



# Policy Platform

2026



[choosechildren.org](https://choosechildren.org)

# WHO WE ARE

Choose Children 2026 is a partnership of organizations and individuals committed to creating a thriving future for California children and families.

We work to ensure that candidates for California Governor take action and support investment and approaches that advance the well-being, care, and learning of young children, their families, and the essential workers who care for them.

Choose Children is coordinated by the First 5 Association of California, Silicon Valley Community Foundation, The Children's Partnership, and the LA Partnership for Early Childhood Investment and works in close collaboration with over 40 state and local partners.

Choose Children is funded by over a dozen California philanthropic foundations and donors.



# Choose Children Policy Platform

California stands at a pivotal moment. The next governor will inherit both tremendous opportunity and significant risk. Federal funding uncertainty, economic pressures, and persistent inequities threaten recent progress for young children and families. California is the world's fourth-largest economy and welcomes nearly 420,000 newborns each year. The next governor will shape the early years of an entire generation.

Ninety percent of brain development happens before age five, and investments in early childhood generate a 13 percent return on investment. When we support babies, toddlers, and their families, we strengthen California's future workforce, economy, and communities.

Choose Children exists to elevate early childhood as a defining priority of the 2026 gubernatorial election and transition. We work to ensure candidates understand why the first five years matter, how public systems shape family well-being, and why coordinated leadership is essential to improving outcomes statewide.

The choice before California is clear. We must:

- Protect and build on recent investments
- Strengthen families' economic security
- Expand access to early care and education
- Improve system coordination
- Center equity in maternal and child health
- Ensure continuous health care coverage

**When we choose children today, we choose California's tomorrow.**

# OUR PRIORITIES

## ECONOMIC SECURITY

### **Ensure families have the financial stability to raise healthy children.**

Child poverty and economic insecurity remain major challenges. Rising housing costs, childcare costs, and the end of federal pandemic relief have increased stress on families. California has taken important steps in recent years, including expanding Paid Family Leave and reducing family fees for child care. These gains must be protected and strengthened.

We call for:

- Expanded child tax credits
- Strengthened and extended paid family leave
- Housing subsidies and homelessness prevention for families with young children
- Basic income and poverty-reduction strategies
- Continued support for CalFresh, CalWORKS, and Medi-Cal access
- Continued preservation of state-level funding flexibility in the face of federal cuts

Economic security is foundational to children's healthy development.

## EARLY LEARNING & CARE

### **Guarantee access to affordable, high-quality early care and education from birth to age five.**

California has made historic progress expanding Transitional Kindergarten and preschool, investing in workforce development, and reducing family fees. But access remains limited, especially for infants and toddlers. Childcare costs are unaffordable for many families, and providers are underpaid.

We call for:

- Continued implementation and expansion of Transitional Kindergarten
- Increased availability of infant and toddler care
- Child care providers pay and benefits to reflect the true value of their care
- Culturally and linguistically affirming care options
- Support for family child care and mixed-delivery systems

Every family should have real access and real choice.

# OUR PRIORITIES

## BIRTH JUSTICE

**Protect the health and dignity of birthing people and newborns.**

California has expanded doula coverage, dyadic care, and home visiting programs. Yet maternal health disparities persist, access to maternity care is declining in some regions, and Black women remain disproportionately impacted by maternal mortality.

The next governor must protect and expand recent maternal health investments and lead the nation in birth equity.

We call for:

- Expanded access to doulas and midwives
- Trauma-informed, culturally responsive maternity care
- Expanded home visiting programs
- Full postpartum coverage and mental health supports
- Enforcement and implementation of maternal health protections
- Investment in workforce diversity within maternal health professions

California must lead the nation in maternal health equity.

## HEALTH COVERAGE & ACCESS

**Ensure continuous, affordable health coverage for all children.**

A majority of California's children rely on Medi-Cal. Recent reforms, including CalAIM and expanded coverage policies, have improved access. However, administrative barriers still cause eligible children to lose coverage, and federal policy changes threaten funding stability.

The next governor must protect these reforms and strengthen continuous coverage for young children.

We call for:

- Continuous Medi-Cal coverage for young children
- Simplified renewal processes
- Preservation of ACA marketplace subsidies
- Strong state response to federal Medicaid and SNAP cuts
- Protection of healthcare access regardless of immigration status

Health coverage is not optional. It is foundational.



# OUR PRIORITIES

## SYSTEM NAVIGATION

**Make it easier for families to access the services they already qualify for.**

California's early childhood system includes healthcare, nutrition support, home visiting, child care, education programs, and economic assistance. Medi-Cal transformation through CalAIM and other reforms have begun to modernize delivery systems. However, families still struggle to find the right door, complete repeated applications, and navigate complex eligibility rules.

The next governor must continue modernizing systems and invest in stronger coordination across programs.

We call for:

- Streamlined enrollment systems across agencies
- Simplified eligibility and reduced paperwork
- Multilingual and culturally responsive navigation support
- Stronger investment in family-facing community navigators
- Better coordination between healthcare, early learning, and economic support programs

Families should not have to navigate a maze to support their children.

## GOVERNANCE

**Create stronger, more aligned state leadership for young children.**

Responsibility for young children is spread across multiple state departments and funding streams. This fragmentation creates inefficiencies and gaps. Recent investments and reforms have improved coordination, but stronger statewide leadership is needed to protect and grow these gains.

We call for:

- Clear accountability within state government for early childhood outcomes
- Improved cross-agency coordination and oversight of early childhood programs
- Protection of state-level funding flexibility in the face of federal cuts
- Sustained and intentional utilization of First 5 Commissions in all 58 counties

California must treat the early childhood infrastructure and its governance with the same seriousness it treats other systems like public safety, education, transportation, and economic development.





Thank you for choosing children.  
Scan for more information



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