



As Diaper Prices Increase, so Does Diaper Need: Supporting Diaper Banks

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Introduction

As of 2023, approximately 47% of U.S. families with babies will struggle with affording diapers.¹ This issue is commonly referred to as diaper need, characterized by caregivers having insufficient resources and supports to be able to supply enough diapers to their infant or toddler.²

On average, infants need their diapers changed 10 to 12 times a day, toddlers need to be changed 6 to 8 times. With diapers being priced at .20 to .30 cents each, parents spend approximately \$18 a week just on diapers.² With the additional costs of wipes, formula, child care, clothes, food, and baby gear, parents are often faced with impossible financial decisions.

A growing issue associated with diaper need is the common requirement of child care centers, mandating that families provide a daily supply of diapers for their child. If parents are unable to provide this number of diapers, they are not permitted to drop their child off, leaving them to miss work or struggle to find back up care. Overall, one in four parents miss school or work because they don't have enough diapers to drop their children off.¹

Aside from this, having insufficient diapers leads caregivers to delay changing. In fact, 48% of parents have reported delaying diapering in an attempt to prolong their diaper supply.³ When a child does not have a clean, dry diaper, they are at increased risk of developing rashes, urinary tract infections, and experiencing increased stress.⁴ These medical issues lead to greater financial hardships as children with diaper need require more frequent visits to the doctor or hospital than children without such need.

Diaper need is a prevalent issue in the state of New Jersey, and throughout the country, yet it often goes

unnoticed by individuals and government officials. This brief will explore the issue of diaper need within the state, identify helpful programs that exist, and provide recommendations for how to combat this issue.

Babies and families should have access to all their basic needs, diapers being an essential one amongst them. It is time that diaper need is recognized as an issue and addressed accordingly by our state and federal government agencies, especially as diaper prices continue to rise.



Addressing Diaper Need

The primary way diaper need is addressed in New Jersey and throughout the country, is through community diaper banks. Diaper banks, like food banks, provide diapers to families in need throughout communities at no cost to them.

Diaper banks can be independent entities, or they can be recognized by the National Diaper Bank Network (NDBN), the organization at the forefront of the diaper need movement. New Jersey has nine NDBN

recognized diaper banks that help supply diapers to over 10,000 infants and toddlers each month, equaling over 6 million diapers each year as of 2022.⁵ Diaper banks supply diapers directly to families, but also work with other community organizations to provide them with a supply for their own communities.

Nationally, there are over 225 NDBN diaper banks distributing over 180 million diapers annually to families in need.⁶ Community diaper banks help supply diapers to children and families in need, but they are primarily reliant on donations making it impossible to serve everyone who needs diapers. Many New Jersey diaper banks report having lengthy waiting lists, and still having to turn families down as they know they will not get through the wait list in time.

Community diaper banks exist to fill the gaps in funding and resources made available to parents and communities. While nonprofit organizations have led the charge in providing families with diapers, changes in state and federal legislation could help increase families' access to basic needs. Luckily, diaper banks are run by passionate individuals hoping to combat the issue within their communities to promote child safety and development.



Issues Contributing to Diaper Need

Despite the prevalence of diaper need, many state and federal governments have not worked to address the issue. While diaper banks exist in communities, they are rarely given funding to increase their capacity and services. Aside from the Diaper Distribution Demonstration and Research Pilot (DDDRP), created in 2022, there are no federal grant opportunities for states to increase diaper access.⁷ And even with this grant program, established by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, states are left behind as only seven grants are awarded each year. Individual states have

funded diaper banks, but this is rare as only 10 states are actively contributing to their diaper banks—New Jersey is not one of them.

Aside from funding, diaper need is exacerbated by the diaper tax that continues to exist in 26 U.S. states.⁸ While New Jersey eliminated the diaper tax nearly 40 years ago, over half of the states continue to charge people taxes for this essential item.⁸ Diaper taxes lead to greater financial burden and directly decrease the number of diapers a family can afford for their child.

Diapers are widely excluded from public benefits programs, and cannot be purchased using Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or Woman, Infant, and Children (WIC) funds.⁹ Occasionally, diapers are permitted to be purchased using funds from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program (TANF), though this is not the case in every state.⁹

Also, TANF programs reach few families and do not provide enough cash assistance for families to use it on diapers. While this first step could help families purchase diapers, the programs would need additional funding so parents aren't forced to make difficult choices as a result of the limited assistance they receive.

Medicaid programs are required to supply diapers to children who require them for certain medical reasons, but the qualifications regarding need and age vary throughout states. In 2023, Tennessee became the first state to cover the purchase of diapers for all families enrolled in Medicaid for the first two years.¹⁰

Addressing diaper need has not been a priority for federal and state governments, as evidenced by the lack of funding and legislation established to reduce it. Currently, diaper need is becoming more widely recognized, leading to an influx of related legislation being introduced at the state and federal level.

Recommendations

There are two primary ways to address diaper need. First, state and federal governments can fund diaper banks and support their distribution of diapers. Second, governments can provide direct assistance to families so they are able to purchase and access diapers on their own. Here are a few proposals related to these solutions:

1. **Increase Federal and State Funding for Diaper Banks.** Community diaper banks need federal and state support to increase staff, capacity, and supplies. Providing funding will allow diaper banks to eliminate wait lists and provide all families in need with diapers.

2. **Streamline Diaper Funding.** Creating a streamlined source of funding for diaper purchases will establish pathways for individuals to buy and receive diapers through social services benefits or other avenues.

3. **Support Diaper-Related Legislation.** Diaper-related legislation is increasingly being introduced at the state and federal levels. This legislation can be supported by individuals who write to their legislators, and by legislators who support and cosponsor the bills.

4. **Eliminate Diaper Tax.** The diaper tax should be eliminated at the federal level. 26 states still charge a tax on diapers, increasing the financial burden for families. This tax is often a result of diapers being considered a “luxury,” rather than a necessity.

5. **Increase TANF and Medicaid Diaper Allowances.** TANF assistance should permit the purchase of diapers for families who need it and provide additional allowances specifically for diapers and diaper products. Medicaid funding should be expanded to include diaper allowances for all families and supply the diapers where medically necessary for children.

6. **Promote Diaper Distribution Demonstration and Research Pilot (DDDRP).** Support the establishment of federal, state, and private grant opportunities for diaper supplies. Encourage diaper banks to apply for these grants and make the funding accessible to more states.

7. **Raise Awareness.** Diaper need is often a silent issue unknown to many people who are not directly impacted by it. Promoting conversation around diaper need will help raise awareness and garner support for the issue. Individuals can get involved by advocating for policy changes, volunteering at local diaper banks, or starting their own diaper drive. Individuals can learn more about diaper need, ideas to address it, and ways to help your community by visiting <https://nationaldiaperbanknetwork.org/>.

Conclusion

Diaper need is a growing issue throughout the state of New Jersey, and the country as a whole. As diaper prices continue to increase, the economic plight of families is worsened and babies are placed at substantial risk of health and developmental issues.

It is time to recognize the needs of our youngest members of society and assist families in affording diapers and diapering supplies. Federal and state governments should begin recognizing the impact of diaper need and the ways in which this need can be reduced, so that all families in the U.S. can thrive.



ENDNOTES

- ¹ The NDBN Diaper Check 2023. National Diaper Bank Network. (2023, July 31). <https://nationaldiaperbanknetwork.org/the-ndbn-diaper-check/>
- ² Diaper Need and Its Impact on US Families. National Diaper Bank Network. (2022, February). <https://nationaldiaperbanknetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Diaper-Need-and-Its-Impact-on-US-Families.pdf>
- ³ American Families Struggle to Secure Everyday Essentials. Feeding America. (2013). <https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/research/in-short-supply/in-short-supply-executive.pdf>
- ⁴ Diaper need in America. National Diaper Bank Network. (2023, August 1). <https://nationaldiaperbanknetwork.org/the-need/#:~:text=These%20babies%20are%20more%20vulnerable,of%20every%20baby%20and%20toddler>
- ⁵ All States Diaper Facts. National Diaper Bank Network. (2022, July). https://drive.google.com/file/d/1iFMDd1tc2XC4UkkLQg-Ash80WLzxEnr_/view
- ⁶ Member Diaper Banks. National Diaper Bank Network. (2023, September 7). <https://nationaldiaperbanknetwork.org/member-directory/>
- ⁷ Diaper Distribution Demonstration & Research Pilot. The Administration for Children and Families. (2022). <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ocs/programs/diaper-distribution-pilot>
- ⁸ Diaper tax. National Diaper Bank Network. (2023, October 4). <https://nationaldiaperbanknetwork.org/diaper-tax/#:~:text=New%20Jersey%E2%80%93%20New%20Jersey%20exempted,from%20the%20state%20sales%20tax>
- ⁹ Federal issues. National Diaper Bank Network. (2023, October 4). <https://nationaldiaperbanknetwork.org/federal-issues>
- ¹⁰ State issues. National Diaper Bank Network. (2023, October 4). <https://nationaldiaperbanknetwork.org/state-issues>