

The Community Need for Diapers

Access to a sufficient supply of diapers is essential for the health of infants, disabled and elderly, and the quality of life of our communities, but too many individuals don't have the resources to adequately provide for this basic need.

As long as poverty exists, children and adults will need diapers. The need is already great... and it's growing: According to 2014 Census Bureau estimates, Americans living at or below the poverty line totaled 46.7 million individuals or 14.8% of the population; and children under 18 make up nearly 21% of those at or below the federal poverty line, meaning that more than one in four children are born into poverty each year.

Resources for free or discounted diapers are few. Food Stamps can't be used to purchase diapers and, until recently, diaper manufacturers hadn't donated diapers to organizations focused on addressing diaper need.

The primary goal of a diaper bank is to bridge this gap. Diaper banks are in the unique position to efficiently distribute diapers and incontinence supplies to those who need them most.

Infant and Children Needs

Shortage of diapers can lead to serious impacts on the well-being of those in need. Parents without sufficient resources often allow children to wear diapers for too long during the day, or try to clean and reuse disposable diapers, putting children at risk for staph and other infections.

Also, the likelihood of abuse increases when a baby is in a household facing the stresses of poverty, and it increases even more when that baby is crying due to the discomfort of a soiled diaper.

The Center for Economic and Policy Research reported that in 2014, the poorest 20% of families in the U.S. spent roughly 14% of their income on diapers. **These are families with an average after-tax income of \$11,253; and they spent over \$1,500 on diapers in 2014.**

At the same time, daycare facilities require that parents provide sufficient disposable diapers to meet the needs of their children while in the facility. In order to do so, parents may have to make difficult choices between purchasing diapers, paying bills, or buying groceries.

Disabled Needs

Many disabled people are obliged to wear diapers for a variety of reasons; incontinence and inability to use a bathroom unaided are among the most common. This is a life-long, everyday reality for many disabled persons, and both the prevalence and the frequency of bladder problems associated with many disabilities increase with age.

According to a 2014 study conducted by the University of New Hampshire, an estimated 28.2% of the population between 18 and 64 with a disability had incomes at or below the poverty line. These numbers only include people with disabilities who are living independently, either alone or with family - not those who are institutionalized and have greater access to care.

Many diaper banks provide monthly donations of incontinence supplies to their partner agencies because the local community's disabled would suffer decreased quality of life, ranging from constant discomfort due to accidents to being unable to leave their homes.

Elderly Needs

The U.S. Census Bureau reports that nearly 10% of adults age 65 and older live at or below the federal poverty line. They also report that by 2030, more than 20% of U.S. residents (over 70 million) will be age 65 or older. At a time when communities need to be building infrastructure and planning to care for our increasing aging populations, services are instead being reduced for even the lowest-income seniors.

With an average income of less than \$16,000 per year for a single-person household over 65 years old, many seniors are unable to pay for critical services, including incontinence supplies.

The Pima Council on Aging, an Arizona Senior Service Agency, has identified the following as major problem areas for their community: the lack of sufficient income to meet basic needs, the lack of transportation and affordable health care-including dental care, need for in-home support-including home maintenance and repair, isolation and need for advocacy. The overriding concern of seniors is to find ways in which to continue living in their own homes for as long as possible. According to the National Association for Continence, "More than half of all residents in nursing homes are incontinent and it is the second leading cause of institutionalization."

The supplies distributed by local diaper banks through their partner organizations are part of a larger continuum of services that not only helps older adults remain in their own homes, but also contributes to their dignity and quality of life. If not for a diaper bank's monthly donation of incontinence supplies to their partner agencies, many of the local community's elderly would be unable to leave their homes due to fear of embarrassment, and possibly worse, living in compromised comfort even while at home.