

The Kid Angle

Kid-focused news from First Focus on Children

Get out the red pens

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Happy almost holiday weekend, everyone.

Lawmakers are slated to begin **filling in the blanks on their \$3.5 trillion budget outline** when they return from break next week and our policy experts are working with Capitol Hill on proposals to support our nation's 74 million children and the people who care for them.

The budget, intended to authorize President Biden's "Build Back Better" agenda, offers a historic opportunity to invest in our nation's children with improved and expanded child-friendly tax credits, investments in child care and children's health and well-being, more affordable housing and early childhood education, paid family leave, a path to citizenship for immigrant children and families, and other items that prioritize our children. First Focus on Children agrees with the Administration that **America needs groundbreaking investments in these areas along with legislation that prevents the government from raising taxes on American families and doubling the child poverty rate**. Here, for your reading pleasure, we present:

Four ways Congress can use the budget to help America's children

1. Preserve policies that cut child poverty and support families

Congress must preserve policies, such as the improved and expanded **Child Tax Credit**, which increased the tax refund to as much as \$3,600 a year per child, began distributing payments monthly and — very important — began including the lowest-income families previously excluded.

Nearly half of the 35 million families who received their first payment on July 15 **spent the money on food**, according to [Census Bureau data](#), pushing the share of low-income families with kids who didn't have enough to eat from 26% to 18.5%. Other [top spending categories](#) included clothing and utility payments. A recent report from Columbia University's Center on Poverty and Social Policy found that COVID-related economic relief, including the expanded Child Tax Credit, **kept 6 million children from poverty in July 2021**. The brief also noted that the monthly child poverty rate fell from 15.8% in June to 11.9% in July 2021. This drop in child poverty was primarily due to the first payment of the **expanded Child Tax Credit, which on its own kept approximately 3 million children from poverty in July**. You can find the new [brief here](#) and its past monthly poverty data through the pandemic [here](#).

2. Improve access to quality early learning opportunities

Congress must improve access to quality early learning by **preserving recent improvements to the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit**, which made the credit refundable for the first time and give families a credit of up to \$16,000 for two or more qualifying children. Lawmakers also must **honor the Administration's plan to serve 8.27 million additional infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with \$450 billion in new funding for early learning**: \$200 billion for universal pre-k; \$225 billion to cap child care expenses for qualifying families and to make child care free to the lowest income families; \$25 billion to upgrade child care facilities.

*Child care is as vital to the U.S. economy as roads, bridges and other infrastructure. Yet, the cost of care for two children **exceeds mortgage payments** in 40 states and the District of Columbia. Fees for two children in a child care center **exceed annual median rent payments** in all 50 states. Combining early learning funding with improvements to the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit **will give greater workforce access to women**, who continue to bear more responsibility for child care in the U.S.*

3. Feed hungry children

Congress must **permanently reauthorize the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)** and make **ensure year-round access to food for low-income children** when school is not in session. The Pandemic EBT program, which provided meals to low-income children eligible for free and reduced-price school meals while schools were shuttered, greatly reduced food insecurity among children.

*SNAP is the first line of defense against food insecurity for **15.8 million children**. In addition, **nearly 30 million children** qualify for free and reduced-price school meals.*

4. Ensure that children have access to medical care

Congress must — finally — **permanently authorize and fund the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)**, which provides coverage to 10 million children a year with child-specific health care through pediatricians and children's hospitals, which sometimes go missing from typical insurance plans. Lawmakers also must **enact 12-month continuous eligibility** for children enrolled in Medicaid and CHIP to eliminate the loss of coverage due to administrative paperwork and bureaucracy.

***More than 500 local and national organizations** representing all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico joined First Focus Campaign for Children recently to urge Congress to make the CHIP permanent. Aimed at families who earn too much to qualify for Medicaid but too little to afford private health insurance, CHIP is one of the most effective and affordable mechanisms for providing care to our country's kids. **CHIP is also the only federal health insurance program subject to expiration**. In 2017, CHIP expired for more than 4 months – endangering the health care of millions of children.*

Committees are tasked with completing their markups by Sept. 15.

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First Focus on Children

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