

Policy Priorities 2016-17

Strengthening Families with Young Children

The Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy's priorities focus on policies that work to strengthen families with young children and build strong communities that contribute to the health and well-being of our state.

Public health and health coverage, access and care

Strengthen children's behavioral health care. The State is undertaking a significant, positive, multi-agency initiative to improve the Medicaid children's behavioral health care benefit package. The success of these efforts depend on a small group of providers that are under resourced and financially distressed. It is urgent that the State make thoughtful investments in children's behavioral health infrastructure development to strengthen and expand existing capacity and lay the groundwork for a smooth transition to managed care. This includes funds designated for health care information technology, workforce development and technical assistance, service capacity expansion, and development of Health Home infrastructure.

Invest in policies that prevent and treat dental disease, including community water fluoridation. Community water fluoridation is the single most cost-effective way to prevent dental disease but, outside of New York City, less than half of the state has access to fluoridated water. Communities need resources to continue or expand this public health practice. New York should keep the promise of an additional \$5M for fluoridation equipment that was contained in the 2015-2016 budget to strengthen the local fluoridation infrastructure.

Ensure that children's health and development are addressed as New York undertakes payment and delivery system reform. Payment and delivery system reform discussions have primarily focused on adult populations, incentivizing reductions in emergency room visits and hospitalizations, and high-need adults. While children have not been a focus, they are also not excluded from calculations of attribution or value. New York must ensure that system transformation efforts currently underway, aiming to fundamentally change the health care delivery system, pay special attention to the needs and developmental trajectory of children.

Include consumers and community members in payment and delivery system reform. As the Delivery System Reform Incentive Payment (DSRIP) program and Value-Based Payment (VBP) take shape, the State

must protect Medicaid beneficiaries and the community-based services on which they rely by establishing mechanisms for measuring consumer experience and providing mechanisms for consumer feedback, especially from consumers with the most significant barriers to engagement and access.

Support the process of adult home residents with mental illness transitioning to community settings and strengthen advocacy and oversight for those in adult homes. Recently, New York has made strides in assisting adult home residents' transit to permanent homes in the community. It is essential that the State both intensify this long overdue effort to improve the lives of residents who have waited for years to move and strengthen oversight and advocacy for those living in adult homes.

A system that effectively serves at-risk families, prevents entry into the child welfare system, and produces positive outcomes for children and families

Fund community-based family strengthening services. While New York State saw 45,927 indicated cases of child maltreatment in 2014,¹ studies have shown that the overwhelming majority of reports are cases of neglect, often connected to resource deprivation, rather than abuse.² At present, families must have a Child Protective Services (CPS) case open and be at risk of foster care in order to receive preventive services. New York should invest in community-based services that strengthen families *before* there is a risk of removal to foster care by restoring State reimbursement for preventive services to 65% (as is written in statute) and designating 3% of that funding for community-based primary prevention. These services should be directed to communities based on community need, as determined by relevant community-level data, such as poverty, maltreatment, etc.

More, better, and more transparent child welfare data. Leaders understand that if we don't measure something, we can't manage it, and NYS has undertaken significant initiatives to measure and improve health care outcomes, but has minimally invested in

understanding child welfare. The State should collect and publicize data on the prevention and post-adoption services offered in each county and the child and family outcomes of those services.

Expand Family Assessment Response. In 2013, only one in thirteen New York families received services through Family Assessment Response (FAR),³ an alternative to CPS which provides protection to children by engaging families and providing support services without “indicating” a case. FAR has also been shown to have an impact on reducing racial disparity and disproportionality in the child welfare system.⁴ Evaluations of FAR show better outcomes for children and families, yet FAR is underutilized in NYS. The State and counties should work together to ensure that FAR is implemented in a sustainable manner so that families may access it as an important family stability resource.

Strengthen the Housing Subsidy Program. As many as one-third of youth who age out of foster care experience homelessness, and many more experience unstable housing arrangements.⁵ To ensure the housing subsidy program is better able to stabilize housing for families and youth, the State should: increase the monthly limit to \$600 (from \$300); increase the upper age limit eligibility from 21 to 24 so that youth who age out of foster care at 21 can avail themselves of the subsidy for up to 3 years; and allow youth receiving the housing subsidy to live with unrelated roommates.

Enhance Kinship Services and the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KinGAP).

Relatives are a preferred caregiver for children who are removed from their birth parents, because such placements help to maintain connections to family and culture. Approximately 5,000 children per year live in foster care with a relative caregiver,⁶ while tens of thousands of caregivers support kin outside of the formal foster care system. New York should support kinship families and cultivate permanent placements for children in foster care with family members through kinship services by increasing State funding for these services to \$2.7 million. For more families to take advantage of KinGAP the State should: remove it from the Foster Care Block Grant; allow payments to continue until age 21 regardless of age of finalization; and use the same definition of kin as is used for kinship foster care.

Raise the Age. New York is one of only two states to automatically try all 16- and 17-year-olds as adults in the justice system. It is time for New York to raise the age of criminal responsibility. Support recommendations from the Governor’s Commission on Public Safety and Juvenile Justice to raise the age and better support the juvenile justice system so that children are treated as children.

Foster College Success. Currently, only 2-7% of foster youth complete a two or four year degree. Youth who graduate from college have a higher chance of securing and retaining employment in adulthood. Part of the State’s responsibility to the youth entrusted to its care is to ensure they have the resources to succeed after foster care. New York should renew and increase its investments in the Foster College Success Initiative to support youth pursuing higher-education who either are or had been in foster care.

Strengthen families and promote family economic security

Expand and integrate maternal, infant and early childhood home visiting. Home visiting is a cost-effective two-generation intervention with proven benefits for children and families, and outcomes that cross disciplines—health, child welfare and education, but is largely unavailable in at least 16 counties across the state and, in other parts of the state, does not reach all families who may benefit from services.⁷ The State must improve coordination and measurement across programs, expand access, and increase funding for home visiting to **\$37.8 million**, which includes:

- \$27.8 million for Healthy Families NY
- \$5 million for Nurse-Family Partnership
- \$3 million for Parents as Teachers
- \$2 million for Parent-Child Home

Enact paid family leave. Workplace laws and policies in New York have failed to keep up with the demographics of working families. Although the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) of 1993 permits employees of large companies to take up to 12 weeks of **unpaid** leave, many employees are not covered or cannot afford to lose their pay.⁸ Cost-effective and budget neutral paid family leave proposals will help to ensure that working families do not have to choose between caring for a family member and keeping their job.

Strengthen tax and wage policies so that low- and moderate-income families can make ends meet. The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is one of the best ways to “make work pay” for low-income families. Research shows that children of EITC recipients do better in school and are healthier.⁹ New York should raise the State EITC to 40% of the federal benefit and increase the minimum wage and index it to inflation so full-time workers do not live in poverty.

Endnotes

¹ OCFS Bureau of Research, Evaluation and Analytics. *2014 Monitoring and Analysis Profiles: New York State*. Retrieved from: <http://ocfs.ny.gov/main/reports/maps/counties/New%20York%20State.pdf>

² See the Institute of Medicine: <http://iom.nationalacademies.org/Reports/2013/New-Directions-in-Child-Abuse-and-Neglect-Research.aspx>

³ New York State Citizen Review Panels for Child Protective Services. 2014 Annual Report and Recommendations.

⁴ Evaluations by the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare have ranked FAR as high in importance for reducing racial disparities and disproportionality in child welfare. See: <http://www.cebc4cw.org/program/family-assessment-response/detailed>

⁵ Housing for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care, US Department of Housing and Urban Development, May 2014, downloaded 11/29/15 from http://huduser.gov/portal/publications/pdf/youth_hsg_main_report.pdf

⁶ Annie E. Casey Kids Count Data Center. 2014. *NY: Children in Foster Care by Placement Type*.

⁷ See the Council on Children and Families' interactive maps, *Home Visiting in New York State*. <http://nysccf.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=888a5e7daa7448a3a4a6340152ad4daf>

⁸ A Better Balance, "New York Needs: Paid Family Leave Insurance Act," April 2014. <http://www.abetterbalance.org/web/images/stories/Documents/familyleave/FLI4Pager.pdf>

⁹ Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. May 2014. "Improving Tax Fairness with a State Earned Income Tax Credit"