



Federal Leadership for Children and Youth

All children and youth should have equitable opportunities to thrive and achieve their full potential. They do not. A significant number face social, racial and other structural barriers that dramatically reduce their opportunity to learn and achieve optimal health, well-being and economic security. After making strides to improve the wellbeing of children during its first 100 days, the Biden Administration should launch a federal coordinating body for children and youth to ensure these investments have the greatest impact while providing a sustainable structure for future efforts.

SUCSESSES OF THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION IN ITS FIRST 100 DAYS

The Biden Administration has taken substantive steps to improve the wellbeing of children, youth and families during its first 100 days by creating leadership structures and through policy achievements. Over the coming years, there is a critical opportunity to maximize the impact of these successes through strong coordination and to build on them through additional policy victories.

Leadership Structures

The Administration has demonstrated its commitment to cross-agency coordination through various councils and task forces that focus on targeted policies and populations, such as with the:

- **COVID-19 Health Equity Task Force** that includes experts on children and youth
- **Gender Policy Council** tasked with coordinating federal efforts to advance gender equity and equality, including policies and programs related to girls
- **Interagency Task Force on the Reunification of Families** focused on identifying the families of children separated at the U.S.-Mexico border in recent years

The American Rescue Plan

While the American Rescue Plan's (ARP) \$1.9 trillion of investments will benefit all Americans, about \$210 billion will directly benefit children and youth. Key highlights include:

- Adjustments to the Child Tax Credit and Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit aimed at **stabilizing families incomes** and **reducing child poverty**
- \$165 billion for **public K-12 schools** and **higher education** institutions
- \$39 billion for **child care assistance** and to support **child care providers**
- Funding and greater flexibilities for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) aimed at **reducing child and youth hunger**
- An extension of **postpartum coverage** and an increased federal match rate for the Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) **health insurance** programs

The ARP also provided billions of dollars for Head Start; Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children; Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program; Individuals with Disabilities Education Act; and several programs aimed at reducing child abuse, homelessness, suicide, traumatic stress, and mental health concerns among children and youth.

PROVIDING LEADERSHIP FOR ALL CHILDREN & YOUTH

While existing leadership structures and policy successes will undeniably have a positive impact on young people, fragmented implementation can be a major barrier to maximizing impact. The Biden Administration should advance an ambitious agenda to improve outcomes and promote equity for all children and youth through a federal leadership structure that could:

- **Coordinate implementation** of the policies in the ARP and other legislative successes so federal agencies as well as key partners like states, tribes, localities, and non-profits can coordinate and implement the provisions effectively
- **Make recommendations** regarding which policies from the ARP should be made permanent or adapted, based on consultation with youth and families themselves and other stakeholders
- **Inform the development of future policies** that will make measurable progress to improve physical and mental health, development, education, and economic opportunities for all children and youth over the long-term

Potential White House Leadership Structures

Single federal agencies lack the structure and mandate to create holistic change. Through Executive Order, the Biden Administration should establish one or more leadership structures described below. A high-level Administration official such as the First Lady, Vice President or First Gentleman should oversee these structures to ensure maximum impact and visibility.

- A **White House Office on Children and Youth** would elevate issues to the highest level of the government and ensure access to key leaders across the Executive Office of the President. The Office would create a National Strategy and Goals for Children and Youth for the federal government. It would develop a coordinated, multi-agency, outcome-focused Children and Youth Budget request. It would regularly coordinate with an External Advisory Council and a National Family and Youth Advisory Board.
- A **Federal Children's Cabinet** would coordinate closely with the Office. State and local governments, led by Democrats and Republicans, have utilized children's cabinets to make measurable impacts for children and youth and address issues requiring coordination across multiple agencies, such as aligning the numerous agencies responsible for pandemic response. The cabinet would also facilitate senior-level leadership engagement across the federal government to identify and eliminate barriers to better alignment and effective action.
- An **Interdepartmental Task Force on Child Wellbeing** would facilitate coordination of specific and defined policy areas, such as the anti-poverty, mental health and education provisions of the ARP.

The Biden Administration should jumpstart this effort through a **White House Conference on Building Back Better for Children and Youth**. This could serve as a venue to develop strategies on how to address key priorities such as childhood poverty, mental health, and racial equity from across the federal government and with outside stakeholders, including policy experts, philanthropy, and the private sector.