

Invest in Every Child: Secure the Future

Immediate Priorities for All Children



Children's Defense Fund

Priority: End Child Poverty.

The Problem: Today, 12.8 million children in America, or 1 in 6, are poor, the majority living in working families. The burden of poverty falls disproportionately on minority children, with 1 in 3 Black children and 1 in 4 Latino children affected compared to 1 in 10 White children.

Why It Matters: Poor children lag behind their peers in many ways beyond income; they are less healthy, trail in emotional and intellectual development, and do not perform as well in school. The challenges that poor children face accumulate and interact, casting long shadows throughout their lives. Every year that we keep children in poverty costs our nation half a trillion dollars in lost productivity, poorer health and increased crime.

What Must Be Done: We must end poverty through investments in high quality education for every child, livable wages for families, income supplements like the Earned Income and Child Tax Credits, job training and job creation, and work supports like child care and health coverage.

Priority: Ensure Every Child and Pregnant Woman Access to Affordable, Seamless, Comprehensive Health and Mental Health Coverage and Services.

The Problem: Today, 9.4 million children are uninsured, an increase of more than one million children over the last two years. Each year more than 750,000 pregnant women are uninsured and lack timely access to essential health services.

Why It Matters: People who are uninsured live sicker and die sooner. The United States is the wealthiest nation in the world, yet children's health status in our country as measured by selected indicators is among the worst in the industrialized world.

What Must Be Done: We must ensure every child and pregnant woman has access to affordable, seamless, comprehensive health and mental health coverage and services.

Priority: Provide High Quality Early Childhood Development Programs for All.

The Problem: Today, only 3 percent of eligible infants and young children (0-3) are enrolled in Early Head Start and only about half to two-thirds of children eligible for Head Start are enrolled. Quality child care and preschool programs are crucial to level the playing field and ensure every child entering school is ready to learn.

Why It Matters: Studies reveal that those enrolled in high quality early childhood education programs are subsequently more likely to complete higher levels of education, have higher earnings, be in better health and be in stable relationships, and are less likely to commit a crime or be incarcerated.

What Must Be Done: We must make early childhood development programs accessible to every child by ensuring such programs are affordable, available and of high quality.

Priority: Ensure Every Child Can Read at Grade Level by Fourth Grade and Guarantee Quality Education through High School Graduation.

The Problem: Today, more than 8 of every 10 Black and Latino fourth graders and almost 6 out of every 10 White fourth graders in our public schools cannot read at grade level. Those unable to read well are at high risk of grade repetition and dropping out of school.

Why It Matters: Attainment of a high school diploma is the single most effective preventive strategy against adult poverty. Yet the U.S. has the sixth lowest high school graduation rate among the 30 industrialized market economies.

What Must Be Done: To help each child reach his/her full potential and succeed in work and life, we need to ensure our schools have adequate resources to provide high quality education to every child.

Priority: Protect Children from Abuse and Neglect and Connect Them to Caring Permanent Families.

The Problem: Almost 900,000 children each year in America are abused or neglected, one every 36 seconds. Forty percent of these children get no services at all after the initial investigation. Each year, more than 800,000 children spend time in foster care. On any given night, 200,000 children are homeless—1 in every 4 of the homeless population.

Why It Matters: The annual total direct and indirect costs of child maltreatment are estimated to be nearly \$104 billion. Children left with no permanent family connections or a connection with a caring adult have no one to whom they can turn for social, emotional or financial support and face numerous barriers as they struggle to become self-sufficient adults.

What Must Be Done: We must expand prevention and specialized treatment services for children and their parents, connect children to caring permanent families, improve the quality of the child welfare workforce and increase accountability for results for children.

Priority: Stop the Criminalization of Children at Increasingly Younger Ages and Invest in Prevention and Early Intervention.

The Problem: A Black boy born in 2001 has a 1 in 3 chance, a Latino boy a 1 in 6 chance and a White boy a 1 in 17 chance of going to prison in his lifetime. In 2003, almost 15,000 girls were incarcerated—1 in every 7 juveniles in residential placement.

Why It Matters: States spend about three times as much money per prisoner as per public school pupil. Unless we focus our efforts on early intervention and prevention, rather than punishment, we are robbing thousands of youth each year of their futures and our country of vital human resources.

What Must Be Done: We must reduce detention and incarceration by increasing investment in prevention and early intervention strategies, such as access to quality early childhood development and education services and to the health and mental health care children need for healthy development.

Learn more, take action or support CDF's priorities for all children at www.childrensdefense.org/priorities