

# 2024 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

The 2024 Children's Action Alliance legislative agenda works to assure the community conditions necessary to allow all Arizona families to have equitable access to high-quality education, health care, child well-being, services, and employment. We strive to live in an Arizona where all children and families thrive.



## CHILD AND FAMILY HEALTH

All children deserve to go to school healthy so they can learn and grow up strong. Childhood sets the stage for health throughout life. Children's Action Alliance understands that children's health is also dependent on family health. That is why it is important all children and parents have access to healthcare, and insurance is key to connecting them to quality care. Here is what Arizona can do to reach that goal:

- **Continue increasing the number of children with health insurance.** The rate of children without health insurance in Arizona has been cut in half – from 16% to 8% – since 2008. This is because leaders prioritized policies that covered kids, but when they didn't – like when Arizona froze KidsCare enrollment – the progress stopped. Now, Arizona needs to successfully implement KidsCare eligibility to reach families who become newly eligible, including those previously denied coverage for being over income. Any budget cuts to AHCCCS could harm the progress Arizona has made in improving children's health.
- **Help children get the health services they need in their school,** which is often a convenient, culturally affirming, and accessible location. Data showing increasing depression, anxiety, and suicide risk among youth is alarming and requires urgent solutions. Schools should be able to bill AHCCCS for behavioral health services as easily as clinical settings. CAA will continue working with AHCCCS to implement its new policies expanding school health billing, and we encourage the State to take advantage of new federal funding and flexibilities under the federal Bipartisan Safer Communities Act to help students get the care they need.
- **Provide comprehensive dental care to adults who participate in Medicaid,** especially during pregnancy, as strong oral health leads to healthier pregnancies and births.
- **Increase AHCCCS eligibility during pregnancy.** At a time of rising maternal deaths, especially among Black and Indigenous women, Arizona has among the most restrictive income limits for pregnant persons.
- **Join 35 other states in restoring AHCCCS and KidsCare coverage to lawfully present Arizonans during childhood and pregnancy** by removing the five-year waiting period for certain lawfully present immigrant families.





## CHILD WELFARE AND JUVENILE JUSTICE

Arizona must reimagine its child welfare system as a child well-being system—a system that prevents abuse and neglect by ensuring families have the resources they need, partners with communities to co-design solutions, prioritizes family integrity, and, for those families that do need foster care, provides strong safeguards and high-quality engagement and services to promote safety, healing, and success for children and families during and after child welfare involvement:

- **Establish a coordinated and collaborative statewide effort to meaningfully shift resources from deep-end system involvement to primary prevention**, including overuse of TANF to fund child welfare and underuse of TANF to support families in financial distress.
- **Increase access to services and supports for kinship families**, including those who are not formally involved with the child welfare system, and ensure kinship families who are system-involved receive the same level of support provided to community foster homes.
- **Reduce Arizona's over-reliance on congregate care placements** and prioritize family based settings for children.
- **End policies that leave children and families with fewer resources due to system involvement**, such as placing parents on the central child abuse and neglect registry, which limits their employment opportunities, when there is no finding of risk to a child.







## EARLY CHILDHOOD

A strong start in life leads to a successful future. As the cost of living continues to rise, providing all families with resources and services to thrive is of the utmost importance.

A child's early experiences shape 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 are 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. Investing in early childhood development supports successful children, families, and economic growth:

- **Expand access to quality and affordable child care for Arizona's children and families** by investing state funding through the Arizona Department of Economic Security Division of Child Care. State funds will help eliminate an impending waitlist and allow child care providers to keep their doors open.
- **Reduce the burden of child care expenses on more families** by expanding income eligibility of child care assistance and allowing full time students seeking a college degree to participate in the program.
- **Ensure child care licensing fees are affordable** to support access to high quality child care in Arizona.
- **Provide paid family medical leave** for all child care workers to address their medical needs and caregiving responsibilities, including caring for a new child after birth or adoption; serious personal health conditions—which includes pregnancy and post-partum care; caring for a child, parent, spouse, or partner; for specific military caregiving and leave; and for absences related to sexual assault, domestic violence, or stalking.

