

STATE PUBLIC POLICY STRATEGIES

2022

When investments are made 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 to thrive. Prevent Child Abuse America advocates for the following state-level policy priorities, which help to support families and are essential for our children's future prosperity.

Prevent Child Abuse America (PCA America) is committed to advancing a range of policy options and services aimed at supporting families and preventing child abuse and neglect before it occurs. Prioritizing and investing in supportive state policies—from evidence-based home visiting programs to concrete and economic supports—are a critical foundation for the healthy development of our children.

For our 2022-2024 Federal Policy Agenda, please see [here](#).



Educate and raise awareness of policy strategies to prevent child abuse and neglect.

State lawmakers play a critical role in leading the efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect and promoting health and well-being. It is crucial to foster policymakers' understanding, appreciation, and knowledge of the needs of all children and families in their state. Expanding awareness of [Adverse Childhood Experiences \(ACEs\)](#), positive childhood experiences, and primary prevention state options provides the tools legislators need to take action.

There are [at least 37 states and the District of Columbia](#) with legislation that relates to strategies to prevent the occurrence of ACEs and strengthen supports for children. Furthering the understanding of why some children and families are at greater risk for child abuse and neglect and the policy options that can promote positive childhood experiences and mitigate the effects associated with experiencing ACEs will better equip lawmakers to implement policies that support families and promote healthy outcomes for children. Our [nationwide network of chapters](#) are a useful and knowledgeable resource for legislators on effective state-level prevention services and supports for children and their families.



Expand funding for evidence-based home visiting programs.

Evidence-based home visiting programs, such as [Healthy Families America \(HFA\)](#), increase positive parenting practices, prevent and reduce the recurrence of child maltreatment, promote healthy child development, and enhance family well-being. Among many other positive outcomes, [families who participate in HFA and other home visiting programs](#) have shown reductions in the number of low-birthweight babies, improved school readiness for children, and increased economic self-sufficiency. Evidence-based home visiting programs serve as an equity accelerator by fostering relationships with families, building on their strengths, and adapting to meet their specific needs and goals.

Funding an array of evidence-based home visiting programs will help to ensure broader home visiting access for all families. PCA America views this early investment in supporting new parents as a critical component in a state's comprehensive prevention strategy.



Increase and strengthen family economic supports and security.

Child neglect is cited as the [most common form](#) of child maltreatment in the United States. Supporting families through cash assistance by offsetting the costs of childcare, reducing the impact of taxes, and helping families to meet essential needs are critical strategies to reduce the prevalence of child neglect. Policies that empower families to meet their basic needs of food and shelter by strengthening household financial security, including such options as a refundable state Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), [Child Tax Credit \(CTC\)](#), [minimum wages](#), and [paid leave policies](#), are linked to reducing the risk factors for child abuse and neglect.

Many of these policy opportunities are in place across states, including as of 2020 approximately 24 states with a refundable EITC, seven states with an enacted state CTC credit, and 10 states that offer some form of a paid leave policy; with many states introducing bills that, if enacted, would create a paid leave employee benefit program. Advancing policies across states that strengthen family financial security, establish greater household stability, and alleviate parental stress help to create the conditions for all children, families, and communities to thrive.



Invest in a comprehensive strategy for the prevention of child sexual abuse.

Child sexual abuse is preventable. Building a comprehensive strategy for the prevention of child sexual abuse requires a portfolio of federal, state, local, and organizational policies as well as the implementation of evidence-based programs for educating adults and children about creating environments where the opportunities for child sexual abuse are minimized. While the majority of states have [laws that address child sexual abuse](#) there remains significant variability in the content of these laws despite their common intended goals.

PCA America supports the implementation of a collection of state policies geared towards the prevention of child sexual abuse, including such policies as funded school-based child sexual abuse education for adults and children, improving screening and hiring practices for organizations and entities that come into contact with children or youth, and strengthening policies for the criminalization of educator sexual misconduct. In addition to a comprehensive prevention policy portfolio, PCA America supports investments in evidence-based child sexual abuse prevention programs that work with adults and organizations to create safe environments for children.



Promote the coordination of prevention efforts and increase prevention funding to optimize resources dedicated to primary prevention.

The coordination of primary prevention activities optimizes resources and the capacity of state governments to implement and scale up effective interventions. Safeguarding current state funding while expanding local, state, and federal funding will increase the capacity to implement and sustain effective interventions aimed at preventing child abuse and neglect from happening in the first place. This includes leveraging new and existing federal funds, including the prevention opportunities within the [Family First Prevention Services Act](#), expanding state-appropriated funding for community-based primary child abuse prevention programs, and increasing the availability and access to primary child abuse prevention strategies.

PCA America supports the coordination and expansion of prevention strategies that promote the alignment and integration of cross-system prevention efforts. [The Thriving Families, Safer Children: A National Commitment to Well-Being](#) movement is a first of its kind partnership between four national entities, Annie E. Casey Foundation, Casey Family Programs, PCA America, and the U.S. Children's Bureau. The organizations are supporting 22 state and local jurisdictions who are working with youth, families, and communities to co-create and enhance networks of community-based supports and aligning government resources to provide a prevention continuum that promotes equity and parental protective capacities and mitigates associated risk factors.

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

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.

PCA America's State Public Policy Strategies focus on areas with the highest impact in the prevention of child abuse and neglect. PCA America works closely with our statewide partners to support policies that strengthen families and prevent child maltreatment. The inclusion of these prevention activities across states will increase the capacity of state governments to implement and scale up effective strategies aimed at preventing child abuse and neglect from happening in the first place.

