

2022 - 2024

FEDERAL POLICY AGENDA



Prevent Child Abuse America® (PCA America) advocates for policies and services that strengthen families and communities, promote healthy child development, and prevent child abuse and neglect before it occurs.

PCA America includes a **nationwide network of chapters** and one of the most widely implemented home visiting programs in the country, with nearly 600 **Healthy Families America®** evidence-based program sites, delivering approximately one million voluntary home visits every year. We promote programs and resources proven by science that enable kids, families, and entire communities to thrive—today, tomorrow, and for generations to come.

Evidence shows that children’s early experiences impact them throughout life—both positively and negatively. Kids raised in [safe, stable, and nurturing relationships and environments](#) are more likely to enjoy good physical and mental health, succeed academically and socially, and go on to contribute to economic prosperity for everyone.

Exposure to violence early in life is linked to [leading causes of death](#) like heart disease and lung cancer, and can increase the likelihood of homelessness, addiction, and unemployment. It can also heighten the risk of behavior problems in school, depression, and suicide.ⁱⁱ



Prevention services and supports are critical for families and communities. Working alongside families, together we can help to lay the foundation for children and for the success of the entire family. Poverty, unemployment, inadequate housing, and/or food insecurity can result in an overload of stress on parents, a significant risk factor for child abuse and neglect. At PCA America, we are committed to eliminating conditions like these that put our children at risk. We directly address social determinants of health, including systemic and structural racism by ensuring equitable access to high quality services and supporting communities to effectively address health disparities.



TOGETHER, IF WE TAKE THE STEPS OUTLINED IN THIS DOCUMENT AND ADDRESS POLICIES AT THE NATIONAL, STATE, AND LOCAL LEVELS, WE CAN PREVENT CHILD ABUSE, AMERICA—BECAUSE CHILDHOOD LASTS A LIFETIME.

Reauthorize and increase funding for the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA)

PCA America supports a strong and comprehensive CAPTA reauthorization bill that includes significantly higher funding levels and improved transparency and accountability. CAPTA reauthorization must also increase the law’s emphasis on primary prevention, family strengthening services, and race equity.

An updated CAPTA must include significant funding increases for Title II, the Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention grants (CBCAP), to provide states and communities the resources to implement community-based solutions. Expanding CBCAP would be transformational for communities and families. It will grow our capacity as a nation to create environments where families get the support they need before they are in crisis, thereby preventing child welfare system involvement. CBCAP grants are instrumental in providing preventative supports in all 50 states, including voluntary evidence-based home visiting services, community-based parent support programs, early childhood and childcare programs, family resource centers, and coordination with mental health, substance use, and domestic violence services, among others.



Expand funding for evidence-based early childhood home visiting programs.

PCA America supports strengthening the array of federal funding streams and opportunities that states and communities can use to support evidence-based early childhood home visiting programs. This includes federal programs such as the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting program (MIECHV), Medicaid, Family First Prevention Services Act, and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). Home visiting programs such as [Healthy Families America](#) foster relationships with families, build on their strengths, and adapt to meet their specific needs and goals. Home visiting builds upon decades of scientific research showing a positive return on investment to society and taxpayers through improved health, education, and employment outcomes, while reducing mental health, special education, and criminal justice costs, as well as involvement with child protective services.ⁱⁱⁱ

The MIECHV program is the cornerstone of evidence-based public policy with widespread bipartisan support. The federal-state partnership provides evidence-based home visiting services in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, five US Territories and 25 tribal communities. In December 2022, Congress reauthorized the MIECHV program and increased federal investment over five years with \$100 million increase in base funding starting in 2023. PCA America was a key supporter of this reauthorization effort, which also doubled the tribal set-aside from 3% to 6% and will continue to allow virtual home visiting with model fidelity to be an approved option for service delivery.



Increase funding for the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (NCIPC) at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

PCA America supports investments in primary prevention, including child sexual abuse and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), to further understand its causes and strengthen approaches to prevent child abuse.

A large and growing body of research indicates that toxic stress during childhood can harm the most basic levels of the nervous, endocrine, and immune systems. It is critical that we continue to translate and address what we know about ACEs into policies that put more children on a path to success. Additional federal investments are also needed in child sexual abuse prevention to build the evidence of current programs and policies. A 2019 [CDC report](#) outlined major gaps in our evidence and the need for dedicated funding for child sexual abuse prevention.^{iv} Increased funding would allow the CDC to expand research for the development, evaluation, and dissemination of prevention policies and practices, including the thoughtful development and rigorous evaluation of primary prevention interventions.



Prioritize and increase economic and concrete supports for families.

PCA America supports and promotes policies and funding options that prioritize primary prevention through increasing economic security to families.

One in five babies and toddlers in the U.S. live with families whose incomes are below or near the poverty line.^v Policies that strengthen family financial security help create the conditions for all children, families and communities to thrive. These policies lessen the stressors of poverty that overload families, promote safe and nurturing family environments, and ultimately build more prosperous communities. Research shows that for every additional \$1,000 that states spent on federal, state and local benefit programs per person living in poverty, there was a 4% reduction in substantiated child abuse, a 2% reduction in foster care placements and about an 8% reduction in fatalities due to child abuse and neglect.^{vi} These policies that support families include:

- **Affordable high-quality childcare:** Investing in high-quality childcare is one of the most effective ways to break the pervasive cycle of poverty, ensure equal opportunity for all, boost our economy, and keep parents employed while ensuring children develop the skills they need for success in school and life. This is especially important for children and families with less access to resources, communities of color, and immigrant families who often face greater difficulty finding high quality, affordable childcare.^{vii} In December 2022, Congress increased funding for the Child Care Development Block Grant by 30%. PCA America advocated for this dedicated funding for childcare and early learning.
- **Universal preschool:** Access to preschool and family engagement programs are shown to positively impact children's cognitive and social skills and school achievement, and decrease conduct problems, as well as reduce child abuse and neglect.^{viii}
- **The child tax credit (CTC):** The [expanded CTC](#) reached 36 million families across the country and lifted more than three million children out of poverty, providing much-needed support for parents struggling to put food on the table, pay mortgages or rent, and make ends meet. The Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University estimates that the child tax credit expansion could cut child poverty overall by 40-45% in one year and reduce racial disparities in child poverty.^{ix}
- **Paid family and medical leave:** [Paid family and medical leave](#) generate substantial health benefits for children and families, including promoting health equity, higher rates of maternal health, lower rates of family stressors, reductions in hospitalizations for abusive head trauma, and allowing employees to meet their personal and family health care needs while fulfilling work responsibilities.^{x, xi, xii}

For too long in our nation's history, primary prevention policies and support have been underfunded and inaccessible for far too many. These policy objectives are within our reach, and now is the time to level the playing field for children and families through the adoption of such policies and programs. The research is clear that investing in families and providing prenatal and early childhood support improves birth outcomes, child development, and educational achievement, and reduces premature mortality, mental illness, violent crime, substance abuse and addiction, and child abuse and neglect.^{xiv}

Sources:

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ⁱⁱ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Adverse Childhood Experiences Prevention Strategy*. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021.

ⁱⁱⁱ Avellar, S., and Paulsell, D. (2011). *Lessons Learned from the Home Visiting Evidence of Effectiveness Review Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services*. Washington, DC.

^{iv} Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2019). *Report to Congress on Child Sexual Abuse Prevention*.

^v Koball, H., Moore, A., & Hernandez, J. (2021). *Basic facts about low-income children: Children under 9 years, 2019*. New York: National Center for Children in Poverty, Bank Street College of Education.

^{vi} Murez, Cara (2021) "State spending on poverty reduces child abuse, foster care placements, deaths." *Health News*

^{vii} Minoff, Elisa et al. (2020). *What We Owe Young Children: An Anti-Racist Policy Platform for Early Childhood*. Center for the Study of Social Policy. Available here: <https://cssp.org/resource/what-we-owe-young-children/>.

^{viii} Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2016). *Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect: A Technical Package for Policy, Norm, and Programmatic Activities*. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

^{ix} Curran, M.A. (2021). *Research Roundup of the Expanded Child Tax Credit: The First 6 Months*. Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University. Available here: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5743308460b5e922a25a6dc71/t/61c499b72338bb0fb7012b6b/1640274362155/Child-Tax-Credit-Research-Roundup-CPSP-2021.pdf>

^x Nandi, A., Jahagirdar, D., Dimitris, M. C., Labrecque, J. A., Strumpf, E. C., Kaufman, J. S., Vincent, I., Atabay, E., Harper, S., Earle, A., & Heymann, S. J. (2018). *The Impact of Parental and Medical Leave Policies on Socioeconomic and Health Outcomes in OECD Countries: A Systematic Review of the Empirical Literature*. *The Milbank quarterly*, 96(3), 434-471. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0009.12340>

^{xi} Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality (2019). *The Paid Family and Medical Leave Opportunity: What Research Tells Us About Designing a Paid Leave Program that Works for All*

^{xii} Romig, K. and Bryant, K. (2021). *A National Paid Leave Program Would Help Workers, Families*. Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities