fatality due to the SARS-CoV-2 virus than white New York residents. New York must address the inequalities amongst minority groups by including race and ethnicity data in the New York State of Health website for public transparency on health disparities and equity over time, and appointing an executive-level task force composed of leadership from relevant entities, including representatives of disproportionately affected communities, to ensure the state has the data necessary to close Covid-19 informational disparities.²

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Key: * = No related legislation proposed yet. ** = Forthcoming legislation in the pipeline.

² <https://www.albany.edu/communicationsmarketing/covid-19-documents/Racial%20Disparities%20in%20COVID-19%20Bonus%20Briefing%20Paper%5B2%5D.pdf>