

# Policy Priorities for Child and Family Well-Being

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2023-24

In 2023, the Schuyler Center urges New York leaders to **prioritize New Yorkers who are struggling to make ends meet, with a special focus on children and families.** Centering these New Yorkers is more important than ever given that low-income, Black, brown and immigrant New Yorkers, and families with children continue to be among those hardest impacted by the pandemic and its after-effects, and are struggling to meet the high costs of necessities due to rising inflation.

**Goal 1. Move toward achieving codified commitment of cutting child poverty by 50% in a decade, with attention to reducing racial inequities.** Priority actions for 2023 include:

1. **The Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council should immediately** identify and advance budget strategies to significantly cut child poverty this year and measure the Executive and Enacted Budgets regarding their impact toward New York’s commitment to cut child poverty and reduce racial inequities.
2. **Strengthen New York’s child tax credit** by (a) securing a robust credit for children under age four (a group currently excluded altogether from New York’s credit); (b) restructuring the credit so the highest credit goes to the lowest income families – by ending the state’s regressive minimum income requirement and phase-in; (c) increasing the credit amount to provide families meaningful support; and (d) ensuring the credit continues to be available to as many immigrant families as possible.

**Goal 2. Continue to make substantial and concrete progress toward achieving high-quality, culturally-responsive, universal child care.** Among the steps New York should take this year:

1. **Establish a Quality Child Care Workforce Compensation Program.** This wage enhancement program would offer significant and sustained wage supplements to all licensed and registered providers in New York State as an interim strategy while the NYS Child Care Availability Task Force develops a compensation scale and structure. (By way of example, in Washington D.C., the municipal government in 2022 directly paid eligible providers \$10,000–\$14,000 supplements; payments in subsequent years will be determined by a compensation scale based on education, experience, and responsibilities.) *Critically, the supplements would be paid to all providers; they would not be tied to children receiving subsidized care.*
2. **Continue to incrementally expand access to high-quality child care to more families, prioritizing low-income families; families from historically underserved communities, and families facing complex needs.** Among the concrete steps New York should take this year:
  - a. Create a state-financed Excluded Families Child Care Subsidies fund to provide child care subsidies to immigrant families whose children are barred from accessing federally financed subsidies on the same terms as other families to help pull immigrant families into the economic mainstream so they can achieve self-sufficiency, help address the state’s workforce shortage, and grow our economy.
  - b. Adopt categorical child care assistance eligibility for families enrolled in other public assistance programs (SNAP, Medicaid, WIC, etc.) and for children with disabilities.

- c. Invest in and support child care programs that serve families during non-traditional hours and children with special needs by increasing the subsidy rate differential and/or provide a monthly per-child supplement for non-traditional hour care and care for children with special needs.
3. **Ensure the New York State Child Care Availability Task Force is convened** and acts quickly and boldly to develop and implement a plan for Universal Child Care in the state.

**Goal 3. Transform the Child Welfare System by investing in family strengthening, prevention of system-involvement, reducing institutional placements, and transparency and accountability of the system.** It is imperative that New York:

1. **Invest in community-based primary prevention services.** Primary prevention services address basic economic, health, housing, child care, education, and social needs, and do not require a family to be involved in the child welfare system to gain access. New York must create a new fund to strengthen and expand these community-focused services.
2. **Increase New York State’s portion of funding for child welfare preventive services from 62% to 75%.** For the children and families already involved in the child welfare system, child welfare preventive services provide support to exit the child welfare system quickly, reunite, or live independently once youth reach the age of 21. One example is the **preventive child welfare housing subsidy.** This year, New York should increase the payment to better reflect the true cost of housing and **build-in ongoing automatic increases to the subsidy** tied to inflation and rising housing costs.
3. **Reduce the number of children in institutional placements,** including emergency placements, and expedite reunification.
4. **Collect, publicly report, analyze, and take action to address systemic complaints in the child welfare system.** New York State should take an intentional, methodical approach to supporting the needs and addressing concerns of children and families who become involved in the system.

**Goal 4. Expand and increase investment in child and family health.**

New York is recognizing the impacts and costs associated with our youth mental health crisis and a multi-year disinvestment in public health. In addition, evidence mounts about the importance of investing as early as possible in prevention and early intervention to mitigate future illness and cost. The State’s pending Medicaid waiver, if approved, will bring new resources and opportunity to invest in children and youth and address inequity. This year, New York should:

1. **Implement continuous Medicaid coverage for children from birth through age six.**
2. Focus investment and payment on **family-oriented/two-generational care; mental health care/preventive mental health; and social determinants of health.**
3. **Improve access to maternal, infant, and early childhood home visiting,** making it available to all families who would like to receive services and ensure health insurance covers it.
4. **Expand access to services and supports for young children with developmental delays and disabilities and reduce racial inequities** in service delivery in **Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education.**
5. **Strengthen and expand the mental health workforce** with new models of care, adequate reimbursement, and robust managed care expectations.
6. **Expand availability of oral health services** by expanding/improving the oral health workforce.

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