



Safety Net Programs

Discussion Guide

Let's review

At the start of each discussion, review the conversation ground rules for returning and new members alike to set the stage for active participation by all. You may want to use a timer as you go around the room.

And don't forget to decide who will take notes and post a discussion recap.

- **Be open and curious:** Everyone has a unique perspective, so listen and be prepared to hear a different point of view. Remember, you do not need to share your political affiliation; this is a discussion and exchange of ideas, not politics.
- **Be respectful and engaged:** Be sure that everyone has a chance to speak before adding a second comment or perspective. Encourage each other's participation.
- **Be focused and concise:** Keep the conversation centered on the issue and the brief.

The "Table-it" Rule: If the group has gone off-topic but the area is of interest, the group can table the conversation and save it for another time to be addressed in a different manner.

Let's begin

- Take five minutes to review the [Executive Summary](#) for this brief. Highlight the main point of each section and key statistics.
- Each member is invited to answer the following questions in a **two-three minute reaction** to the brief:
 - Introduce yourself, and share what "lens of care" did you wear when reviewing this brief (e.g. personal, professional, community, state, nation, global)?
 - What did you find most interesting or surprising from reading the brief? What matters?

Spread the word: facts to share during your discussion

- The U.S. government 2020 budget included \$1.6 trillion in [discretionary spending](#) and \$4.6 trillion in [mandatory spending](#), including \$1.45 trillion for Medicare and Medicaid, \$1.09 trillion for Social Security, and \$1.05 trillion for income security programs.
- Social Security and Medicare face a combined [\\$100 trillion cash shortfall](#) over the next 30 years. The Social Security trust fund is expected to be depleted by [2034](#), and Medicare Part A is expected to be depleted by [2026](#).
- The [2021 COVID-19 Relief Bill](#) extended 8 of 13 safety net programs, including adding \$38.3 billion to the Child Care program block grants and \$41.3 billion in housing assistance.

Let's discuss

Pick 2 or 3 questions that resonate with the group and discuss, or choose your own.

- **Community:** What are the impacts of entitlements on our community? Who cares about this and which part(s)? How can programs support seniors who are close to retiring or in retirement, while shoring up these programs up for younger generations?
- **Government:** How can voters help politicians feel like they can talk about reforms to our entitlement programs without losing their next election?
- **Business:** How can we balance the promises made to older generations with the financial obligations of younger generations that may receive little/no benefits?

Let's act

1. **Take it local.** Talk to neighbors, friends, and family. Ask for their views on and experiences with safety net programs. Hosting another conversation with these community members.
2. **Explore the impact of legislation related to safety net programs in your community.** On your municipality's website you can find information pertaining to benefits and programs related to low incomes, aging, healthcare. You can search various departments or agencies, most likely a Department of Human Services, or search for "healthcare" or "social security" in the search bar.
3. **Investigate community programs** in your state or municipality. Contact your state or local agencies on [aging](#), [SNAP](#), [TANF](#), [Medicaid and CHIP](#), and [unemployment insurance](#). Also investigate private providers that contract with states or municipalities, or operate solo, to benefit community members.
4. **Research your elected representatives' positions** on social safety net programs, and their vision for how to tackle related challenges facing Americans and your community. You can find contact information for federal, state, and local government officials [here](#). Your state or municipality's websites will also have information to contact leaders. Try looking at the drop-down menu for a *Government* tab.
5. **Establish a relationship with your legislators.** It's easy to establish a relationship with your legislators. Start by introducing yourself. You can also learn to write to your representatives or set up a meeting with a legislator on [The Policy Circle website](#).
6. **Consider writing a letter to the editor or an op-ed on your stance on social safety net programs in your local paper.** Learn how on [The Policy Circle website](#).

Next Steps for Your Circle

- **Post a Recap:** Summarize your discussion to share thoughts with members not present, and share planned actions from group members. Designate who will post a meeting recap on your circle page.
- **Decide your next meeting topic.** Want to discuss a related brief at your next meeting? Suggestions include:
 - [Aging in the 21st Century](#)
 - [Poverty](#)
 - [Healthcare](#)
- **Dive Deeper into the issues.** If this is an area you would like to pursue further, consider taking possible steps to influence policy. The Policy Circle offers resources for [developing a message about your issue](#) and [organizing a petition](#) to amplify your voice and raise awareness. Don't miss our [latest events](#) that help you dive deeper on this issue and more.