

FIRST 5

A Whole-Child, Whole-Family Agenda



When our children are supported to thrive, our society thrives. Yet the COVID-19 pandemic has made it harder for many young children and families in California to flourish, and aggravated deep racial disparities in opportunity. **Now is our chance to not only repair, but restructure and improve, the way we support young children and families, especially those furthest from opportunity.** We do this by nurturing the whole child and the whole family, from physical and mental health to child care to family stability to financial stability.

Right now and for the future, California's young children and their families need a holistic **whole-child, whole-family agenda** that prioritizes their well-being. To that end, First 5 urges the following critical budget proposals be adopted through the FY 2021-22 State Budget:

Early Childhood Mental Health and Trauma Support

Young children and families are experiencing unprecedented levels of social-emotional difficulties, including stress, isolation and depression.

California needs **multiple strategies** to fully support the mental health of young children and their families as we emerge from the pandemic, and to build trauma-informed communities for our future. With 57% of California children having at least one Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) before the pandemic, buffering and preventing trauma for children and their caregivers is a clear imperative.

70% of California parents of young children are worried about their family's mental health.

First 5 urges state leaders to:

- Dedicate \$112 million over 3 years to **expand Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation** and Trauma Informed Care to support child care providers in addressing mental health needs of children.
- **Create a dyadic care benefit** financed by Medi-Cal to improve preventative care for children, address social-emotional needs, and support maternal mental health.
- Launch a pilot program to **expand home visiting** services through Medi-Cal managed care plans, ensuring that more California families have access to these critical supports.

Health Equity for Young Children and Moms

During the pandemic, children's preventive health care rates have dropped below their already-low rates, and increased stress has taken a toll on maternal and child wellbeing. The strain is more severe for families with lower income, many of whom are on Medi-Cal.

Childhood vaccinations dropped 40% in the first months of the pandemic.

Nearly half of all births are covered through Medi-Cal, which primarily serves

families of color. With a third of maternal deaths occurring one week to one year after pregnancy ends, mothers should have health coverage for a full year after birth. Young children must be covered, too: 90% of brain development occurs, and 14 well-child visits are recommended by experts, in the first five years of life.

California must make permanent the **continuous Medi-Cal eligibility** for young children and postpartum adults that was put in place for the pandemic. By removing barriers to accessing Medi-Cal, our state can help dismantle the structural racism that undergirds our health disparities, and help improve our state's low preventive care rates.

First 5 urges state leaders to:

- **Provide continuous Medi-Cal coverage for children up to age 5, and for 12 months for postpartum individuals.** Existing coverage lasts just 60 days for postpartum individuals, and from birth to age one for children. Extending coverage will save money in the long run, and leverage a federal Medicaid match.

California ranks 40th in the U.S. in providing preventive care for young children with Medi-Cal.

Child Care on the Brink of Collapse

COVID-19 has sharply illuminated what every working family has long known: Child care is essential. More than 2.3 million U.S. women have left the labor market since the pandemic began, many citing child care as the reason.

As parents head back to workplaces, many will find their child care provider is no longer around. California has lost over 43,000 licensed child care slots since the start of the pandemic—when there were already far too few spaces to meet demand.

Nearly
3 in 10
child care workers
lost jobs during the
pandemic, with
workers of color
the most affected.

Accessible, affordable, and quality child care is essential to keep children learning, families working, and our economy thriving. California needs a multi-year, multi-billion dollar investment to strengthen and expand a

comprehensive child care system that meets the needs of children, families and providers.

In alignment with the Early Care and Education Coalition, First 5 urges state leaders to allocate:

- \$435 million to improve the inequitable **rates that child care providers are paid [SB 246 (Leyva)]**.
- \$1.75 billion for **new child care spaces** across a mixed delivery system.
- \$325 million to **waive all family fees** through September 2024 **[AB 92 (Reyes)]**.
- Nearly \$1.9 billion in one-time stipends to child care providers to **defray increased costs of providing care** during a pandemic, and to **stabilize the field**. Also, we must continue to pay providers based on enrollment, not attendance, through September 2024.

Financial Stability Helps Family Stability

When parents thrive, children can thrive. A key way to support children and families is putting money in their pockets, and making policies like the California Earned Income Tax Credit (CalEITC), the Young Child Tax Credit (YCTC), and Paid Family Leave more equitable.

In the past year, low-earning workers—disproportionately people of color—have been more likely to lose their jobs and need resources to help pay for basic needs like food, rent and child care. To help workers get back on their feet and support a sustainable living, the state must improve its financial stability policies.

70% of California tax filers with an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number have children.

First 5 urges state leaders to:

- **Support Immigrants & Families through the CalEITC** by permanently increasing the CalEITC for ITIN filers by \$100, since they do not qualify for the federal EITC; and formally recognize unpaid work of caregivers with young children by changing the YCTC income eligibility **[SB 691 (Rubio)]**.
- **Ensure Workers Can Access Paid Family Leave** by increasing wage replacement in California's Paid Family Leave program to 90%, so low-income Californians can afford to take paid leave. **[AB 123 (Gonzalez)]**.

FIRST 5 believes all of California's youngest children deserve to be healthy and safe, and to develop to their full potential in school and life. Grounded in a whole child/whole family framework that advances equity, prevention, and systems coordination, First 5 integrates comprehensive early childhood systems of care, with an intentional focus on Prenatal-3 during this critical stage of child development. We connect services and systems so families can access resources to nurture their young children. We shift the conditions that hold inequities and barriers to access in places, and insist that the strengths and needs of young children are centered in local and state decisions and actions.