



Children's  
Action Alliance

# 2022 Issue Guide



## WHERE WE STAND ON:

EARLY CHILDHOOD | CHILD WELFARE | CHILDREN'S HEALTH

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### **INTRODUCTION:**

For over thirty years, Children's Action Alliance has served as an independent voice for Arizona children at the state capitol and in the community. We believe in an Arizona where every child is safe and loved and has access to a quality education and affordable health care.

Because children can't vote, it is important Arizonans choose candidates who will represent the 1.6 million children in our state, and will make policy decisions that positively impact their lives. For Arizona to succeed, we must prioritize policies that will help all children, in all communities, and in all corners of the state.

This guide provides information and recommended policy priorities voters should consider this election cycle in selecting candidates and propositions that support children and families.

Regardless of the outcome, we look forward to working with all elected officials to keep children and young people first.

# FAST FACTS ON EARLY CHILDHOOD

**50%**

of the state of Arizona is a child care desert<sup>(1)</sup>

**17%**

The current enrollment for 3- and 4-year-old children in quality early learning settings. The Arizona Early Learning Progress Meter goal is 35% by 2030

**NEARLY 23%**

of children in Arizona are left without quality child care as there are only 234,280 child care slots for 304,180 children

**BY 2024**

Federal COVID-19 funds that bridged state funding gaps in the system will run out in 2024 as Arizona is facing an early childhood education funding cliff

**\$11,017**

The annual average cost of center-based infant care is \$11,017 and average annual cost of home-based infant care is \$7,509. Even with assistance, child care is cost prohibitive for most Arizona families

[1] A child care desert is any census tract with more than 50 children under age 5 that contains either no child care providers or so few options that there are more than three times as many children as licensed child care slots.” 50% of the state is a child care desert. That not only includes rural areas but also include urban areas including south phoenix. Retrieved from: <https://childcaredeserts.org/2018/>

# EARLY CHILDHOOD POLICY ISSUE GUIDE

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## Where We Stand:

Every child deserves to have high quality early childhood experiences to assure that they are ready for school and life.

At Children's Action Alliance, we believe that a strong start in life leads to a successful future. As the cost of living continues to rise, providing all families with the resources and services they need to thrive is of the utmost importance. We believe that the state must take an active role in lifting up families as a means of supporting the most vulnerable years in a child's life.

These early experiences shape a child's lifelong learning as human brain development occurs most rapidly and dramatically in the first three years of life. For every \$1 spent on early childhood, up to \$16 is saved through decreased special education, social welfare, and crime-related costs. Investments early in life also increase high school and college graduations and spur economic development.



## HERE IS HOW THE NEXT GOVERNOR AND STATE LEGISLATURE CAN ACCOMPLISH THIS:

### **Expand Access to Child Care-** Child Care Provider Rate Increases

Last year, federal funds were distributed to Arizona to aid the child care network in recovering and rebuilding from the COVID-19 pandemic. These funds helped stabilize access to quality child care by increasing child care provider rates to the 50th and 75th percentile of the 2018 Market Rate Survey. **State investment to keep child care provider rates at the federal benchmark and to support the growth and sustainability of Arizona's child care network is essential.**

### **Expansion of Mental Health Consultation-** Smart Support™

Smart Support™ is a unique program that offers early childhood mental health consultation for child care providers to promote the social and emotional development of all children in care and help providers respond to children with behavioral challenges. **Mental health consultation programs are a proven approach to supporting the healthy development of all children in care and state investment is necessary for child care centers working to maximize the quality of their services.**



### **Support for the Strong Families AZ Home Visiting System- Nurse-Family Partnership**

Due to expiring grant funds, two Arizona agencies that deliver the evidence-based Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) nurse home visiting program to low-income, first-time moms and their babies will have to discontinue services for up to 200 families in Maricopa & Pima Counties. NFP is part of the continuum of the Strong Families AZ home visiting system, which provides voluntary, in-home services and support for parents and caretakers of young children. **State funding is required to prevent this loss of services, and to extend Nurse-Family Partnership nurse home visiting services to other families in need in Arizona.**

### **Expand Access to High Quality Early Learning Settings-**

Every child, in every community, and in every corner of Arizona should have options for high quality early childhood education. High quality early childhood programs that include comprehensive services have been strongly linked to both academic and life skills success among children. Research shows children who come from families with several risk factors show the most gain from access to high quality early childhood programs.[1] The High Quality Early Learning Grant (HQEL) provided by the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) Early Childhood Education (ECE) offers an opportunity for children and families to access high quality early learning settings by allocating funds to programs located in high needs communities (HNC).[2] **To increase and expand access to high quality early care and education to more of Arizona's children living in high need communities, who may not otherwise have access to high quality early learning settings prior to kindergarten entry, additional state investment should be appropriated for the HQEL grant program.**

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[1] Retrieved from <https://www.azed.gov/ece/hqel>

[2] Ibid





# FAST FACTS ON CHILD WELFARE

**11,550**

children in foster care in Arizona

**87%**

of foster children are in care due to neglect as opposed to physical abuse (7%) or sexual abuse (2%).

**4 out of 10**

children in Maricopa County will be the subject of a child welfare investigation by the time they are 18. For Black children that number is more than 6 out of 10.



# CHILD WELFARE POLICY ISSUE GUIDE

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## Where We Stand:

Children's Action Alliance believes that transforming the child welfare system into a more equitable child and family well-being system is a critical investment Arizona must make in its future. By working across systems and sectors to promote the health, well-being, and financial security of families, Arizona can end child abuse and neglect and the harmful practice of family separation by the child welfare system.

The vast majority of children in Arizona's foster care system are in care due to neglect, and much of what is deemed "neglect" stems from poverty. Research shows that when families are financially insecure and have high parental stress due to issues like unemployment, housing instability, and food insecurity, children experience "neglect" at a rate seven times greater than other children. [1] For families of color, systemic racism enhances the challenges of poverty bringing them to the attention of child welfare at disproportionately high rates. It doesn't have to be that way because research also shows that when families have access to concrete supports like TANF, childcare, and supportive housing, reports of neglect and entries into foster care decrease.

The path forward is clear: Arizona must reimagine its child welfare system as a child wellbeing system. One that supports family financial security and understands and addresses the root causes of "neglect" and structural racism. We need a system that co-designs solutions with impacted communities and prioritizes family integrity by dramatically reducing family separation. For those families and children that do need foster care, Arizona needs to ensure children are placed where they thrive best, in well-supported kinship foster homes or, secondarily, in community foster homes instead of in congregate care facilities. The state must also work to set children and families up for success after child welfare involvement ends whether through reunification, guardian, adoption, or aging out.

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020). Risk and protective factors. Violence Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/riskprotectivefactors.html>. Sedlak, A.J., Mettenburg, J., Basena, M., Petta, I., McPherson, K., Greene, A., and Li, S. (2010). Fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-4): Report to Congress. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.



## HERE IS HOW THE NEXT GOVERNOR AND STATE LEGISLATURE CAN ACCOMPLISH THIS:

- Establish an Arizona Conference on Families, Children and Youth that includes government leaders, representatives from all child and family serving public agencies, community members, and specifically individuals directly impacted by the child welfare involvement to make recommendations for establishing a coordinating committee or state department of child well-being.
- Re-define neglect to exempt conditions related to poverty unless they present an imminent safety threat to the child and cannot be addressed by the provision of state assistance including short-term supports.
- Immediately end policies that leave children and families with fewer resources due to system involvement, such as the state's collection of foster children's SSI benefits to offset the cost of their care.
- Ensure foster children placed with kin receive the same level of support as they would get in a community foster home.
- Restore child-only TANF for children living with kin outside of the foster care system.
- Fund supportive after care services for all children and families who have experienced foster care, especially young people who aged out.



# FAST FACTS ON HEALTH POLICIES

Arizona ranks

**4th Worst**

when it comes to the  
rate of uninsured kids  
in our state.

Over

**161,000**

children in Arizona do  
not have health  
coverage.





# CHILDREN'S HEALTH POLICY ISSUE GUIDE

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## Where We Stand:

Children's Action Alliance believes health care should be **affordable, accessible, and accountable**. Health insurance helps bolster family well-being and the state's economy. It helps prevent families from racking up medical bills for care. It also improves children's financial prospects for years – and even generations – to come. Children who have health insurance year-round do better in school and are more likely to graduate from high school. They earn more as adults and have healthier babies than their peers who did not have health coverage as children. Investing in the health of today's children will help future generations get a strong start in life.

Arizona lawmakers should reimagine the role of health systems and government in dismantling racial, ethnic, rural, and other disparities in access to care and coverage.

The health of parents and caregivers is also important. Studies show that child health is closely tied to the health of parents before, during, and after pregnancy. Kids are more likely to get enrolled and stay covered when their parents also have health insurance. Adults with health coverage are more likely to seek preventive care for themselves and their children. This allows doctors to identify and treat diseases before they become life-threatening. Preventive care saves both money and lives in the long run.



## HERE IS HOW THE NEXT GOVERNOR AND STATE LEGISLATURE CAN ACCOMPLISH THIS:

Arizona lawmakers should make it easier to access quality, affordable health care by making the most of the programs we have available at the state and federal levels. Making sure that Arizonans can access the care they need at a price they can afford will help build a healthy Arizona now and well into the future.

**Affordability.** Medicaid and CHIP (AHCCCS and KidsCare) are great tools to provide affordable health care. Arizona should make sure these programs are covering as many people as possible by:

- Raising the income limits for pregnant people and children.
- Investing in outreach and enrollment to help people transition from AHCCCS or KidsCare to other affordable health coverage.
- Providing dental care to adults covered by AHCCCS.

**Access.** To improve access to health care and make it easier to get covered, Arizona should:

- Get rid of the five-year residency requirement for children and pregnant people with green cards.
- Identify state funds to cover all children and pregnant people in Arizona.
- Do away with the 90-day wait period and monthly payments for KidsCare coverage.
- Provide a full year of coverage to children who have AHCCCS.
- Make it easier to apply and re-apply for AHCCCS and KidsCare.

**Accountability:** Our taxes pay for the critical health care services provided by AHCCCS, KidsCare, and the health care Marketplace. As investors in these programs, we deserve to know how well they are serving Arizonans. State lawmakers should:

- Make data about health care more accessible to taxpayers.
- Let the public easily access information about AHCCCS and KidsCare participation and performance.





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[HTTPS://AZCHILDREN.ORG/](https://azchildrens.org/)