The keys are in their hands
September 16, 2021

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The post-Labor Day scramble has arrived. Here’s a quick-and-dirty look at what’s coming for kids over the next couple weeks:

The key to healthy children

The number of kids without health insurance rose for the fourth year in a row in 2020, according to figures released this week by the U.S. Census Bureau. The numbers show that nearly 4.3 million children — or 5.6% of all U.S. children — did not have health insurance in 2020, a 7% rise over 2019. Children of color were hit hardest, the data suggests, with 9.5% of Hispanic children lacking health insurance, the highest of any ethnic group.

But wait! There’s hope! The Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and Medicaid — which together insure roughly 40 million children — scored a victory in budget negotiations last week that offers Congress a rare opportunity to reverse this trend. The Democrats in the House Energy and Commerce Committee announced that making CHIP permanent and offering children 12-month continuous enrollment in Medicaid are priorities of their budget legislation.

More than 500 local and national organizations representing all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico recently joined First Focus Campaign for Children in urging Congress to make CHIP permanent.

First Focus Campaign for Children also joined more than 200 national, state and local organizations who urged House and Senate leaders this week to include language in the reconciliation package that requires states to offer 12-month continuous eligibility for children on Medicaid and CHIP. Continuous eligibility would be a game-changer in states like Texas, where churning off coverage has contributed to nearly 13% of children — a high number of them Hispanic — going without health care coverage.

The key to ending child poverty

This week also confirmed the outsized impact of economic assistance on child poverty — and, more important, the absolute necessity of harnessing that progress.

The number of children living in poverty, also according to census figures released Tuesday, actually went down in 2020 — which, you may recall, saw a global pandemic and economic crisis.
When accounting for government assistance — which included two rounds of stimulus payments, and an increase to emergency unemployment benefits and food assistance — the census found that the rate of child poverty was 9.7% — nearly 3 percentage points lower than the same figure in 2019. The stimulus payments alone ensured that nearly 3.3 million fewer children lived below the poverty line, according to the data.

These figures do not even reflect improvements to child-related tax credits expected to cut child poverty in half in 2021.

**The moral of the story:** We know what works. The proof is right there, in the numbers. Congress has the keys. Will they have the gumption to walk through the door?

Stay tuned.