



## 2020 State Public Policy Priorities

**Prevent Child Abuse (PCA) America® advocates for policies and services that strengthen families, promote healthy child development, and prevent child abuse and neglect before it occurs. We support services that improve child well-being through our extensive network of chapters in nearly 50 states and nearly 600 Healthy Families America® (HFA) evidence-based home visiting program sites.**

At least 1 in 7 children have experienced child abuse and/or neglect annually in the United States.<sup>i</sup> A recent study estimates that the victims of child abuse and neglect from 2015 will **incur costs nearly \$2 trillion over their lives in addressing the effects of the abuse and neglect.**<sup>ii</sup> This directly impacts state budgets in various ways through treating the tangible and intangible consequences of child maltreatment across the entire span of a victim's life.<sup>iii</sup> We know that investing in healthy child development reduces the likelihood of a significant array of these costly conditions, including chronic health problems, premature mortality, lowered educational achievement, lost productivity, mental illness, violent crime, substance abuse and addiction, and the perpetuation of abuse and neglect.<sup>iv</sup>

A public health approach to the prevention of child abuse and neglect requires strategies that address the conditions and contexts in which children and families live. As noted by the Centers for Disease Control, supporting children and families through policy is one of the most promising strategies for preventing child abuse and neglect and promoting health and well-being.<sup>v</sup>

When communities, policymakers, and resources are invested in prevention strategies, we can begin to envision a world where the negative impacts and outcomes from child maltreatment will be nonexistent. State legislative policies ought to prioritize programs that emphasize the prevention of child abuse and neglect.

**PCA America recommends that states prioritize children and families in both their legislative and budgetary decisions in 2020 through strategies that strengthen families and reduce child abuse and neglect.** These priority areas represent a select group of strategies, based on the best evidence, to inform the prevention activities in states.



**Implement Family Friendly Work Policies**



**Strengthen Economic Supports To Families**



**Expand Evidence-Based Home Visiting**



**Eliminate The Use Of Corporal Punishment In Public Institutions**



**Prevent Child Sexual Abuse**



**Prioritize Primary Prevention**



## Implement Family Friendly Work Place Policies

PCA America promotes strengthening the economic supports to families, including workplace policies that are family-friendly, as these policies yield significant benefits to an organization, individual, and their family. Supportive policies that demonstrate positive outcomes in families include:

- **PAID FAMILY LEAVE** policies cover working people to care for a new child without jeopardizing their economic security. Paid leave is significantly associated with reductions in hospitalizations for abusive head trauma, higher rates of successful breastfeeding and maternal health, and lower rates of family stressors and risk factors. These policies allow much needed time for bonding, adjustment, and healing before a mother returns to work. Studies show that paid leave improves worker retention and reduces turnover costs citing that new mothers who take paid leave are more likely than mothers who take unpaid leave or no leave to be working again after childbirth<sup>vi</sup> and return to the same employer.<sup>vii</sup> As an example, the company Patagonia has in place family friendly policies, including paid family leave, and 100% of new mothers return to work after maternity leave. Yet, **only 17% of workers in the U.S. have access to any paid family leave** through their employers.<sup>viii</sup> Expanding Paid Family Leave policies within states by allowing parents protected paid time off to care for family members, not just newborns or children, is a critical support to all families.
- **LIVABLE WAGES** for families through an increased minimum wage allows working parents enough income to cover the costs of living and provide for basic needs (e.g., food, shelter, appropriate child and medical care). One of the greatest beneficiaries of increasing minimum wages in states are children. The effect of a livable wage for families has positive impacts on parental mental health, which can improve parenting behaviors, reducing the likelihood of child abuse and neglect. In fact, a study found that raising the minimum wage by just \$1 could result in a 10% reduction of reported cases of child abuse and neglect.<sup>ix</sup>



## Strengthen Household Financial Security to Families

A families' financial stability not only reduces parental and family stress, but it allows children's basic needs to be satisfied. Financial insecurity leads to increased parental stress, which could be a trigger for abuse and neglect; providing families with stronger household financial security reduces this stress and therefore the incidences of abuse and neglect. Furthermore, we know that stability is necessary for healthy childhood development. PCA America supports policies that strengthen economic supports for families including:

- **SUBSIDIZED CHILDCARE** provides childcare assistance through vouchers, lower cost childcare, or cash transfers to low-income families to offset the cost of quality, full-time childcare. Parents receiving childcare subsidies tend to choose better quality childcare, which increases the likelihood that children will experience safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments. Analyses have shown that states meeting demand for childcare assistance reported decreased rates of child abuse and neglect and neighborhoods with more licensed childcare spaces relative to childcare need have also **shown lower rates of child abuse and neglect**.<sup>x</sup> Additionally, studies have shown that higher child care subsidy expenditures **significantly increase labor force participation and employment rates** among low-income mothers.<sup>xi</sup> States can elect to expand eligibility requirements, simplify the application process, or even increase the subsidy amount as supports to reduce child-care costs to improve families' economic and financial well-being.
- **EARNED INCOME TAX CREDIT (EITC)** is a tax credit that encourages parents and guardians to work while offsetting the impact of taxes, essentially leading to increased family income while incentivizing work. The EITC supports families with children and helps low income families increase yearly income and offset many costs, including childcare. States vary in eligibility and funding amounts, and **only half of states in the U.S.** have enacted EITCs. States with refundable EITC had **13% fewer abusive head trauma admissions** than states without the tax credit. EITC also has impacts on decreasing infant mortality, increasing health insurance coverage, improving school performance, and decreasing maternal stress and mental health problems. States that access, implement, and utilize the economic tools available to communities through refundable EITC's provide increased supports to families and see reduced risk factors for child abuse and neglect.



## Expand Evidence-Based Home Visiting

Home Visiting Programs, such as PCA America’s signature program Healthy Families America (HFA), provide families with critical information and connection to community resources, such as mental health, substance use, and direct caregiver support. Rigorous studies have shown HFA leads to reduced pregnancy complications by 70%, reduced rates of low birth weight by 48%, and lower parenting stress for mothers.<sup>xii</sup> For nearly 30 years, HFA has worked toward a vision that all children receive nurturing care from their family that leads to a healthy, long, and successful life. Establishing and expanding effective home visiting programs through state legislation safeguard a committed investment in evidence-based home visiting models that demonstrate effectiveness, ensure accountability and address quality improvement measures. PCA America promotes the inclusion of evidence-based home visiting models, such as HFA, as a critical component in a states’ comprehensive prevention strategy through:

- **ADVOCATING FOR STATE FUNDING FOR PREVENTION SERVICES**, including evidence-based home visiting models within state budgets is a prevention strategy used to support pregnant moms and new parents to promote infant and child health, foster educational development and school readiness, and help prevent child abuse and neglect.
- **UTILIZING FAMILY FIRST PREVENTION SERVICES ACT** (Family First) as a lever to expand the reach of home visiting to vulnerable populations in need of support. Family First includes reforms to help keep children safe with their families and avoid entry into foster care. This is a historic law that, for the first time, provides flexibility for child welfare programming by allowing states, territories, and tribes the option of using federal Title IV-E funds before children enter the foster care system by utilizing important services such as mental health, substance use, counseling, and other in-home parent skill-based programs. States have the option to use this federal funding for evidence-based home visiting programs such as HFA – one of the few programs identified as well-supported by the Family First Prevention Clearinghouse. PCA America will offer guidance, technical assistance, and peer-to-peer support on this important new policy. This process includes activities such as peer-to-peer learning, improving strategies through sharing of resources, crossing knowledge boundaries, developing or sharing innovative ideas, and building a supportive collaborative environment where members can learn from each other about how to best address successes and challenges in states, reporting and sharing this information across states and Congress.

<b>585+</b>	HFA program sites located across 38 states, the District of Columbia, five US territories, and Israel—and growing.
<b>70,000+</b>	Families receiving personalized in-home support from HFA program sites each year.
<b>1,000,000+</b>	Home visits conducted by HFA staff each year.



## Eliminate the Use of Corporal Punishment in Public Institutions

Banning corporal punishment in public institutions better protects children and youth and aids in establishing healthier norms around safe, effective discipline strategies outside of harsh physical punishment. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has updated its policy on corporal punishment highlighting new evidence that links corporal punishment to an increased risk of negative behavioral, cognitive, psychosocial, and emotional outcomes for children. The AAP’s statement supports positive and effective parenting strategies for parents as studies have shown that physical punishment and verbal abuse disciplinary strategies for children have been shown to be minimally effective in the short-term and not effective in the long-term.<sup>xiii</sup> The research on brain development gives credence to this stance on physical punishment, noting negative effects on the developing brain in children who have experienced physical punishment and other fear-based discipline strategies. 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 lifts up states’ efforts to reduce corporal punishment in public institutions and promotes the education of stakeholders on the adverse impact of corporal punishment on the well-being of developing children as an important child abuse and neglect prevention effort.

### 19 STATES

**Currently allow public schools to use corporal punishment to discipline children from the time they start preschool until they graduate from 12th grade.**



## Prevent Child Sexual Abuse

Figures indicate that 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 13 boys experience child sexual abuse at some point in childhood<sup>xiv</sup>. Child sexual abuse can cause serious damage to the cognitive, social, and emotional development of a child. Further, a recent study estimated that the cohort of children who were sexually abused in 2015 will incur costs of nearly **\$9.3 billion over their life** as a result of the abuse (e.g., child welfare costs, health care costs, productivity losses, special education costs, suicide death costs).<sup>xv</sup>

Figures indicate as many as 1 in 4 girls



and 1 in 13 boys



experience this type of serious adverse childhood experience during their childhood.

Resources for child sexual abuse have mostly focused on the treatment for victims and criminal justice-oriented approaches for perpetrators. While these efforts are important after child sexual abuse has occurred, little investment has been made in preventing child sexual abuse before it occurs. Child sexual abuse is preventable – a successful state approach should comprehensively address child sexual abuse by emphasizing adult and community responsibility in primary prevention, as well as treatment for victims and accountability for perpetrators.

If we are to prevent child sexual abuse from ever occurring, dedicated state investments are needed. With sustainable funding, states can implement and evaluate initiatives that provide evidence-informed child sexual abuse prevention education, therefore, building and strengthening the evidence of programs and policies. This includes policies that ensure quality, research-based, age-appropriate sexuality education; prevention in schools and youth-serving organizations; assistance to entities to implement and institutionalize safe child policies and practices; 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.



## Prioritize Primary Prevention

PCA America promotes the inclusion and priority of primary prevention in state policies including the strategies outlined above and in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Violence Prevention’s Essentials for Childhood.<sup>xvi</sup> The inclusion of primary prevention activities, based on the best available evidence, in state policy will increase the capacity of state governments to implement and scale up effective interventions aimed at preventing child abuse and neglect from happening in the first place. Incorporating these strategies as part of state policy will ultimately leverage cross-sector partnerships and shared resources within states. Implementing statewide comprehensive strategies and approaches designed to reduce Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES), morbidity, mortality, and related health disparities that are associated with child abuse and neglect will play a role in shaping the positive future of our children and the neighborhoods, communities, and states in which they live.

**We have an extraordinary opportunity to contribute to a prosperous future for our nation by giving children in every state the fundamental tools for future success.**

### The 2020 State Public Policy priorities focus on areas with the highest impact in the prevention of child abuse and neglect.

PCA America encourages states to focus on these key issues for advancing their state policy in 2020 as these policies build and support relevant prevention strategies and the priorities that PCA America is focusing on at the federal level.

At PCA America, we believe that prevention happens in partnerships and promote the advancement of strong partnerships at all levels within states. PCA America is committed to supporting state chapters and advancing their goals of preventing child abuse through research, message development, educational materials, and technical assistance.

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