Founded in 1972, Prevent Child Abuse America (PCA America) works to ensure the healthy development of children and the prevention of child abuse and neglect nationwide. PCA America is powered by our dedicated and thriving chapter network, which operates successfully in all 50 states, as well as our signature home visiting program, Healthy Families America (HFA), operating nearly 600 sites in 38 states. HFA is a nationally recognized, evidence-based home visiting model designed to work with overburdened families who are at-risk for adverse childhood experiences, including child maltreatment.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), child abuse and neglect costs the U.S. approximately $2 trillion a year in lifetime economic costs associated with investigated and substantiated cases of maltreatment. It is estimated that each victim of child abuse or neglect will incur a lifetime cost of $830,928 in treating the consequences associated. We know that the more Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) a child is exposed to, the higher their risk for depression, substance abuse, unemployment, and even health problems, such as heart disease or cancer later in life. We know that we can reduce these costly adverse life outcomes when children are raised in safe, stable, and nurturing families. In 2019, PCA America encourages states to expand their focus and broaden their reach to enhance support of state policy and programming.

BUILDING A STATE-BASED PREVENTION POLICY FRAMEWORK

PCA America recognizes that each of us has the opportunity to help create the kind of nation we want to live in every day. Because of the work accomplished within our PCA America chapter network, we know that there are many effective child development and family strengthening programs being implemented across the country. We urge states to work within their communities to advance prevention programming and encourage local budgetary decisions that enhance the government’s commitment to child and family well-being. We encourage states to identify and promote opportunities that empower families and childcare, and by enhancing support for evidence-based services for preventing child abuse and neglect.

PRIORITY ISSUE AREAS FOR STATES

We encourage states to focus on key issue areas for advancing state policy in 2019, based on recommendations distributed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, on policies shown to strengthen families and reduce child abuse and neglect. These priority areas include but are not limited to:

- Earned Income Tax Credit
- Paid Family Leave
- Corporal Punishment in Public Institutions
- Evidence-based Home Visiting
- Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse

These represent a select group of strategies based on the best available evidence to help prevent child abuse and neglect and help inform prevention activities in states.

1. EARNED TAX CREDIT
Empowering families to meet their basic needs of food, shelter, and medical care by strengthening household financial security is proven to reduce the risk factors for child abuse and neglect. The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) supports families with children and helps low income families increase yearly income and offset the costs of childcare. The EITC is a federal tax credit that encourages parents and guardians to work while offsetting the impact of federal taxes. States vary in eligibility and funding amounts, and only half of the states in the U.S. have enacted EITC. States with refundable EITC had 13% fewer abusive head trauma admissions than states without EITC. EITC also has impacts on infant mortality, health insurance coverage, school performance, and maternal stress and mental health problems. PCA America encourages states to access, implement, and utilize the economic tools available to communities through refundable EITC’s.

2. PAID FAMILY LEAVE
Paid Family Leave allows the family more time with an infant during the most critical year for preventing child fatality: the first year of life, when the majority of child fatalities occurs. Paid Family Leave is also associated with significantly higher rates of successful breastfeeding and maternal health, reductions in hospitalizations for abusive head trauma, and lower rates of family stressors and risk factors. PCA America supports states in efforts to promote Paid Family Leave Policies.

3. CORPORAL PUNISHMENT IN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS
Regulation of corporal punishment in public institutions better protects high-risk youth and aids in establishing healthier norms around safe, effective discipline strategies outside of harsh physical punishment. The American Academy of Pediatrics recently (2018) released an updated position statement outlining comprehensive data on the adverse impact associated with corporal punishment and the need to raise awareness of positive discipline practices. Some states have banned the use of corporal punishment in public institutions and in alternative care settings, such as foster care or institutional care, child day care and after school care, schools, and juvenile detention facilities. However, at least 19 states have not moved forward in banning corporal punishment in public institutions. PCA America encourages state efforts to reduce corporal punishment in public institutions and educate stakeholders on the adverse impact of corporal punishment on the well-being of developing children.

4. EVIDENCE-BASED HOME VISITING
Voluntary evidence-based home visiting programs allow highly trained professionals to partner with families during the critical first few years of a child’s life with proven success. Home visiting programs, including those funded by the bipartisan federal Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program, meet rigorous standards for accountability and require continued demonstration of improvement among recipients in key areas such as maternal and newborn health; prevention of child injuries, including maltreatment; school readiness; reduction in crime or domestic violence; family economic self-sufficiency; and linkages and referrals. NY OCFS attributes the rigorous home visiting programs in the state of New York to the reduction of the number of infants entering foster care, cutting the rate by half. Home visiting programs provide families with critical information and connection to community resources, such as mental health, substance use, and direct caregiver support. PCA America urges states to expand their home visiting programming and local investments in home visiting efforts.

5. CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE
Child sexual abuse (CSA) can cause serious damage to the cognitive, social, and emotional development of a child. States must expand the focus of preventing CSA to include the prevention of institutional CSA through funded initiatives rather than unfunded mandates. With funding, states can implement initiatives that provide evidence-informed CSA prevention education. This includes prevention in schools and youth-serving organizations and assistance to these entities to implement and institutionalize safe child policies and practices that include training employees, volunteers, and parents to learn about child sexual abuse and its prevention; developing codes of conduct; screening prospective employees and volunteers; and reporting and responding appropriately to boundary violations and suspected or disclosed cases of child sexual abuse. PCA America will encourage state efforts to educate policy makers regarding CSA and bring forth community-based programs and policies for prevention.