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# Targeting dropouts, poverty

The United Way plans to launch a 10-year program that also will seek to improve the health of Americans.

*From the Washington Post*

**WASHINGTON** — The United Way of America, alarmed at the nation's fraying safety net, will announce today that it will direct its giving toward 10-year goals that would cut in half the high school dropout rate and the number of working families struggling financially.

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The nonprofit organization also wants to increase by one-third the number of youths and adults considered healthy.

The announcement, scheduled for its annual conference in Baltimore, comes as the organization releases a report detailing a precipitous decline in key education, personal finance and health indicators.

The report finds that one in four high school students does not graduate on time, one in four families do not earn enough to provide for their household, and two in three young people and adults lead unhealthy lives, including those who engage in such risky behaviors as drug use, binge drinking and unsafe sex.

"The country is at a crossroads right now," said Brian Gallagher, United Way's president and chief executive. "I've never felt a time in my career where there's this combination of enough pain, feeling of a lack

of progress, feeling like we've stalled, combined with a next generation of leadership demanding change."

United Way leaders will pledge to spend the money raised in the next 10 years to support programs directly related to education, income and healthcare. The national organization sets the agenda for its 1,300 affiliates, but those affiliates have some autonomy.

"The country's social safety net is broken, Gallagher said, and the United Way must redirect its money toward the root causes and hold itself accountable by setting bold goals.

"For years and years and years, folks saw us as a fund-raising organization . . . but the issues we care about weren't getting better," he said in an interview at the Alexandria, Va., headquarters. "So the change here is to put a stake in the ground on the issues that drive improving social conditions."

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