Prevent Child Abuse America®

2021 State Public Policy Prevention Strategies

When investments are made upstream in public policies and programs that build strong families and supportive communities, we are securing the safe, stable and nurturing environments that all children need. Prevent Child Abuse America advocates for the following policy priorities, which help to support families and are essential for our children's future prosperity.

INCREASE FUNDING AND ACCESS TO EVIDENCE-BASED HOME VISITING PROGRAMS

Evidence-based home visiting programs, such as Healthy Families America, have shown positive impact on reducing incidences of child abuse and neglect, decreased pre-term births and low-birthweight babies, improved school readiness for children, and increased high school graduation rates.

EXPAND FAMILY-FRIENDLY WORKPLACE POLICIES

Workplace policies that support parents, such as implementing or expanding paid family and medical leave policies and increasing the minimum wage, yield significant benefits to an organization, individual, and their family and are associated with reductions in child abuse and neglect.

STRENGTHEN ECONOMIC SECURITY FOR FAMILIES

Empowering families to meet their basic needs of food and shelter by strengthening household financial security is proven to reduce the risk factors for child abuse and neglect. These strategies support families through cash assistance, offsetting the costs of childcare and the impact of taxes, helping families to meet essential needs.

INVEST IN EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAMS TO PREVENT CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Research shows that the two most effective ways to prevent child sexual abuse are through education and training focused on adults and programming focused on skills training in children.

END THE USE OF CORPORAL PUNISHMENT IN SCHOOLS

Evidence suggests that corporal punishment may cause further harm to the child by affecting healthy brain development while other methods that teach children right from wrong are safer and more effective. Legislative approaches can reduce the use corporal punishment and can shift attitudes towards more effective, positive discipline strategies.

Prevent Child Abuse America works closely with our statewide partners to support policies that strengthen families and prevent child maltreatment. Our policy priorities align with recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) technical packages for violence prevention, including preventing Child Abuse and Neglect and Adverse Childhood Experiences, as well as the CDC's Essentials for Childhood framework.

For more information about our state policy priorities, please contact Kelly Crane, State Policy Specialist

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Prevent Child Abuse America® (PCA America) is the nation's oldest and largest organization committed to preventing child abuse and neglect before it happens. We promote programs and resources informed by science that enable kids, families, and entire communities to thrive—today, tomorrow, and for generations to come.

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 nationwide network of chapters and one of the most widely implemented home visiting programs in the country, with nearly 600 Healthy Families America® evidence-based home visiting program sites.

In the United States, at least one in seven children experience child abuse and/or neglect annually.[i] Child who are victims of abuse and neglect are at high risk for a host of adverse short and long-term outcomes, including chronic health problems, mental health issues, premature mortality, lowered educational achievement, substance abuse and addiction, and the perpetuation of abuse and neglect.[ii]
Yet, child abuse and neglect are preventable.

A public health approach to the prevention of child abuse and neglect requires strategies and policies that address the conditions and contexts in which children and families live. It is especially important in this current period for the United States – among a global pandemic and racial and civil unrest – for states to support primary prevention centered policies for all families and children. If we act now, we can make sure that children and families thrive, even during difficult times.

> State budgets are impacted by addressing the tangible and intangible consequences of child maltreatment across the entire span of a victim's life. Studies show that the total lifetime economic burden associated with treating the consequences of child maltreatment is approximately $2 trillion.[iii]

State lawmakers play a critical role in leading the efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect. 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.[iv] When there is a common focus and investment in effective state-level prevention services and supports for children and their families, we can begin to envision a world where the negative impacts and costs from child maltreatment will be nonexistent.

PCA America encourages states to focus on these key issues for advancing their state policy in 2021 as these build and support relevant prevention strategies and complement the priorities we advocate for at the federal level.
PCA America advocates the following policy priorities, which strengthen families and reduce abuse and neglect, be prioritized in state budgetary and legislative decisions.

- **INCREASE FUNDING AND ACCESS TO EVIDENCE-BASED HOME VISITING PROGRAMS**
- **EXPAND FAMILY-FRIENDLY WORKPLACE POLICIES**
- **STRENGTHEN ECONOMIC SECURITY FOR FAMILIES**
- **INVEST IN EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAMS TO PREVENT CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE**
- **END THE USE OF CORPORAL PUNISHMENT IN SCHOOLS**

Increase Funding and Access to Evidence-Based Home Visiting

Home visiting is prevention strategy used to support pregnant moms and new parents as they deal with the challenges of raising babies and young children. By intervening to prevent adversity and build resilience during a child's most critical years of development, rigorous studies have shown that evidence-based home visiting results in favorable outcomes in the areas of maternal and child health, positive parenting practices, child maltreatment, child development and school readiness, family violence, family economic self-sufficiency, and linkages and referrals. PCA America promotes the inclusion of evidence-based home visiting models, such as Healthy Families America®, as an investment and critical component in a states' comprehensive prevention strategy.

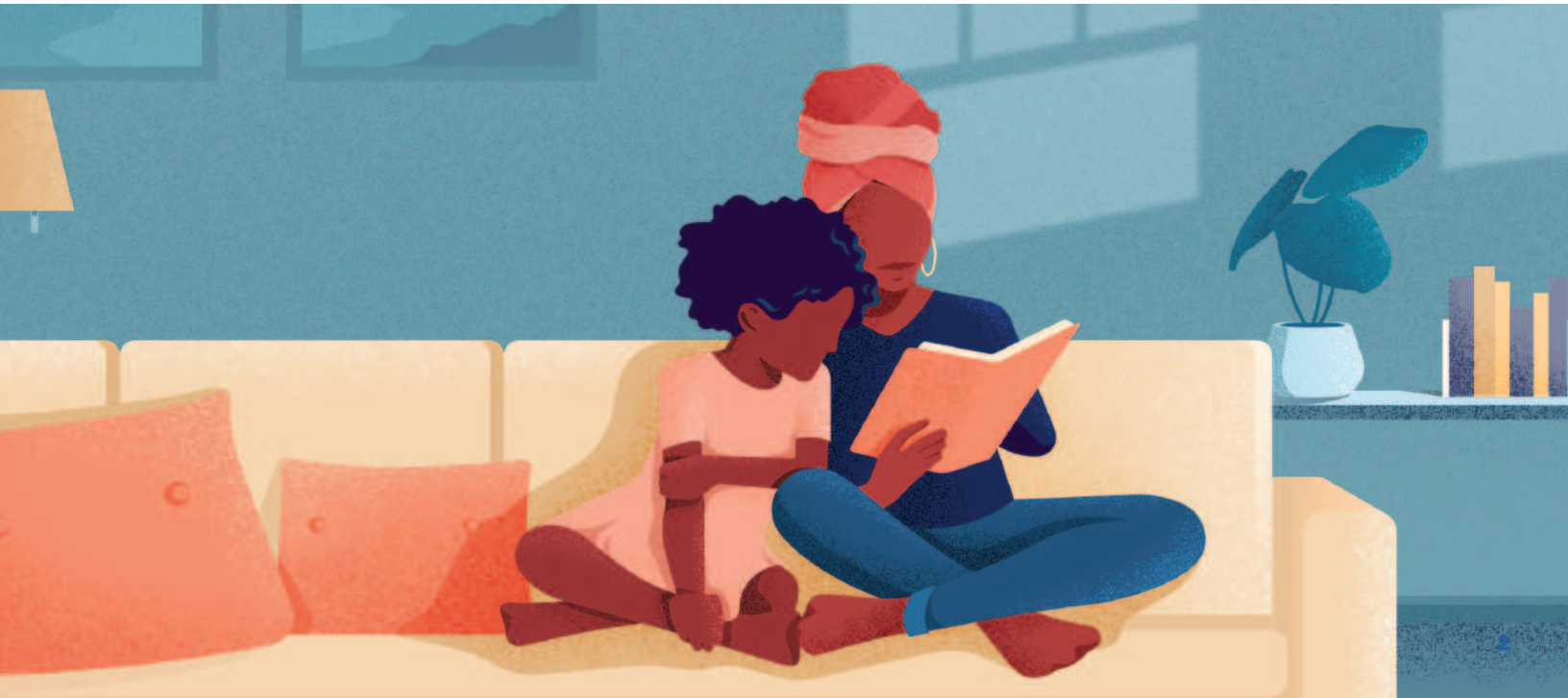
Rigorous studies have shown Healthy Families America leads to **reduced rates of low birth weight by 48%**

LOWER PARENTING STRESS

IMPROVED MENTAL HEALTH FOR MOTHERS

• **DEDICATED STATE FUNDING** funding for evidence-based home visiting models, like Healthy Families America, is a critical prevention strategy within state budgets and legislation. The majority of states supplement available federal funding by combining state funds from taxes, tobacco settlements, lotteries, and budget line items to implement and expand evidence-based home visiting[v]. With limited resources, ensuring there is dedicated and protected state funding for this prevention strategy will further expand the reach of home visiting, providing greater support to families, promoting infant and child health, and helping to prevent child abuse and neglect.

• **LEVERAGING THE OPPORTUNITY IN THE FAMILY FIRST PREVENTION SERVICES ACT** (Family First) will expand the reach of home visiting programs in states to vulnerable populations in need of support. Family First includes reforms that strengthen prevention supports in child welfare and align upstream systems and community investments to keep children safe with their families and prevent entry into foster care. States have the option to use Title IV-E federal funding for evidence-based home visiting programs such as Healthy Families America –a program identified as well-supported by the Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse – before children enter the foster care system. PCA America will offer guidance, technical assistance, and peer-to-peer support on this important policy lever, reporting and sharing this information across states and with policymakers.



Expand Family-Friendly Workplace Policies

Policies that increase the economic security and lead to self-sufficiency of families can alleviate parental stress and help establish a stable household—two factors that can help protect children from abuse and neglect. A family-friendly workplace or employer is one whose policies make it possible for employees to more easily balance family and work, and to fulfill both their family and work obligations, leading to lower rates of family stressors and risk factors. PCA America promotes workplace policies that support working parents, such as adopting comprehensive paid family and medical leave policies and increasing the minimum wage, as these strategies are associated with reductions in the risk factors for child abuse and neglect.

• **PAID FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE** policies refer to partially or fully compensated time away from work for specific and generally significant family caregiving needs, such as the arrival of a new child, serious illness of a close family member, or to attend to one's own health. Having access to such programs are 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. For example, a 2016 study found that California's paid family leave policy was associated with a reduction of pediatric abusive head trauma admissions.[vi] **Yet, only 17% of workers in the U.S. have access to any paid family leave** through their employers.[vii] Comprehensive paid family and medical leave policies allows parents the flexibility to provide care and nurturance to their families and does not force parents to choose between employment and care.

Most recently, the COVID pandemic has exposed the need for workers to have paid time off to quarantine or care for a sick family member. Given the pandemic's disproportionate impact on low-income workers, young parents, and families of color, it is important that any paid leave strategy place these vulnerable families at the forefront and not be limited to those currently in the wage labor force[viii]. Expanding paid family and medical leave policies within states – through partial to full wage replacement or a linked social-insurance and public assistance program – provides parents protected paid time off as a critical support to families and can substantially improve child and family well-being in the United States.

• **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 neglect. In a recent study, increasing the minimum wage by just $1 resulted in a **10% reduction of reported cases of child abuse and neglect.**[ix] Certainly at a time when low-wage workers, particularly women and people of color, have been hit the hardest by the pandemic recession, there is a clear and immediate need for a substantive boost in wages for those working hard and earning an hourly wage.

Strengthen Economic Security for Families

Poverty is an important predictor of child maltreatment and policies that strengthen the economic security of low-income families may reduce child maltreatment. Strategies that support families through cash assistance can offset the costs of childcare, the impact of taxes, and help to meet essential needs. Increasing access to these state supports can help the many families that have found themselves seeking assistance and relief as the current pandemic crisis continues. PCA America promotes strengthening these supportive policies that demonstrate positive outcomes in families.

• **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. Child care is a critical resource that supports parents to engage in work while promoting children's leaning and development. However, families with low incomes, families of color, and immigrant families are among those who are most likely to struggle to access and pay for high-quality child care[x], particularly as it relates to access to child care subsidies and availability of child care programs. Parents receiving childcare subsidies tend to choose better quality childcare,[xi] which increases the likelihood that children will experience safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments. Studies 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.[xii] **Yet, only 8% to 12% of eligible children actually receive subsidized care.**[xiii] Supporting the communities and populations hit hardest by the decline in child care, exacerbated by the current pandemic, will be critical to states' economic recoveries from COVID-19. States can elect to expand eligibility requirements, simplify the application process, or even increase the subsidy amount as supports to reduce child-care costs which will improve families' economic and financial well-being.

• **STATE TAX CREDITS,** such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) which is a tax credit that encourages parents and guardians to work while offsetting the impact of taxes, can essentially leading to increased family income while incentivizing work. States vary in eligibility and funding amounts, and only half of states in the U.S. have enacted EITCs. **States with refundable EITC, compared to those without, experienced an 11% reduction in foster care entry rates.**[xiv] Further, states with refundable EITC had 13% fewer abusive head trauma admissions than states without the tax credit.[xv] Many states offer versions of the EITC as well as Child Tax Credit and the Child and Dependent Care Credit to complement these federal tax credits. States that access, implement, and utilize the economic tools available to communities through these tax credits may see reduced risk factors for child abuse and neglect.

• **CASH ASSISTANCE THROUGH TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE FOR NEEDY FAMILIES (TANF)** can support families in meeting their essential needs. States have broad flexibility over the use of state TANF funds including providing basic assistance to help people find a job, increase work skills, attend job preparation, and other forms of financial aid including short term cash assistance to needy families with children so that they can ideally live in their own home or the homes of relatives. **However, in 2019, states spent only about 20% of TANF funds on basic assistance to meet essential needs of families with children.**[xvi] Investments in cash assistance can improve academic, health, and economic outcomes for children in families in poverty, research shows.

Invest in Evidence-Based Programs to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse is preventable and 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. Legislation mandating or encouraging child sexual abuse prevention education in schools has been adopted in 32 states, however, there is much variability within these laws including the level of dedicated funding. **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 strategies 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; policies which prohibit perpetrators of child sexual abuse to leave one school district for a job in a different school district; and reporting and responding appropriately to boundary violations and suspected or disclosed cases of child sexual abuse.[xvii]

Figures indicate as many as 1 in 4 girls

and 1 in 13 boys

experience child sexual abuse at some point in childhood. Child sexual abuse can cause serious damage to the cognitive, social, and emotional development of a child.

End the Use of Corporal Punishment in Schools

Corporal punishment – an adult's use of physical force (e.g., spanking, switching, paddling) to punish a child or correct a child's inappropriate behavior – increases aggression in young children and is ineffective in teaching a child responsibility and self-control. Currently, 19 states do not have laws in place eliminating the use of corporal punishment in schools and public institutions.[xviii] Evidence suggests that corporal punishment may cause further harm to the child by affecting healthy brain development while other methods that teach children right from wrong are safer and more effective. The American Academy of Pediatrics has taken a firm stance against the use of physical punishment on children, calling for the abolition of corporal punishment in the United States citing comprehensive data on the adverse impact associated with corporal punishment and the need to raise awareness of positive discipline practices.[xix] **Legislative approaches can reduce the use of corporal punishment in school settings and can shift attitudes towards more effective, positive discipline strategies.**[xx] 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.

We have an extraordinary opportunity to contribute to a prosperous future for our nation by creating the conditions for children in every state to succeed and thrive.

The 2021 State Public Policy Prevention Strategies focus on areas with the highest impact in the prevention of child abuse. PCA America works closely with our statewide partners to support policies that strengthen families and prevent child maltreatment. Our policy priorities align with recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) technical packages for violence prevention, including preventing Child Abuse and Neglect and Adverse Childhood Experiences, as well as the CDC's Essentials for Childhood framework. The inclusion of these prevention activities 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.

Together, we can prevent child abuse, America... *Because childhood lasts a lifetime.*

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