

Leveraging Medicaid Investments for Child and Family Wellbeing

The Promise

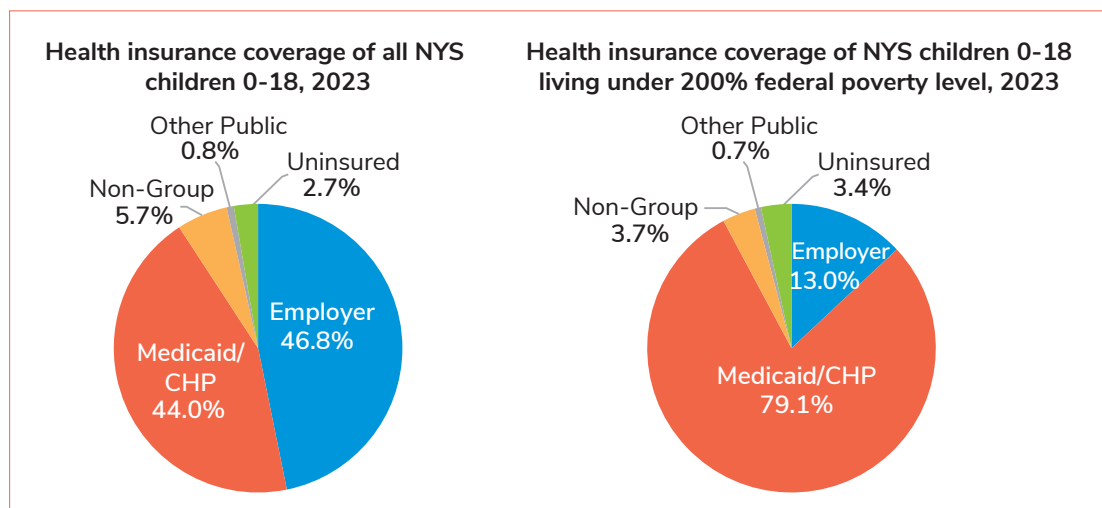
New York State Medicaid, along with Child Health Plus (CHP), helps ensure children have the health coverage and care they need to thrive. New York leverages Medicaid funds to prioritize the health and wellbeing of children and invest in policies focused on families and proven to prevent poor health and disease, including those that address social needs like nutrition and housing.

The Challenge

Historically—and still—health payment systems like Medicaid and private insurance invest little in prevention and child health, even though it is well-established that if children and their caregivers are connected early to the services they need, before there is a diagnosis, disease, or long-term health problems, many health challenges can be prevented, and the extraordinary financial costs of medical care reduced.¹

What We Know

New York State is a leader in providing affordable, comprehensive health insurance coverage to 1,780,200 children through Medicaid and Child Health Plus, covering 44% of the state’s children, and nearly 80% of children living in poverty and near poverty.² The rate of coverage may rise in 2025 when New York State implements continuous Medicaid eligibility for children from birth to age six. This new policy will facilitate uninterrupted access to services young children need to thrive.



Sources: KFF. (2024). Health Insurance Coverage of Children 0-18.
KFF. (2024). Health Insurance Coverage of Low Income Children 0-18 (under 200% FPL).

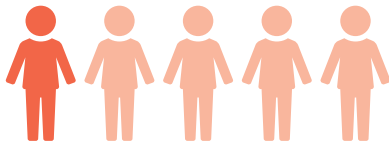
New York is implementing an innovative and ambitious initiative that will allow Medicaid resources to be used to address some social needs (also called social determinants of health) as a means to improve health. This new initiative will screen Medicaid members for “health related social needs.” If needs are determined, the member will be eligible to get help locating and enrolling in existing programs, including housing supports, nutrition, transportation, and case management. Among the priority populations eligible for these services are Medicaid enrollees who are pregnant – up to 12 months after the end of the pregnancy; children birth through six; children under 18 with a chronic condition; and youth in foster care, juvenile justice-involved, and those in kinship care.³

This initiative was developed through a Medicaid waiver—an agreement with the federal government to waive certain Medicaid rules to allow New York to test out new initiatives. This waiver, (the Medicaid 1115 Waiver), includes a multi-billion dollar federal investment to carry out the new initiative.

The 1115 Waiver provides an important opportunity to improve health by identifying and addressing pressing social needs like **poverty**, **food insecurity**, and **homelessness**.

- Children are the population most likely to experience **poverty** and are also most vulnerable to its effects.⁴ Poverty is a leading driver of poor health.⁵
- Hunger is experienced by far too many New York children; nearly 19% of children are **food insecure**.⁶
- Children's health and housing security are closely intertwined. While family homelessness and housing instability is notoriously hard to quantify, New York State's Department of Education found that public school student homelessness increased between 2023 and 2024.

18.8% of children are food insecure in New York State, 2022



Source: Feeding America. (2024). Map the Meal Gap.

Homelessness is among the most devastating poverty-related experiences, and one that a growing number of New York children face

Public school students experiencing homelessness has increased.



2022-23 School Year

113,000



22%

2023-24 School Year

138,000

Source: New York State Education Department. (ND). Comparing Enrollments.

Too often, families experiencing unmet social needs don't access the services and resources to which they are entitled because the systems are difficult to navigate. For example, among New York State infants, children, and women who are eligible for the WIC program in New York State [which provides pregnant women and young children with free access to nutritional foods], just 58.5% are enrolled.⁷

For the short- and long-term health of our children and communities, New York State must act with urgency to prevent children from experiencing poverty, hunger, homelessness, or the deprivation of other social needs. If they do experience one or more of these hardships, the state must ensure they and their families are swiftly connected to services and resources that mitigate negative impacts.

The Policy Solutions

- ▶ Medicaid and CHP are impactful, effective health programs in New York. Policymakers and the public should celebrate the positive impacts of these programs and work together to support and strengthen them.
- ▶ Implementation of the Medicaid 1115 waiver should prioritize children's health and health-related social needs.

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If my kids got nutrition supports, and if [my oldest son] got medically tailored home-delivered meals, that would be good. He has diabetes, and I try my best to put meals together that aren't harmful for his health. If he has something already prepared that I can pop in the oven and it's based on his health needs, that would be great. I wouldn't have to sit here and stress about it.

—Parent, Queens

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¹ Drake, P., Damico, A., Tolbert, J. (2023). *Key Facts about the Uninsured Population*. KFF.

² KFF. (n.d) *Health Insurance Coverage of Children 0-18*.

³ NYS Department of Health. (2024). *1115 Medicaid Redesign Team Waiver Webinar: New York Health Equity Reform (NYHER)* [Power-Point Slides].

⁴ Kristin, M., Red, Z., Tompson, D. (2024). *Poverty Matters for Children's Well-being, but Good Policy Can Help*. Child Trends.

⁵ American Academy of Pediatrics. (2021). *Poverty and Child Health*.

⁶ Feeding America. (2024). *Map the Meal Gap*.

⁷ USDA Food and Nutrition Service. (2024). *WIC Coverage Rates by State and Participant Category, 2022*. United States Department of Agriculture.

*For all sources and computations, go to <https://scaany.org/sonyc-sources-2025/>