

2026 POLICY PRIORITIES

First 5 Association works to advance state and federal public policies and funding that support California's young children and families. Our policy work is informed by local communities and local First 5 Commissions and is grounded in a whole child / whole family lens. We do this while centering the fact that low-income communities, communities of color, and historically marginalized Californians face disproportionate impacts due to systemic racism, wealth inequality, and environmental hazards.

Our goal is to have public policies and investments in place that center equity, prevention, systems building, and coordination to build comprehensive and integrated early childhood systems of care.

Policy Priorities



THRIVING FIRST 5 COMMISSIONS AND SYSTEM OF CARE

- Ensure First 5s are identified and prioritized as fund administrators, innovators, intermediaries, and systems partners in securing and safeguarding dedicated funding for early childhood systems.
- Protect and leverage health, family, and child development investments with a shared goal of removing barriers to accessing systems of care.
- Secure stabilization and ongoing funding sources for First 5 Commissions, prioritizing counties that need financial support most, to ensure continued positive child outcomes.



COMPREHENSIVE CARE AND DEVELOPMENT

- Preserve access to essential health and social services for young children and their families.
- Improve prevention, care coordination, screenings, navigation, and re-certification supports for Medi-Cal and other systems of care.
- Increase access to and timeliness of early intervention and infant and early childhood mental health (IECMH) services, including assessments and validated developmental screening tools.
- Improve maternal and infant health outcomes in communities of color impacted by disparate outcomes* by dismantling racist practices and developing culturally safe systems in partnership with health providers and systems of care.



ECONOMICALLY SECURE FAMILIES

- Advocate for culturally responsive, trauma-informed, healing-centered family support services that recognize and build parents' strength, wisdom, and capacity to support their children's optimal development.
- Increase economic supports that empower families to meet the basic needs of children.
- Increase access to affordable, safe, and nurturing early care and education.



EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

- Prioritize and scale early care and education mixed-delivery opportunities, with a focus on infant and toddler care.
- Support quality training and professional growth pathways for early educators and childcare providers, with a focus on infant and toddler care.
- Promote recruitment and retention of the early educator and childcare workforce by uniting with statewide partners to advocate for increased benefits and true cost-of-care wages.

*Black, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, American Indian and Alaska Native, Indigenous, and multiracial