



A BLUEPRINT FOR

# Building Back A Better Safety Net System

## 6 OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION

The pandemic's impact on our communities has underscored the vital role of the social safety net- yet has also exposed its cracks. Below, we highlight opportunities for how we can rebuild and strengthen the sector so that it is able to withstand future crises, serve people to their fullest potential, and so the system can play a stronger role in addressing deeply rooted social issues like poverty, social justice, and racial equity.

Our vision is: **A strong safety net benefits everyone, and Montgomery County's safety net will thrive through a shared commitment to nourish and sustain it.** To achieve that vision, we've identified six opportunities and major action steps.

This Blueprint is a work in progress. We invite you to add your own insights and ideas during one of our no-cost virtual Community Planning Sessions in August or September. Visit [healthspark.org/events](https://healthspark.org/events) for more information and to register.

Build the safety net system's capacity to advance racial and social justice.

This means first **building personal, organizational, and systemic understandings** of racism, white privilege, and institutionalized discrimination and how it manifests in our system. To build this knowledge, we need to **identify appropriate trainers and education programs**, as well as **fund and require training for staff, boards, donors, and policymakers.**

Second, it means dismantling oppressive structures and cultures across organizations and the system itself. This includes **promoting anti-racist and anti-discriminatory policies and practices, developing pipelines into leadership** for people of color and other underrepresented groups, and **building equity into hiring and HR practices.**

Put an end to chronic underfunding and cut the red tape of the safety net system.

This work starts by advocating for full funding of the safety net system, so that services are funded at true cost. This includes **paying livable wages and health benefits** for all staff, **paying actual rates for administration**, and **funding evaluation and capacity building.**

This also includes changing restrictive regulations that limit who qualifies for help. Ideas include **raising income limits** for services like subsidized childcare, **reducing redundant application requirements** across programs, and **extending grace periods for income recalculations** so that households aren't penalized for earning income.

Finally, this means **developing a common agenda for advocacy and policy-making** that supports a holistic approach to funding and providing safety net services.

Sustain technology advances and support equitable access to technology.

This includes sustaining telehealth advances made in the past few months by **working with payors to retain telehealth/service-related advances** post-COVID (e.g., WIC, Medicaid, CHIP, Medicare) and to health plans directly; and **advocating for changes in HIPAA** to allow telehealth to continue.

This also includes ensuring that tech advances don't exacerbate existing inequities. This includes taking steps to **ensure access to Internet is available to everyone, creating programs to provide equipment such as phones and tablets** to individuals and families in need, and **raising the skills of people who are new to technology.**

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Support the emotional well-being of safety net staff and community members.

This starts by supporting a **community-wide approach to trauma-informed care** that recognizes the intersection between trauma, racism, and poverty. This includes **requiring trauma training** for all providers, boards, and funders, and providing **funding to support trauma-informed approaches**.

This also includes ensuring that everyone in our community has access to mental health resources by **designing outreach for those who cannot go to regular support services**.

This also includes **increasing mental health care resources for health care workers and essential workers, including case workers and front line staff**.

Strengthen the operational practices of safety net providers.

This includes **strengthening skills in financial management, scenario planning, and business continuity planning**. It also includes **supporting adaptations accelerated by COVID-19** such as banking, virtual work, and flexible work schedules.

Support organizational coordination, such as **exploring shared purchasing power for back office services** like professional services, benefits, fundraising technology and software, and insurance.

**Strengthen nonprofit boards** by bridging their knowledge gap about the sector and the impacts of the 2020 crises.

Build a more vibrant, active, and inclusive community.

**Replicate and build-on collaborative models** to promote coordination as a best practice and shared part of all organization's values.

Share power with consumers and marginalized communities by **establishing a Consumer Advisory Council** to advise all service providers and **create structured opportunities for listening** to marginalized communities about their needs, and advancing their priorities.

Expect or mandate **cultural and language competence and inclusion**.

Engage in collective advocacy and learning, and **integrate advocacy for policy change into the regular activities of safety net providers**.