

STATE PUBLIC POLICY PRIORITIES



Prevent Child Abuse America (PCA America) is the nation's oldest and largest organization committed to preventing child abuse and neglect *before* it happens. Informed by our 50-year history and the combined success of our nationwide network of state chapters and nearly 600 Healthy Families America home visiting sites, PCA America raises awareness and advocates for family centered policies that ensure children have what they need to succeed.

State laws play a critical role in leading the efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect. Legislative priorities that support state investments in primary prevention expand access to the resources, opportunities, and relationships that children and families need to thrive.

There isn't one policy option that will prevent child abuse and neglect, but rather a range of solutions that can support families and reduce stress. Investments must be prioritized for upstream policies and programs to build strong families and resourceful communities.

Child abuse is preventable and by investing in strategies that can address the root causes of child abuse and neglect we can prevent child abuse and neglect *before* it occurs.



Expand and prioritize economic and concrete supports for families.

Economic supports for families can be instrumental in lowering familial stress which is linked to child abuse and neglect. [Research](#) shows that for every additional \$1,000 that states spent on benefit programs, such as housing and childcare assistance and refundable Earned Income Tax Credit, per person living in poverty, there was a 4% reduction in child abuse and neglect reports, a 2% reduction in foster care placements and about an 8% reduction in abuse-related child fatalities.

The range of these economic supportive policy options include state tax credits, increased minimum wages, and paid family and medical leave that enhance the economic security of families; childcare subsidies that help low-income families pay for care; supportive housing policies that provide stable housing; and immediate and financial supports for families, including cash assistance, rental support, diaper banks, or food banks. The compounded economic burdens that many families today face, create an urgency for advancing economic and concrete supports as a key child abuse and neglect prevention strategy at the state level.



Invest in the expansion of evidence-based home visiting programs.

Voluntary home visiting programs, such as Healthy Families America (HFA), promote positive parenting, enhance child health and development, and prevent child abuse and neglect. Home visiting programs educate new parents and caregivers, provide space for them to learn strong parenting skills, and support parents with valuable resources to develop nurturing relationships with their children for lifelong health and success. 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.

Funding an array of evidence-based home visiting programs helps to ensure broader home visiting access for all families. Safeguarding current funding while maximizing local, state, and federal funding will increase needed access to home visiting programs. This includes leveraging new and existing federal funds, including the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program, the [Family First Prevention Services Act](#), and state funds for home visiting programs. PCA America views this early investment in supporting new parents as a critical component in a state's comprehensive prevention strategy.

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.



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

Child sexual abuse is preventable – we must empower adults to take responsibility for the safety of children. 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.

State policy strategies include advancing laws funding school-based child sexual abuse prevention education and improving screening and hiring practices for organizations.



Eliminate the use of corporal punishment in public schools.

Corporal punishment – an adult’s use of physical force (e.g., spanking, 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. 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. Despite these negative outcomes, 19 states still allow the use of corporal punishment in schools and public institutions.

Legislative strategies designed to support and promote positive parenting and discipline strategies can reduce the use of corporal punishment and can shift attitudes towards more effective, positive discipline strategies.



Prioritize primary prevention policies and funding.

The inclusion and priority of primary prevention strategies in state policies includes the approaches outlined above and recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Violence Prevention’s [Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences \(ACEs\): Leveraging the Best Available Evidence](#). Prioritizing these prevention activities 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.

Implementing statewide comprehensive strategies and approaches designed to reduce 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.

Children and families are our greatest natural resource. Now is the time to create positive childhood experiences that enable families and communities to thrive. PCA America works closely with our national network of state chapters to advance state-level policies that address the conditions that promote stable communities, healthy families, and the prevention of child abuse and neglect.

See our [Federal Policy Agenda](#).

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