

2026 LEGISLATIVE & POLICY AGENDA

Children's Action Alliance (CAA) envisions an Arizona where all children and families thrive. In carrying out this vision, we have utilized data, research, and relationships to advocate to policy makers across the political spectrum to promote policy and state budget decisions that work for – not against – children and families. Our 2026 Legislative & Policy Agenda identifies key priorities.



Health: Affordable Health Care for the Whole Family

As cuts are made to federal funding of health care, ensuring all families have affordable health care is one of the best ways to support the most vulnerable years in a child's life. All children deserve a healthy start in life so they can grow and thrive in school and beyond.

Yet Arizona is among the five states with the most uninsured children in the nation, and, as a result, many children often go without routine preventive care to stay healthy. Access to affordable health services, whether through AHCCCS, KidsCare, or Marketplace plans is critical.

CAA's top health priorities include:

- **DEFEND HEALTH CARE FOR ARIZONANS BY PROTECTING AHCCCS/KIDSCARE** from unnecessary funding cuts and attempts to impose new enrollment obstacles for eligible Arizonans
- **ALLOCATE REVENUE TO PREVENT AHCCCS ENROLLMENT LOSS AMONG ELIGIBLE ARIZONANS**, including IT infrastructure modernization and to address Medicaid shortfalls created by federal law
- **INCREASE ACCESS TO ORAL HEALTH CARE** through an Oral Health Care Study Committee to research the cost savings and health benefits of AHCCCS coverage of comprehensive adult oral health services



Child Welfare: Prioritize the Safety & Well-being of Children through Prevention

Too many families face a crisis due to rising costs of food, health care, and housing insecurity, which make it tough to make ends meet. When families have access to concrete supports like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), child care, and stable housing, reports of neglect and entries into foster care decrease.

In times when a child can no longer remain safely with parents, it is critical to support grandparents and other kinship care givers so they can afford to step in. When this is not possible, it is essential that children are placed in safe and nurturing homes, not institutions where they are less likely to thrive.

This next legislative session, CAA child well-being priorities are:

- **STRENGTHEN PREVENTION EFFORTS** by ensuring that poverty alone is addressed with concrete financial supports not family separation
- **SUPPORT THE SAFETY OF CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE BY REDUCING PLACEMENTS IN CONGREGATE CARE**, creating safeguards for the youngest children who may be placed in group homes, and increasing placements with safe and nurturing kin and licensed foster families
- **INCREASE FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR KINSHIP CAREGIVERS**, including by restoring child-only TANF for children living with kin outside of the foster care system to reduce Arizona's over-reliance on congregate care
- **STRENGTHEN THE STABILITY OF YOUTH WHO TRANSITION OUT OF FOSTER CARE** by providing supportive services, including maintenance of SNAP
- **ALLOCATE REVENUE TO PREVENT SNAP ENROLLMENT LOSS AMONG ELIGIBLE ARIZONANS**, including IT infrastructure modernization and to address cost shifts created by federal law



Early Childhood: Investments in Every Child's Start from Cradle to Classroom

Early care and learning encompass all forms of education, both formal and informal, provided to young children up to eight years old. This education is fundamental to the development of a child and can significantly shape the later years of their life.

Early childhood experiences shape a child's lifelong learning as brain development occurs most rapidly and dramatically in the first three years of life. For every \$1 spent on early care and learning, up to \$16 is saved through decreased special education, social welfare, and crime-related costs.

CAA's efforts focus on expanding access to early care and learning programs by promoting needed solutions and sustainable funding to support our youngest children.

CAA's top early childhood priorities are:

- **INCREASE THE NUMBER OF CHILD CARE SLOTS IN RURAL AND UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES** by investing in child care infrastructure
- **MAKE CHILD CARE MORE AFFORDABLE** for families with lower incomes by funding the Child Care Assistance Program and reducing the waitlist
- **ENHANCE FUNDING STREAMS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS**, like the Early Childhood Development and Health Board (First Things First)
- **EXPAND ELIGIBILITY** for the Arizona Early Intervention Program for infants and toddlers with disabilities
- **BUILD ON THE SUCCESS OF EARLY LITERACY COACHING** to increase reading proficiency by 4th grade
- **REDUCE CHILD HUNGER** by funding free school meals for eligible children