

Prevent Child Abuse America State Policy Priorities



State laws play a critical role in promoting healthy families, positive childhood experiences, and preventing child abuse and neglect. There are a range of legislative policy options to support families and reduce the stressors that can overload families. State investments in primary prevention can expand access to the resources, opportunities, and relationships children and families need to thrive.

[Prevent Child Abuse America](#) (PCA America) works closely with our national network of state chapters to advocate for state-level policies addressing the environments and conditions to promote stable communities, healthy families, and the prevention of child abuse and neglect.

We advocate for policies and investments which are evidence informed, equitable, family-centered, bold, and accountable. These state policy priorities align with [PCA America's Theory of Change](#) and our Federal Policy Priorities.

Primary Prevention – Primary Prevention includes strategies directed to the general population that strengthen community and families BEFORE maltreatment occurs.

Prioritize Primary Prevention:



Investing in state policies supporting families is critical for the healthy development of our children.

Primary prevention encompasses many different upstream strategies designed to connect children and families to the supports and resources within their own communities. To ensure these services are accessible to every family who needs them, states should prioritize investments in **community-based prevention programs, early intervention and family support services, and child sexual abuse prevention efforts.**

Additionally, states play a critical role in leveraging federal funding opportunities that strengthen families and prevent child abuse and neglect. These include:

- Funding to sustain and expand evidence-based home visiting, such as Healthy Families America, through Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV),
- Community-based and prevention-focused programs and activities designed to strengthen and support families to prevent child abuse and neglect through Community-based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) grants, and
- Supports for families and communities through other federal funding streams such as TANF and Title IV-B that help to mitigate crises for families.

[See our Federal Policy Priorities.](#)

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Promote Comprehensive Family Supports:



Creating inclusive, aligned, and coordinated prevention supports for families can proactively meet the needs of families and communities before a crisis.

Creating a system of coordinated prevention, support, and services can ensure that families have what they need, when they need it, in their own communities. Statewide comprehensive strategies and approaches can promote positive childhood experiences and address health disparities that are associated with child abuse and neglect. States can invest in building aligned systems of prevention and voluntary family support that give all children, families, and communities the opportunity to thrive. These coordinated supports can prevent the need for child welfare or other crisis interventions and include policies and programs such as **early childhood home visiting, access to quality and affordable childcare, peer-to-peer caregiver and parent support, and family resource centers**. It also includes expanded support for families impacted by substance use and mental health issues. These policies and programs serve as gateways for families to access important supports, stabilize crises, and promote positive physical, mental, and behavioral health.

Strengthen Family Economic Stability and Mobility:



Advancing economic supports helps families address basic needs and create safer environments for children to thrive.

Advancing policies across states that strengthen family financial security and establish greater household stability help to create the conditions for children, families, and communities to thrive. Economic support for families is instrumental in lowering familial stress which is linked to child abuse and neglect. In addition, most reports to state child protective services are for neglect (e.g., unstable housing; adequate food and clothing) which can overload the system and make it harder to identify the appropriate supports that families need to remain intact. There is a range of economic policy options that states can enact to better support families, thereby reducing risk of child abuse and addressing basic needs before families are in crisis. These include **child tax credits, refundable earned income tax credits, paid family and medical leave, and childcare subsidies**. Through administrative policy, states also have opportunities to improve support to families by broadening eligibility criteria, addressing benefit cliffs and minimizing administrative burden that can buffer unexpected changes to a family's financial security.

Prioritizing prevention strategies in state policy will increase the capacity of state governments to develop effective interventions aimed at preventing child abuse and neglect from happening in the first place. It's critical to invest in our future by giving all families access to resources within their own communities and the opportunity to increase their economic security, creating nurturing, stable homes that support children's healthy development. Now is the time to create positive childhood experiences that enable families and communities to thrive.

[See our Federal Policy Priorities.](#)