



# **2026** **PRIMER & PRIORITIES**



## **CALIFORNIA MUST CHOOSE CHILDREN**

California leaders need solutions to support the well-being, care, and learning of babies, toddlers and young children — and of the caring adults in their lives — to create a state where children thrive.



## INTRODUCTION

On November 3, 2026, California will choose its next governor. As candidates prepare their platforms and as parents consider their votes, Californians should recognize that a child born today will spend the majority of their early childhood under the next administration.

Now the world's fourth largest economy, California welcomes nearly 420,000 newborns annually.<sup>1</sup> We must build on the momentum of the last eight years, in which our state has made unprecedented investments in systems that support our youngest and their families. The next governor will face both remarkable opportunities and significant challenges.

In an uncertain federal policy environment that will have considerable impact on California's budget, California's future leader must protect and advance our most precious resource — our children.

## WHY EARLY CHILDHOOD MATTERS

California's governor is responsible for Californians of all ages, but it is California's youngest children who will experience the most dramatic and long-term impact by the governor's policy and investment decisions. Not only that, investing in children is one of the best return on investments the state can make. Research finds a 13% return on investment for comprehensive, high-quality, birth-to-five early education.<sup>2</sup> This is because more than one million neural connections are made each second in the first years of a child's life; and that ultimately 90% of brain development happens before the age of 5.<sup>3</sup>





Children depend on safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments for healthy development.

- These relationships flourish when families are supported by paid family leave, well baby visits, secure housing, and high quality early care and education.
- Families also need access to healthcare and other developmental supports that are often delivered through home-visits that support parenting and high-quality, accessible, and responsive early care and education opportunities.

**Ultimately it is these strong relationships that buffer the impact of poverty, toxic stress, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), and systemic racism.**

- A 2025 study shows that as many as 65% of Californians have experienced at least one adverse childhood experience.
- There is a high cost of inaction, with an estimated cost of \$1.5 trillion dollars to the state on health care costs and lost healthy years of life.<sup>4</sup>
- Access to high-quality, culturally responsive home visits, early care and education, and economic and legal supports for families are the antidote.<sup>5</sup>
- These supports are critical because more than two in three families of young children report experiencing emotional distress, including stress (50%), anxiety (45%), loneliness (42%), and depression (36%).<sup>6</sup>

**All children have the right to be cared for in safe, stable, nurturing environments where their caregivers have the support they need to thrive.**

# CURRENT STATE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD IN CALIFORNIA & RECENT PROGRESS

## Current State of Early Childhood in California

Early childhood policy, like all US policies and systems, has roots in historic injustice and structural racism. In this complex web of policies, programs, and practices, children and families face myriad issues.

There are an array of systems, services, and professionals that support young children and their families in their first five years of life. These include hospitals, pediatricians, home visitors, health care providers, early educators, family childcare providers, family friend and neighbor caregivers, community-based centers, schools, and an array of poverty mitigation and child welfare services such as foster care, Medi-Cal, CalFresh, CalWORKS, among others.

One unique asset within California's early childhood landscape is its network of Children and Family Commissions at the local and state level. Also known as First 5s, these commissions exist in all 58 counties and focus on coordinating county services (across departments including county departments of health, county departments of social services, etc.) to meet the needs of families with young children.

First 5s have individual local priorities but collectively work to ensure the voices of California's families and their young children are uplifted and considered by policy makers. First 5 California is the state-level commission and advocates for and funds family-friendly policies and efforts to get young children ready to enter school. Proposition 10 tobacco tax revenues support funding the county commissions and state-level commission.<sup>7</sup> First 5s may serve as a backbone agency to support a network of care to respond to ACEs and toxic stress or to ensure access to critical prevention and early intervention services.

Specific to the early care and education sector, California has a mixed delivery system that delivers these services through public, private, and nonprofit organizations. There is also variation in the settings of the service; in a provider's home, in the family's home, in an early learning center, in a school, etc. California's mixed delivery system is a strength that helps meet the needs of individual families.<sup>8</sup>

The mixed-delivery system offers families choice in the type of early care and education services they select for their child; however the current cost of care is so high and the supply is so limited that many Californian families are not able to receive the benefits of



the mixed delivery system because they are not able to easily access care, let alone have a choice in the care they select.

**In 2022, only 1 in 9 children eligible for subsidized child care programs received services.<sup>9</sup>**

- According to data from the RAPID Survey Project at Stanford University, one parent in Monterey County shared “I can’t find a childcare provider in my area that will accept the payment the state offers for childcare. Everyone is full or so expensive I’d have to pay out of pocket.”<sup>10</sup>
- Another parent in Los Angeles County shared, “I would love to have a third child but I simply cannot afford it due to the cost of childcare.”
- While there is some public investment in child care and preschool services, the American child care market is considered a market failure.<sup>11</sup>



**The complex network of individuals supporting families and their young children through health care services, child welfare services, economic supports, and other key sectors is similarly complex.**

- There are numerous state and federal agencies and divisions that fund and regulate these systems. Some funding streams start out at the federal level (e.g., Child Care & Development Block Grant (CCDBG), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Head Start Act funding, Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program funding, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Parts B & C funding) and have associated federal requirements in addition to any state level oversight.
- Some funding streams originate at the state level (e.g., Prop 10 funding, Prop 98 funding, State General funds, California State Preschool Programs (CSPP) Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) Block Grant funds) and can have more flexibility in how they’re implemented because they are not subject to the federal regulations.
- The current federal administration has already withheld funding from states related to education and immigration services;<sup>12</sup> and has passed H.R. 1, also known as the One Big Beautiful Bill, which has substantive cuts to major federal funding

programs like Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and federal student loans.<sup>13</sup> This legislation could result in a loss of Medicaid coverage for up to 3.4 million Californians and at least 735,000 Californians would be at risk of losing their CalFresh benefits.<sup>14</sup>

**The next governor will need to respond to a federal administration with priorities counter to the interests of many Californians.**

## Recent Progress

Despite the challenges and complexities, California has made a great deal of progress over the last eight years. Wins include:

- **Universal PreK (UPK) Expansion:** California more than doubled its investment in the California State Preschool Program (CSPP) since 2021 and tripled its investment in Transitional Kindergarten (TK). In the 2025-26 school year, all 4 year olds will have access to TK.<sup>15</sup> The state also established a Preschool through Third Grade teaching credential.
- **Paid Family Leave Expansion:** SB 951 passed, boosting leave benefits for lower- and middle-income workers, including childcare and development employees; expanding maximum duration of Paid Family Leave (PFL) benefits from six weeks to eight weeks; and expanding job protections to more workers.<sup>16</sup>
- **Early Intervention:** Notable early intervention progress included establishing the CalWORKS Home Visiting Initiative in 2019, with over 20,000 families received home visits by 2022.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, in 2022 the state made changes to Early Start to better meet the developmental needs of infants and toddlers across California, including lowering eligibility thresholds and decreasing case loads at regional centers that serve children with developmental disabilities.<sup>18</sup> Finally, building on Medi-Cal expansion efforts, DHCS launched [CalAIM](#) in 2021 to transform and improve Medi-Cal to provide services beyond doctor's offices and hospitals, including behavioral health; dental; and opportunities for respite care, homecare services, and asthma care. Additional reforms will be phased through 2027.<sup>19</sup>
- **Medi-Cal Transformation:** California's Medi-Cal program has made important strides toward strengthening whole-child and whole-family care. The Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) added doula services and dyadic care services as a benefits effective January 1, 2023. Doula services include emotional and physical support provided during pregnancy, labor, birth, and the postpartum period, as well as support for and after miscarriage and abortion.<sup>20</sup> Dyadic services are a family and caregiver focused model of care intended to address developmental and behavioral health conditions of children and includes services provided to parent(s)/caregiver(s) (known as a "dyad").<sup>21</sup> Additionally, DHCS added Community Health Worker (CHW) services as a Medi-Cal benefit starting July 1, 2022. CHW services are preventive health services to prevent disease, disability, and other health conditions or their progression; to prolong life; and promote physical and mental health and well-being.<sup>22</sup>

- **Maternal Health and Postpartum Supports:** The 2021 “Momnibus Bill” (SB 65) developed a fund to grow and diversify the midwifery workforce, extend California’s Medicaid coverage for doulas, and extend Medicaid eligibility for birthing people and families experiencing postpartum depression from two to twelve months.
- **California’s Children and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative (CYBHI):** a multiyear, multi-billion-dollar effort launched in 2021 focused on improving the behavioral health and well-being of children, youth, and families (the core of the [Master Plan for Kids’ Mental Health](#)).<sup>23</sup> Since 2024, 850 California organizations have been awarded more than \$2 billion to conduct over 1,500 activities focused on advancing behavioral health supports and services.
- **Passage of the Behavioral Health Services Act (BHSA)** in 2024, replacing the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) of 2004; the BHSA reforms behavioral health care funding to prioritize services for people with the most significant mental health needs. This act increases oversight, transparency, and accountability at the state and local levels; adds the treatment of substance use disorders (SUD); expands housing interventions; and increases the behavioral health workforce.<sup>24</sup>
- **Reduced Family Fees:**<sup>25</sup> Family fees for childcare and development programs were revised to limit fees and improve ease of administration. Reduced family fees means subsidized programs are more affordable for families who are receiving public child care benefits.
- **Child Savings Accounts:** The California Kids Investment and Development Savings Program (CalkIDS) was launched in 2022 to help jumpstart college savings for children statewide by awarding scholarship accounts up to \$1,500. Also in 2022, the California HOPE for Children Trust Account Program was established through Assembly Bill 156. The HOPE program provides a trust fund account for eligible children in foster care and children that lost parents due to COVID.
- **Reimbursement Rates for Early Care and Education and Bargaining with the Child Care Providers United (CCPU) Union:** Work is underway to update the process the state uses to reimburse childcare and preschool programs. The state is transitioning to a single rate structure informed by the actual cost of providing services. This policy change will likely lead to improved compensation of providers and greater financial stability for programs.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, in 2023, the state and CCPU fully ratified a new memorandum of understanding, providing retirement and health benefits and more than \$1 billion in funding towards the childcare and development workforce. The 2025 agreement preserves these benefits for three more years.<sup>27</sup>

Guiding some of this strategy was the 2020 [Master Plan for Early Learning and Care](#), outlining a plan to transform California’s early childhood systems by 2030 and the 2022 [Medi-Cal’s Strategy to Support Health and Opportunity for Children and Families](#), a policy agenda for children and families enrolled in Medi-Cal. There has been significant progress towards the goals set out in these plans; and there is still a lot of work left for the next governor to realize the state’s vision for young children and their families.<sup>28</sup>





## CRITICAL OPPORTUNITIES

**In the face of federal threats to investments in California, the next governor should work to protect the progress made in the last eight years and make new gains for young children and their families.** There are still critical unmet needs for families with young children.

### System Navigation

The number of different funding streams and entities overseeing the services supporting young children and their families makes it challenging for families to navigate.

- Not only are families unclear on what services they can access, families also have to find the right door for the right service.
- They must complete an application process, and in some circumstances, submit paperwork to complete repeated eligibility determinations. This is challenging enough for all families; and in California, 59% of children under the age of five are multilingual and live in homes with families who may also face translation and interpretation challenges when trying to access services.<sup>29</sup>
- Families need access to important services including healthcare, nutrition supports, legal counsel, workforce development, and early care and education.
- While there are existing services to support families in navigating the complexities of this system; these resources are limited.

**These resources could be better maximized and more efficiently used with updated enrollment systems.**

### Governance

California has many different state departments; a number of which are responsible for administering the wide range of services for young children and their families.<sup>30</sup>

- This complicated web of oversight has areas of overlap and alignment, but most often state departments are working independently.



- This results in challenges for families when they try to access services and are met with different eligibility requirements.
- Funding for early childhood services is respectively complex and spread across many different local, regional, state, and federal entities.
- Current levels of funding for early childhood services are not sufficient to meet the state's needs.

**The state could more efficiently and effectively administer programs that benefit children and families if it had a streamlined approach to governing the programs and agencies that serve them.**

## **Economic Security**

Economic insecurity and poverty are challenges facing too many Californians.<sup>31</sup>

- California's poverty rate rose from 15.2% in 2022 to 16.9% in 2023, according to the California Poverty Measure (CPM); and with the end of pandemic relief programs, poverty among children rose.<sup>32</sup>
  - The National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine report that children growing up in families with income below the poverty line fare worse than children from wealthier families in most dimensions, ranging from physical and mental health, to educational attainment and labor market success, to risky behaviors and delinquency.<sup>33</sup>
- Data collected by RAPID, at the Stanford University Center on Early Childhood from 2022-2024 indicate that about two in three (68%) of California parents of infants and toddlers report having moderate-to-extreme stress about paying for their basic needs.<sup>34</sup>
- Californians also face a housing crisis.<sup>35</sup> Between 2021 - 2022, more than 50,000 babies and toddlers in California experienced homelessness.<sup>36</sup>
  - Similar to research on poverty, experiencing homelessness has been shown to have negative impacts on a child's outcomes.<sup>37</sup>

**To ensure that children have the best start in life, many families need improved child tax credits, expanded paid family leave benefits, housing subsidies, and basic income programs.**

## **Early Care and Education**

While many families face economic insecurities, so do many of the educators; family childcare providers; paraprofessionals; and family, friend, and neighbor providers that care for young children.

- In 2022, 47% of early educator households in the state participated in one or more public safety net programs.<sup>38</sup>

- Reimbursing providers based on the true cost of care will be key next steps to improve compensation for early care and education professionals.<sup>39</sup>

California's families also struggle to access affordable early care and education services.

- Data released in April 2025 states that “one in 6 parents of children ages 0–5 could not find childcare when they needed it for a week or longer in 2023” with affordability being the primary reason for this.
- These challenges are even more pernicious for families with infants and toddlers.
- In 2023, 70% of households with children under 5 spent \$200 or more on childcare weekly, which was a considerable increase from pre-pandemic costs.<sup>40</sup>
- Many families simply can not access reliable childcare and struggle to work as a result.

**The next governor will need to continue the commitment to Universal PreKindergarten (UPK) and will need to increase early care and education availability that addresses the diverse needs of Californian families so all families can thrive.**

## Birth Justice

Quality healthcare services are critical during pregnancy, delivery, and postpartum. It's also essential for families to experience working with professionals who have training in Trauma Informed Care and culturally affirming practices, and who can speak the same language as them.

- There are many obstacles to accessing maternity care at all, with the number of hospitals delivering babies in California dropping from at least 250 in 2012, to 214 in 2025.<sup>41</sup>
- California needs improved access to maternity care, including doulas and midwives, access to lactation spaces and supports, and increased access to home visits to support new parents.
- While these services and rights are afforded to some, there remain major policy implementation challenges that restrain many's ability to access.<sup>42</sup> According to a proclamation released by the executive branch in September 2024, “on average, a new mother loses her life due to a pregnancy-related complication every five days in our state. This heartbreaking reality is even more pronounced for Black women, who are three times more likely to die from pregnancy related causes.”<sup>43</sup>
  - The maternal mortality crisis is preventable and not present to the same degree in other countries.<sup>44</sup>

**California's next governor will need to continue to grapple with protecting Californians giving birth.**

## Health Coverage and Access

Stable health insurance coverage is key to accessing health care, and something many families with young children struggle to maintain.

- A majority of California's children rely on Medi-Cal for their health coverage, which requires families to renew their eligibility every year.<sup>45</sup>
- While improvements have been made to streamline this process, many children still lose their Medi-Cal coverage as part of this eligibility renewal process because of administrative errors and long wait times.<sup>46</sup>
- Temporary subsidies for those purchasing coverage through Covered California, the Affordable Care Act (ACA) marketplace, initially launched in 2021 as part of the nation's COVID-19 response are set to expire at the end of 2025, which will lead to increased costs in the subsidized California market.<sup>47</sup>
- The "One Big Beautiful Bill" limits California's ability to tax Medicaid services in order to draw down federal funding, limits certain payments to Medicaid providers, and requires many able-bodied adults in Medicaid to work, study, or complete community service to access healthcare. It also increases the frequency of eligibility redeterminations for childless adults.<sup>48</sup>
- Access to healthcare should be a universal right for all Californians, regardless of immigration status. Recent changes in federal policy exclude immigrants from essential support and access to healthcare coverage which may lead children and families to suffer from treatable illnesses and compromised community health.

**Ensuring California's children have continuous health insurance will have rebounding positive impacts on their long-term health and outcomes.**





## HOW TO GET INVOLVED & LEARN MORE

Despite measurable improvements to children's health and educational outcomes over the past decade, they face an uncertain future. The challenges facing California's young children and their families are directly connected to the commitment of our state's leaders. The next administration must affirm a strong commitment to fighting for our youngest children; it's what they deserve.

**To learn more about early childhood issues and the upcoming gubernatorial election, visit the Choose Children Campaign's website at: <https://choosechildren.org>**

*First 5 California sponsored this primer; and developed the content with its Choose Children partners.*

# Endnotes

- 1 Osterman, M. J., Hamilton, B. E., Martin, J. A., Driscoll, A. K., & Valenzuela, C. P. (2024, April 4). Births: Final Data for 2022. National Vital Statistics Reports. Retrieved August 5, 2025, from <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr73/nvsr73-02.pdf> and Hayes, C., & Hoskins, P. (2025, April 24). California overtakes Japan as fourth largest global economy. BBC. Retrieved August 7, 2025, from <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cly80zlk1lyo>
- 2 Heckman, J. (2025 ) There's more to gain by taking a comprehensive approach to early childhood development. Retrieved on Oct. 20, 2025 from <https://heckmanequation.org/resource/13-roi-toolbox/>
- 3 Brain Architecture: An ongoing process that begins before birth. (n.d.). Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. Retrieved August 6, 2025, from <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/key-concept/brain-architecture/> and Weixler, L. (2025, May 19). The labor market case for early childhood education. Brookings. Retrieved August 7, 2025, from <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-labor-market-case-for-early-childhood-education/>
- 4 Cora Peterson, Maria V. Aslam, Phyllis H. Niolon, et al., "Economic Burden of Health Conditions Associated with Adverse Childhood Experiences among US Adults," JAMA Network Open 6, no. 12 (December 6, 2023): e2346323, <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.46323>.
- 5 Roadmap for Resilience. (2020, December 9). The California Surgeon General's Report on Adverse Childhood Experiences, Toxic Stress, and Health. Retrieved August 6, 2025, from [https://osg.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/266/2020/12/Roadmap-For-Resilience\\_CA-Surgeon-Generals-Report-on-ACEs-Toxic-Stress-and-Health\\_12092020.pdf](https://osg.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/266/2020/12/Roadmap-For-Resilience_CA-Surgeon-Generals-Report-on-ACEs-Toxic-Stress-and-Health_12092020.pdf)
- 6 (2024, December). California families with infants and toddlers face economic strain and emotional stress. RAPID - Stanford Center on Early Childhood. Retrieved September 15, 2025 from <https://rapidsurveyproject.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/STUPN0567-Infants-and-toddlers-241210.pdf>
- 7 Proposition 10 Statues. (2011, March 24). California Codes. Retrieved August 7, 2025, from [https://www.cafc.ca.gov/pdf/about/organization/policy/about\\_legislation\\_prop\\_10.pdf](https://www.cafc.ca.gov/pdf/about/organization/policy/about_legislation_prop_10.pdf)
- 8 Strengthening a Mixed-Delivery System of Early Care and Education. (2023, January). A First 5 California Position Paper. Retrieved August 8, 2025, from [https://www.cafc.ca.gov/pdf/about/organization/policy/F5CA\\_Mixed\\_Delivery\\_Position\\_Paper\\_2023.pdf](https://www.cafc.ca.gov/pdf/about/organization/policy/F5CA_Mixed_Delivery_Position_Paper_2023.pdf)
- 9 Suacedo, E. (2024, Dec.) California's Child Care Crisis: High Unmet Need and Regional Disparities. Retrieved on Oct. 20, 2025 from <https://calbudgetcenter.org/resources/californias-child-care-crisis-high-unmet-need-and-regional-disparities/>
- 10 RAPID Survey Project (2025). In their own words: Parent quotes from the RAPID-California Voices Project. RAPID Survey Project Stanford Center on Early Childhood. Retrieved October 17, 2025
- 11 Guevara, H. (2021, September 24). Treasury Report Highlights Market Failures in America's Child Care System and How Build Back Better Can Help. First Five Years Fund. Retrieved October 3, 2025, from <https://www.fff.org/resources/2021/09/treasury-dept-report-highlights-market-failures-in-americas-child-care-system-and-how-build-back-better-can-help/>
- 12 Carrillo, S. (2025, July 14). Trump withheld over \$6 billion for schools. Now, states are suing. NPR. Retrieved August 8, 2025, from <https://www.npr.org/2025/07/14/nx-sl-5467251/trump-school-education-grant-s-lawsuit> and Hughes, T., & Cullen, M. (2025, August 13). Vermont named sanctuary state by Trump administration over immigration. Burlington Free Press. Retrieved August 7, 2025, from <https://www.burlingtonfreepress.com/story/news/politics/2025/08/13/vermont-sanctuary-state-trump-administration-immigration-ice/85643202007/>
- 13 Lautz, A. (2025, July 23). What Does the One Big Beautiful Bill Cost? Bipartisan Policy Center. Retrieved August 7, 2025, from <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/explainer/what-does-the-one-big-beautiful-bill-cost/>
- 14 Governor Newsom slams Trump over bill that would cut millions in health coverage, food assistance for California | Governor of California. (2025, June 27). Governor of California. Retrieved October 18, 2025, from <https://www.gov.ca.gov/2025/06/27/governor-newsom-slams-trump-over-bill-that-would-cut-millions-in-health-coverage-food-assistance-for-california/>
- 15 Universal PreKindergarten. (2024, December 30). California Department of Education. Retrieved August 7, 2025, from <https://www.cde.ca.gov/eo/in/ts-universalprek.asp>

- 16 SB 951: Paid Family Leave Just Got A Raise. (2024, December 18). Our Family Coalition. Retrieved August 7, 2025, from <https://ourfamily.org/sb-951/>
- 17 Gaither, J. Home Visiting Landscape in California. Retrieved September 8 2025 from <https://first5center.org/blog/home-visiting-landscape-in-california>
- 18 Parma, A. '22-'23 California State Budget Makes Significant Changes to Early Start Program. Retrieved September 8 2025 from <https://first5center.org/blog/22-23-california-state-budget-makes-significant-changes-to-early-start-program>
- 19 Initiatives | Medi-Cal Transformation. (2025, February 19). DHCS. Retrieved September 1, 2025, from <https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/CalAIM/Pages/Initiatives.aspx>
- 20 Doula Services as a Medi-Cal Benefit. (2025, September 15). DHCS. Retrieved September 18, 2025, from <https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/provgovpart/Pages/Doula-Services.aspx>
- 21 Dyadic-Services. (2025, June 2). DHCS. Retrieved September 18, 2025, from <https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/provgovpart/Pages/Dyadic-Services.aspx>
- 22 Community Health Workers. (n.d.). DHCS. Retrieved September 18, 2025, from <https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/community-health-workers>
- 23 A Golden State of Mind. (2025, June 9). 2024 CYBHI Annual Report. Retrieved September 18, 2025, from [https://cybhi.chhs.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/FinalCYBHIAnnualReport\\_6.9.25edit.pdf](https://cybhi.chhs.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/FinalCYBHIAnnualReport_6.9.25edit.pdf)
- 24 Mental Health Services Act (MHSA). (2025, September 9). DHCS. Retrieved September 18, 2025, from [https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/MH/Pages/MH\\_Prop63.aspx](https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/MH/Pages/MH_Prop63.aspx)
- 25 Progress Report. (2024, December). California's Master Plan for Early Learning and Care. Retrieved September 18, 2025, from <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/CCDD/Progress%20Report%20on%20Master%20Plan%20for%20Early%20Learning%20and%20Care.pdf>
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Ayala, D. (n.d.). CCPU Bargaining Updates – SEIU Local 99. SEIU Local 99. Retrieved September 18, 2025, from <https://www.seiu99.org/category/child-care-providers/ccpu-bargaining-updates/>
- 28 The next Governor will be able to leverage many assets and aligned efforts within the state including [A Golden State For Kids](#), [Bringing Up California](#), the [RAPID Survey Project](#) based in the Stanford Center on Early Childhood, the network of First 5s, and local ballot initiatives focused on early childhood (e.g., [Measure C](#) in Alameda County). California is well poised to support young children and their families, and needs a strong leader who is dedicated to supporting the state's youngest.
- 29 Ensuring A Multilingual-Ready Universal Pre-Kindergarten Workforce. (2025, August). English Learner Workforce Investment Initiative Central Valley State Policy Recommendations. Retrieved August 15, 2025, from <https://californiantogether.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/EL-WIN-Ensuring-a-Multilingual-Ready-UPK-Workforce-FINAL-WEB.pdf>
- 30 CA.Gov. (n.d.). All Departments. Retrieved August 7, 2025, from <https://www.ca.gov/departments/all/>
- 31 Kimberlin, S., & Anderson, A. (2022, October). A Job Does Not Guarantee Economic Security in California. California Budget & Policy Center. Retrieved August 8, 2025, from <https://calbudgetcenter.org/resources/a-job-does-not-guarantee-economic-security-in-california/>
- 32 Bohn, S., Danielson, C., Kimberlin, S., Malagon, P., Stevens, C., & Wimer, C. (2025, August). Poverty in California. Public Policy Institute of California. Retrieved August 8, 2025, from <https://www.ppic.org/publication/poverty-in-california/>
- 33 National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine; Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education; Committee on National Statistics; Board on Children, Youth, and Families; Committee on Building an Agenda to Reduce the Number of Children in Poverty by Half in 10 Years; Le Menestrel S, Duncan G, editors. A Roadmap to Reducing Child Poverty. Washington (DC): National Academies Press (US); 2019 Feb 28. Retrieved August 8, 2025 from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK547371/>
- 34 (2024, December). California families with infants and toddlers face economic strain and emotional stress. RAPID - Stanford Center on Early Childhood. Retrieved September 15, 2025 from <https://rapidsurveyproject.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/STUPN0567-Infants-and-toddlers-241210.pdf>



- 35 Addressing a Variety of Housing Challenges. (n.d.). California Department of Housing and Community Development. Retrieved August 8, 2025, from <https://www.hcd.ca.gov/policy-and-research/addressing-variety-housing-challenges>
- 36 Yu, E. (2024, March 28). More Than 50,000 Babies And Toddlers Experiencing Homelessness In California, Study Finds. LAist. Retrieved August 8, 2025, from <https://laist.com/news/education/early-childhood-education-pre-k/babies-toddlers-homeless-in-california-2024>
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 McLean, C., Austin, L. J., Powell, A., Jaggi, S., Kim, Y., Knight, J., Muñoz, S., & Schlieber, M. (n.d.). State Profiles: California. Early Childhood Workforce Index 2024. Retrieved August 8, 2025, from <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2024/states/california/>
- 39 See [here](#) for progress and updates related to California's work towards rate reform.
- 40 Lordi, N., Villacorta, V., Thu-Huong Wong,, J., Williams, A., Dominguez- Brinkley, M. E., Fabian, R., & Lee, W. (2025, April). Child Care Among California Households With Young Children Ages 0–5. First 5 California. Retrieved August 8, 2025, from [https://www.cafc.ca.gov/pdf/ResearchAndPublications/Child\\_Care\\_0\\_5\\_Policy\\_Brief\\_2025.pdf](https://www.cafc.ca.gov/pdf/ResearchAndPublications/Child_Care_0_5_Policy_Brief_2025.pdf)
- 41 Hwang, K., Ibarra, A. B., & Yee, E. (n.d.). No Deliveries. Cal Matters. Retrieved August 7, 2025, from <https://calmatters.org/health/2023/11/california-hospitals-close-maternity-wards/?series=no-deliveries-maternity-care>
- 42 Dillette, A. (2025). Empowered Beginnings. Advocating for Black Workers' Maternal Health and Maternity Care Access. Retrieved September 2, 2025, from <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/606f0f29425d7f54bbfe3d48/t/68127a68927e6f6774bd631b/1746041463769/SDBWC+Empowered+Beginnings+Maternal+Health+Rights+Report-compressed.pdf>
- 43 Governor Newsom proclaims Strong Start & Beyond Day as state launches new maternal health initiative | Governor of California. (2024, September 17). Governor of California. Retrieved August 8, 2025, from <https://www.gov.ca.gov/2024/09/17/governor-newsom-proclaims-strong-start-beyond-day-as-state-launches-new-maternal-health-initiative/>
- 44 Johnson, S. R. (2024, June 4). Maternal Mortality: How the U.S. Compares to Other Rich Countries. U.S. News. Retrieved August 8, 2025, from <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/2024-06-04/how-the-u-s-compares-to-other-rich-countries-in-maternal-mortality>
- 45 Making Medi-Cal Work for Families: Keeping Children Covered. (2024, October 2). The Children's Partnership. Retrieved August 8, 2025, from <https://childrenspartnership.org/research/continuouscoverageprotectskids/>
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 Ortaliza, J., Cord, A., McGough, M., Lo, J., & Cox, C. (2024, July 26). Inflation Reduction Act Health Insurance Subsidies: What is Their Impact and What Would Happen if They Expire? KFF. Retrieved August 6, 2025, from <https://www.kff.org/affordable-care-act/inflation-reduction-act-health-insurance-subsidies-what-is-their-impact-and-what-would-happen-if-they-expire/>
- 48 (August 20, 2025) "Overview of Major Impacts of H.R. 1 – One Big Beautiful Bill Act" Legislative Analysts Office. Retrieved September 16, 2025 from [https://lao.ca.gov/handouts/state\\_admin/2025/Major-Impacts-of%20HR1-082025.pdf](https://lao.ca.gov/handouts/state_admin/2025/Major-Impacts-of%20HR1-082025.pdf)



# 2026 Policy Platform



## SYSTEM NAVIGATION

California families have access to culturally resonant navigation and peer support that connects them to economic, social-emotional, and developmental services.



## ECONOMIC SECURITY

California families have the financial resources necessary to ensure their child's healthy development.



## BIRTH JUSTICE

California birthing people and families receive high-quality, culturally responsive care and seamless services before, during, and after birth.



## EARLY LEARNING AND CARE

California families have quality, affordable and culturally and linguistically affirming early learning and care for their children, birth to age 5.



## HEALTH COVERAGE & ACCESS

California families with young children have affordable and high-quality health care.



## GOVERNANCE

California has a well-developed infrastructure governance to prioritize families with young children and birthing people.

**Thank you to our Choose Children Planning Council members that have advised the development of the Choose Children Policy Platform.**

Around Birth Collective	First 5 Orange County
Black Californians United for Early Care and Education	First 5 Riverside
CA Black Women’s Health Project	First 5 San Bernardino
California Coalition for Black Birth Justice	First 5 Shasta
Californians for Justice	InnerCity Struggle
Catalyst CA	Kidango
Child Care Resource and Referral Network	LA Partnership for Early Childhood Investment
Child Care Resource Center	Low Income Investment Fund
Children First Collective San Diego	Parent Voices
Crystal Stairs	PICO CA
Early Edge California	Pre-Term Birth Initiative
EdTrust-West	Silicon Valley Community Foundation
End Child Poverty CA	Small Business Majority
Family Voices of CA	Sutter County Children & Families Commission
First 5 Association	The Children’s Partnership
First 5 California	Tribal Child Care Association of CA
First 5 Contra Costa	UNITE-LA
First 5 Fresno	Ventures