

Kansas Children's Agenda

LET'S MAKE OUR STATE THE BEST PLACE TO RAISE – AND BE – A CHILD

Food. Shelter. Health care. Education. With these building blocks in place, Kansas kids succeed. But too often, poverty and systemic barriers keep them out of reach.

For over 40 years, Kansas Action for Children has worked to change this. We listen to families and the organizations that support them, gather data that reflects their realities, then share this work with lawmakers.

The best solution, though, is bigger than anything that comes from the Statehouse. When Kansans from every corner of the state, inspired and educated, use their votes and voices, our kids win.

The Kansas Children's Agenda, supported by advocates across the state, gives this shared movement a clear direction.

ABOUT THE AGENDA

The Kansas Children's Agenda is built on a foundation of work to improve early learning, health, and family economic security. Our kids need quality and affordable child care. Our kids need a doctor's visit when they get sick. Our kids need a place to stay and food to eat if their families go through tough times. The agenda's recommendations provide a starting point for solutions.

We're not just looking to change laws or implement good ideas. We want to invest resources, time, and attention in our next

generation. And we're setting out a shared platform that shows us how to get there with clear voice amplifying the values of caring Kansans.

Our coalition has much to add in these critical areas. We will always center racial equity, because those Kansans who have been longest neglected so often have the greatest need.

Kansas kids need a state that stands up for them. The Kansas Children's Agenda shows us how to get there.

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EARLY LEARNING

Research tells us that the first five years of a child's life are the most critical for brain development. Learning starts at birth, not whenever someone starts school. High-quality child care is essential for setting a child on the path towards success.

Leaders must:

Expand high-quality early learning opportunities for all Kansas kids

- Support families by limiting child care expenses to no more than 7 percent of household income
- Increase state funding and leverage all available federal funds for evidence-based early learning programs
- Expand eligibility for the existing employer tax credit for child care to create an incentive for small businesses to cover the cost of child care for their employees
- Increase the amount of child care assistance a family can receive so that child care providers are appropriately compensated for working with families who have difficulty affording care

Support the early learning workforce because they are essential people in the first years of a child's development

- Adopt meaningful financial incentives for child care providers to improve the quality of their programs
- Implement a statewide Quality Rating Improvement System
- Explore ways to use the Child Care Development Fund to support adequate and equitable compensation for child care providers

Support communities as they work toward local solutions for specific child care needs

- Promote state programs such as the business tax credit and child care assistance program to cities, counties, chambers, and economic development offices across the state
- Customize support to local needs such as infrastructure, overhead, and workforce development funding to ensure availability of child care

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HEALTH

Affordable health care is necessary for children and adults, and untreated illness costs money and lives. We should start with ensuring access to care for expectant moms to improve their health. We should then make certain Kansas' littlest residents and their caregivers can see the doctor when needed and have nutritious food to eat.

Leaders must:

Improve eligibility and access to the KanCare program for kids and families

- Expand KanCare so more Kansans have access to health care
- Extend KanCare coverage to eligible new mothers to a full year after giving birth
- Address KanCare enrollment, service, and renewal barriers that families encounter
- Identify weaknesses and gaps for kids in the current KanCare system and address in the next round of KanCare MCO contracts

Protect Kansas children, families, and the general public from illness and disease

- Protect current vaccination requirements for child care and school attendance
- Promote the safety, efficacy, and importance of vaccines through increased program outreach and public education

Prioritize a healthy beginning and first year for newborns and their families

- Address underlying causes of infant mortality, including continued racial disparities
- Identify and address underlying causes of maternal mortality and morbidity, particularly racial disparities
- Support continued expansion of the newborn screening program through a permanent funding cap increase.
- Ensure all newborns leave their birthing facility with five years of guaranteed insurance coverage



FAMILY AND ECONOMIC SECURITY

Families thrive when their basic needs are met. But harmful legislation has created obstacles to Kansas families accessing anti-poverty programs. Kansas has seen an overall decline of children and families using these programs. We must strengthen families' economic stability, ability to plan, and capacity to deal with unexpected events.

Leaders must:

Remove state-imposed barriers to federal programs so our eligible families can enroll in these programs during their critical times of need

- Reinstate lifetime limits for cash assistance to the federal maximum of 60 months so families can continue to pay for rent, utilities, and other necessities
- Remove state-imposed barriers to food assistance such as limitations to working adults and those who have been involved in the justice system so families can keep food on the table
- Stand for families enrolled in anti-poverty programs by removing punitive sanctions that make it harder for children to participate in programs we know work to move Kansas kids out of poverty

Support asset-building, particularly for communities that experienced historical and structural barriers to securing wealth

- Add a fourth individual income tax bracket for the highest-income Kansans to ensure everyone, including those at the top, pay what they owe
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- Limit state and local government reliance on revenue from fees and fines that can trap Kansans – particularly low-income Kansans and Kansans of color – in cycles of poverty and debt
- Expand existing or add new tax credits that support families with young children – such as expanding the earned income tax credit to all tax filers, including those who do not have a Social Security number, increasing the amount of the child and dependent care tax credit, and implementing a state child tax credit
- Implement children's savings accounts for asset-building early in life, with a focus on higher education

JOIN THE KANSAS CHILDREN'S AGENDA

Why join the Kansas Children's Agenda Network?

The Kansas Children's Agenda policy platform is advanced by a network of partners throughout the state. We are direct service providers, policy advocates, grassroots organizations, and community coalitions. What do we all have in common? We care deeply about Kansas kids, and we want to see them succeed.

The Kansas Children's Agenda Network of partners collectively shapes statewide public policy to ensure all Kansas children thrive. Through connecting and amplifying the voices of Kansans and allied organizations, we promote public policy changes and shared investments in early learning, health, and family economic security.

How do we join the network?

- Complete a one-time application.
- Agree to support and abide by the network's Shared Agreements.
- Participate (via surveys) in developing the Kansas Children's Agenda before the Kansas legislative session.
- Attend Children's Agenda Network convenings to keep up to date on children's issues.
- Connect annually with Kansas Action for Children staff to discuss participation and how we can support and strengthen our work together.

What are the benefits of network participation?

- Advocacy consultation and training.
- Support crafting strong legislative priorities.
- Legislative updates.
- Amplification and promotion of partner content (the ability to share advocacy alerts, policy information, and relevant event notifications for distribution to the Children's Agenda partners).
- Research and data on child well-being indicators.
- Access to the national Advocacy Learning Lab (curated by Annie E. Casey Foundation and supported by the Partnership for America's Children).