



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 14, 2026

Contact:

dhughes@universitysettlement.org

University Settlement launches new direct service campaign “We Got Us” to respond to the federal benefits eligibility crisis

Working in coalition with the Association of Lower East Side Settlements, which collectively engage 87,500 New Yorkers at risk of losing federal benefits including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Medicaid

New York City – University Settlement will launch “We Got Us,” a direct services approach for keeping New Yorkers connected to the federal benefits their households rely upon, America’s first Settlement House announced today.

The announcement comes as New Yorkers are beginning to feel the effects of H.R. 1, the so-called “Big Beautiful Bill,” which complicates and limits eligibility for federal social safety net benefits including SNAP and Medicaid.

University Settlement CEO **Melissa Aase** announced the new campaign with an op-ed [published in the New York Daily News this week](#).

In New York state, where 3.5 million people receive federal nutrition benefits, an estimated 1.02 million people (29% of all recipients) are at risk of going hungry due to the changes, while more than 1 million could lose their health coverage. Significantly, these groups also substantially overlap.

Neighborhood economies, which typically benefit strongly from SNAP spending, will also be profoundly impacted – it’s estimated that Lower Manhattan businesses will lose up to \$66 million per year in annual revenue.

Modeled after disaster response efforts, and launched in coalition with the Association of Lower East Side Settlements (ALESS), which includes the Chinese-American Planning Council, Educational Alliance, Grand Street Settlement, Hamilton-Madison House, and

Henry Street Settlement, “We Got Us” will:

- Upskill and train existing staff across all six partner agencies to do benefits case advocacy;
- Leverage existing trusting relationships with community members to communicate timely, effective, accurate information about changes to benefits eligibility requirements;
- Enhance local mutual aid and emergency food infrastructure;
- And ensure all coalition members are flexibly resourced to quickly respond to community needs as they arise.

Collectively, the We Got Us coalition organizations serve 87,500 people who currently receive SNAP and/or Medicaid benefits.

“We’re calling this effort We Got Us, because no one is coming to save our communities and we must have each other’s backs,” said **Melissa Aase, Chief Executive Officer, University Settlement**. “We’ve learned that effective disaster response requires forethought, collaboration, and efficiency – and that in times of crisis, trusted relationships are vital for ensuring that accurate information is shared and acted upon. That’s why we are raising the alarm, training hundreds of team members to communicate accurate information to our neighbors, and setting up an intentional coalition with our peer organizations who operate programs and locations in all five boroughs of New York City.”

“We are coordinating with the City and State, but nothing can replace the deep trust our teams have built with the families who are in harm’s way, or the safe places we provide to address basic needs,” **Aase** continued. “This makes NYC’s settlement houses and human service organizations a key link in the chain of help.”

“Changes to SNAP and other critical benefits are creating real uncertainty for families across New York City, particularly for low-income, immigrant, and working families who are already struggling with the rising cost of living,” said **Wayne Ho, President and CEO of the Chinese-American Planning Council (CPC)**. “At CPC, we know that our community members turn to organizations they trust for support in navigating complex systems and understanding how changes will affect their families. Through the ‘We Got Us’ campaign, ALESS is coming together to ensure our staff have the training and resources they need to provide clear, accurate guidance and connect New Yorkers to critical supports. This is what settlement houses have always done best -- mobilize our collective strength and make sure our neighbors know they do not have to face these challenges alone.”

“As more New Yorkers experience the loss of critical federal benefits, we are committed to stepping up alongside our fellow Settlement Houses in ALESS and with the support of the ‘We Got Us’ Program,” said **Rich Baum, President and CEO of Educational Alliance**. “Together, we can make a real difference in the lives of the tens of thousands of New

Yorkers who are navigating food insecurity, barriers to medical care, and other hardships. Through the holistic support and resources that are at the heart of the settlement house model, we can together help individuals and families create the foundation they need to thrive."

"New Yorkers are facing soaring rent, major child care costs, record gas prices, and economic challenges that make it hard to access basic necessities like food and healthcare," said **Robert Cordero, CEO of Grand Street Settlement**. "We're proud to stand with our Settlement House partners as part of the 'We Got Us' initiative. Our neighbors need support navigating the changing landscape of SNAP and Medicaid eligibility and we're here to serve them."

"Settlement houses have always been a first line of support during times of uncertainty," said **Isabel Ching, Executive Director, Hamilton-Madison House**. "The strength of We Got Us lies in the trust our organizations have built within our communities and our ability to respond quickly to emerging needs. Hamilton-Madison House is honored to stand alongside our ALESS partners to help New Yorkers maintain access to essential benefits and ensure that no one has to navigate these changes alone."

"New eligibility restrictions for SNAP and Medicaid will have a devastating effect on the Lower East Side, where many residents already face intolerable hunger and economic strain," said **David Garza, president & CEO of Henry Street Settlement**. "Henry Street is proud to collaborate through the We Got US coalition and is grateful for University Settlement's leadership that positions us, along with our sister settlements, to leverage the collective power of each partner's trusted relationships with our neighbors to multiply our impact, demand solutions and help our community remain resilient."

We Got Us has received generous funding from The Altman Foundation, UNH's Settlement House Sustainability Fund, and the Child Welfare Fund.

###

About University Settlement

University Settlement partners with 40,000+ New Yorkers in Lower Manhattan and Brooklyn every year to build on our collective strengths as we achieve healthy, stable, and remarkable lives.

For 140 years, we've fought poverty and systemic inequality by building highly effective social services in collaboration with our neighbors.

Established in 1886 as the first Settlement House in the United States, we bring the values of our movement into the 21st century by meeting New Yorkers where they live, listening deeply to all perspectives, and creating space for responsive cooperation.

Joining with our neighbors to make stable foundations where people of all ages can grow and pursue their dreams, we build community strength.

We infuse a commitment to civic engagement, equality, and communal action into each of our programs, which include early childhood education, youth development, healthy aging, mental health and wellness, housing advocacy and benefits assistance, English classes for adult immigrants, community centers, and the arts.

#NYCisUS. What can we do together? Learn more at www.universitysettlement.org