



Public Policy Priorities

January 1, 2021

Our Values

The Opportunity Alliance (TOA) envisions a world where society and its systems (e.g., food security, education, criminal justice, health care, housing) are just, fair, and inclusive, enabling all people to participate and reach their full potential. We believe in the dignity and humanity of all people. We strive for a healthy and prosperous society that promotes all people having equitable access and opportunity.

The values of TOA are: Respect and Trust; Diversity; Integrity; Collaboration and Community; Empathy and Compassion; Empowerment; and Advocacy.

- We believe a community is only as strong as its ability to care for its youngest and most vulnerable members and their families, and that access to high-quality, affordable childcare and education is a human right.
- We know that systemic and institutional inequities, especially in matters of race, remain significant barriers for people and communities working to reach their full potential, and it will take all of us prioritizing anti-racist and inclusive practices to support these communities.
- We believe New Mainers bring a rich array of experience and culture, and we believe attracting and supporting New Mainers to the state is in the best interest of our communities and our workforce.
- We believe that all people have the right to advocate for and influence their own well-being, and that of their families and communities.

Our Work

The Opportunity Alliance supports Maine's most vulnerable populations: low-income, at-risk individuals and families; children and young adults; communities of color; refugees and New Mainers; individuals with disabilities; people experiencing mental health and substance use disorders; and individuals and families on the brink, or in the midst, of crisis.

To meet the needs of these populations, and to build stronger communities, TOA helps individuals and families navigate crisis, access basic needs, and improve their neighborhoods. The organization's 45 comprehensive programs, 450+ employees, and dozens of strategic partners are all tightly connected to provide community members with compassionate and effective wrap-around support.

At TOA, we know that high quality childcare and early learning experiences, along with parent and family support, are foundational to children's success in school and throughout life.

Our staff work with families to support the social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development of their children at all ages, in classrooms and at home, to prepare them for their later transition into Kindergarten.

Our place-based approach helps transform target neighborhoods into communities where people know each other and take care of each other. We employ a comprehensive, barrier-free approach to address complex challenges faced by individuals and families. We work to ensure that all individuals and families have consistent, safe opportunities to meet and form social connections and relationships as neighbors in their communities, while having access to needed resources and services. We believe that together, we can best address the issues that individuals and families are facing in our communities.

TOA's efforts to address the needs of low-income, vulnerable individuals and families help create self-sufficiency, break the cycle of multi-generational poverty, create neighborhood resiliency, and improve whole communities. The organization views all these issues through a racial equity lens and takes into account the disproportionate effects on people of color. In addition, TOA recognizes the lack of services/resources in rural communities and is committed to assisting in addressing and working to resolve unmet needs.

Effective and efficient results-based practices among programs are possible because of the comprehensive continuum of care spanning prenatal to senior services, a multitude of partnerships and collaborations, and a combination of state, federal, and private funding.

In addition to providing services and programs that lift up Mainers, TOA seeks to advocate with and on behalf of clients and the community to create a more just society. To do this, TOA is committed to:

- Creating pathways for clients to express their views and share their experiences directly with policy makers.
- Continuing to be resolute in our efforts to address racial disparities and injustices that we see in our workplace and in our community.
- Promoting fair and anti-racist practices among our community and business partners.
- Advocating for public policy that addresses systemic and institutional racism, disparities, and oppression.

COVID-19 Pandemic Community Response

At this time when there are drastic changes to family financial situations, sharp increases in anxiety and stress levels, and a scarcity of community resources, TOA has continued to provide community access to crisis mental health services and basic needs such as housing, food, and infant formula and diapers. In fact, the organization grew throughout the pandemic—increasing the services it provides to the community.

Over the course of 2020, TOA leveraged its size and reach, wrapping its services around those in need. The organization learned the importance of flexibility in how it supports clients as well as staff. It has also learned the importance of strong partnerships. In responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, TOA has proven that community-based nonprofit organizations are innovative and nimble and can be counted on to effectively support community needs in times of emergency.

Strategic Plan

TOA's public policy priorities align with the agency's Strategic Plan's Strategy Statements and Key Service Areas.

Strategic Plan's Strategy Statements

- We build better lives and stronger communities by offering a comprehensive array of services and resources.
- We are a results-focused organization that transforms in response to changing needs.
- Our success is built upon financial sustainability, fiscal integrity, and agency accountability.
- We strategically partner to achieve greater impact while informing public policy.

Key Areas of Service

- Family & Early Childhood Education
- Mental Health & Wellness
- Economic Supports
- Community Building

TOA's public policy priorities also align with our partners' efforts including those of the Alliance for Strong Families and Communities, Behavioral Health Community Collaborative, Maine Affordable Housing Coalition, Maine Community Action Partnership, Maine Council on Aging, and Thrive 2027. We recognize that these efforts and organizations need to work together more effectively than ever before given the acute needs and risks our clients face financially, socially, and health-wise due to the pandemic.

Key Areas of Service & Legislative Priorities

Family & Early Childhood Education

A collection of programs working in partnership with families and the community to ensure children are ready for school.

Advocacy Objective: Access to high-quality early childhood education including high-quality childcare for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.

Strategies:

- Ensure that children have access to high-quality early childhood education.
- Focus on improving outcomes and results for parents and their children, including increasing employment, school readiness, and reducing intergenerational poverty.
- Support programmatic efforts to help parents gain the skills, knowledge, and tools to support their child's development.
- Advocate for childcare solutions and family supports for when schools are not in session (due to a COVID-19 outbreak or otherwise) and parents still must work.
- Provide access to academic and behavioral support services and high-quality supervised recreation.
- Build a skilled early childhood education workforce to prepare children for lifelong academic and career success.

Mental Health & Wellness

A continuum of public health, community, and residential mental health and substance use disorder services for children, youth, and adults.

Advocacy Objective: Access to health care/behavioral health care.

Strategies:

- Advocate for maintaining/increasing MaineCare funding so that all Mainers have access to health insurance.
- Ensure that individuals and families have access to health care/behavioral health care and receive quality services.
- Promote continued support of telehealth services beyond the pandemic.
- Participate in the review of MaineCare reimbursement rates for behavioral health services.
- Increase the availability of mental health & substance use disorder services.

Economic Supports

A collection of programs and services designed to increase income and meet basic needs by ensuring access to food, safe and stable shelter, utilities, and volunteer opportunities.

Advocacy Objective: Access to economic supports and mobility as well as housing while focusing on homelessness prevention.

Strategies:

- Ensure that individuals and families have access to the economic and social supports needed to provide them with educational programming, workforce development services, and employment opportunities to ensure that they meet their full potential.
- Help individuals and families build social capital that can support upward economic mobility.
- Support both short-term and long-term economic recovery needed due to the COVID-19 pandemic by being flexible and swift to utilize opportunities presented by pandemic relief funding at the state and federal level, during the period of emergency and beyond.
- Support and advocate for maintaining and increasing the availability of rent subsidies to prevent evictions and potential homelessness.
- Support and advocate for increasing affordable housing, employment opportunities, and food access that address underlying systemic causes of homelessness.

Community Building

A collection of programs working with youth, families, neighbors, and partner organizations to build strong networks and healthy neighborhoods.

Advocacy Objective: Access to services and resources in rural communities.

Strategies:

- Increase education about the special needs of rural communities.
- Assess unmet community needs.

- Identify potential funding opportunities and partners such as the Maine Rural Health Collaborative.
- Engage partners in the development of community-based services.