



# Key Children's Policy Recommendations for the 2025 Legislative Session

*January 2025*





We drive policy  
change to improve  
the lives of Texas  
children **today** for a  
stronger Texas  
**tomorrow.**

# 4 Areas of Focus

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**Early  
Learning**

2

**Healthy  
Families**

3

**Child  
Protection**

4

**Mental  
Health**

# Key Children's Priorities for Next Session

- Funding for Texas Workforce Commission's child care scholarship program so parents have high quality child care options
- Funding and legislation to strengthen pre-k for young children
- Bills to give parents information about kids' health coverage options
- Funding to make the Medicaid eligibility system actually work for families
- Funding and bills to ensure new moms get maternal health care they need
- Funding to help parents find services for their children with mental health challenges



# Early Learning

- child care
- pre-k, including for students with disabilities
- emergent bilingual students



“When we first got [a scholarship], we were going through a rough patch financially.

Now I’m able to come to work and have my kids in a high-quality place where I know they will have the education that they need.”

- Anaelys, a mother of two children receiving child care scholarships

# Families Deserve Choices

- Child care costs more than tuition to UT-Austin.
- Approximately 80,000 kids are on a waitlist for the state's Child Care Services program.
- Because of a lack of funding, programs are struggling to pay their bills and meet the demand.
- The lack of affordable, high-quality child care options for working families limits their job opportunities and professional success.

# Recommendations from 120 Texas Groups Mirroring Florida, Alabama, and Other Red States

- Invest in more scholarships for eligible families
- Provide child care for child care educators
- Address child care shortage areas such as night time/weekends, care for children with disabilities, and infants
- Strengthen pre-k partnerships





# Healthy Families

- ECI for toddlers with disabilities
- kids' health insurance
- maternal health



Thanks to Early  
Childhood  
Intervention, Natalia  
and her daughter  
Mariana recently  
danced together for  
the first time.

# Toddlers with Disabilities Learn to Walk, Communicate with their Families, Get Ready for School, or Meet Other Goals

- ECI is for children under age three with disabilities and delays.
- Last year, the Legislature covered the enrollment increase — **but per-child funding is down 38% since 2010, when adjusted for inflation.**
- Inadequate funding means that kids with disabilities:
  - enroll late
  - miss ECI entirely
  - receive fewer visits/hours than needed

# Recommendations to Adequately Fund ECI for Toddlers with Disabilities

- Keep the \$18 million in funding to cover enrollment growth, which HHSC requested.
- Raise Medicaid rates — for the first time since 2011 — for key ECI services
  - Specialized Skills Therapy (SST)
  - Targeted Case Management (TCM)
- Increase General Revenue funding for the ECI program to begin restoring per-child funding after years of decline.



As a baby, Meg could:

- attend regular check-ups
- take antibiotics for ear infections
- get an EpiPen for her life-threatening allergy.

All thanks to Medicaid health insurance.

# About Half of Texas Kids Without Health Insurance Are Actually Eligible for Coverage through Medicaid/CHIP

- The Legislature could slash the children's uninsured rate — the worst in the US — while keeping current eligibility limits in place.
- For U.S. citizen children who do not receive insurance through their parents' employers, Medicaid is often the only affordable option.
- Many parents do not know their children are eligible.
- Parents also run into delays, backlogs, and other problems with the state's clunky enrollment system.



Under the state's outdated system, Medicaid applications submitted online must be re-entered by HHSC staff.

Over 100,000 applications have not been processed yet.

# Recommendations to Ensure Kids Who Are Currently Eligible for Medicaid Health Insurance Can Sign Up

- Bills to inform parents:
  - **When families apply for SNAP**, the state should notify parents if their kids are confirmed eligible for Medicaid health insurance.
  - Give parents info when they are discharged from the **hospital after childbirth**.
  - Give parents info during **school enrollment**.
- Funding to overhaul HHSC's outdated technology so it actually works for families:
  - HHSC's request to upgrade TIERS and YourTexasBenefits app/website.





The Legislature took a key step passing 12-month postpartum health coverage for moms.

But our research shows there is much more work to do.

# The Legislature made huge investments in women's health programs last session, but the work isn't done.

- New moms need help!
  - accessing basic necessities
  - accessing care for themselves
- A need for mental health support
  - all provider types — and most moms — mentioned as a top need
  - gaps in screening and limited access to counseling and therapy
- A need for additional Medicaid providers
  - shortage of providers, or providers that take Medicaid
  - long wait times for specialists

# Recommendations to Support Maternal Health

- Add **key maternal health services** to Medicaid coverage, including:
  - Doula care during pregnancy, delivery, and postpartum
  - Case management services for year postpartum for high-risk pregnancies
  - Additional postpartum depression screenings during well-baby visits
- Ensure there is a robust network of care:
  - Continue investment in women's mobile health units and women's health programs
  - Continue Medicaid labor and delivery add-on payments for rural hospitals



# Child Protection & Mental Health

- Keeping kids safe with their families & out of foster care
- Services for children with complex mental health challenges
- Older youth in foster care



The Legislature should help keep families together — safely.

# The Legislature Has Recognized the Importance of Safely Keeping Kids Out of Foster Care and With their Families

- Most kids enter foster care because of concerns about abuse or neglect
- But a separate population — about 6% of kids in foster care last year — enter because of their own unmet mental health needs.
- There are effective services, but the Legislature needs to provide funding to ensure kids can access them.
- For example: Despite *increased* inquiries into YES Waiver services over the last five years, the number of children served has *decreased*.

# Recommendations to Support Kids with Complex Mental Health Needs — Including Those At Risk of Entering Foster Care

Services designed for all youth with complex mental health challenges:

- Increase **funding for the YES Waiver program** so kids at risk of hospitalization or placement in foster care can receive specialized mental health services
- Add key **children’s mental health services to Medicaid insurance**, including intensive mental health services, home and community based interventions, and crisis stabilization services.

Mental health services **designed for youth at risk of entering foster care:**

- Invest state funding to preserve the **Family First Pilots**, which offer mental health services and targeted family preservation services

# Additional Recommendations to Safely Keep Kids Out of Foster Care and With Their Families

- Improve **legal services for families** investigated by CPS by increasing funding for the Texas Indigent Defense Commission (TIDC) — Exceptional item in budget



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