



Federal Leadership for Children and Youth
**Charter for a White House
Office and Conference**

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All children and youth should have equitable opportunities to thrive and achieve their full potential. They don't. A significant segment of children and youth face structural barriers — based on race, ethnicity, geography, economic or health conditions — that dramatically reduce their opportunity to achieve success in life. Children and youth are often an afterthought in policy discussions despite strong evidence of the lifelong benefits of addressing the health, social, financial, relational and educational needs of pregnant women, children, youth and their families — and the importance of these benefits to the future of the American economy. The United States (U.S.) ranks near the bottom in a majority of child well-being measures compared to its peers. While the compounding crises of COVID-19, an economic recession, and racial injustice continue, the country continues to face threats of adolescent suicide, obesity and the opioid epidemic. Our nation can confront these challenges, emerge from the pandemic stronger, and rebuild a better system. Our future well-being and prosperity are interconnected. We all benefit if the federal government steps up and does what is best for children and youth.

Children's issues do not fit neatly in one box. Their unique needs cut across health, education, agriculture and tax policy, to name a few. There is no single federal entity with visibility and accountability for prioritizing their needs, and no single agency can fill this role. This structural gap in the federal executive branch contributes to policy failures that have led to disparities in health, education and economic well-being and imperil our ability to stay competitive globally.

Republican and Democratic governors have recognized this challenge and created children's cabinets to cut across silos and implement a children's agenda. Accomplishments^{1,2} of these cabinets have ranged from Maryland's Child Well-Being Scorecard³ tracking outcomes for eight child and youth well-being measures, to Virginia's improvements in school attendance, school suspensions, student nutrition and school accreditation.⁴ Internationally, children's ombudsmen and Children's Ministers are charged with improving child health and well-being. No similar entity exists in the federal executive branch in the U.S.⁵

THE OPPORTUNITY

Out of the COVID-19 crisis must come leadership to secure a prosperous future. The President should chart a course for how the U.S. will prioritize children and youth in its policy and budget decisions in order to improve health, education and well-being; promote equitable outcomes for children and youth; and, recognizing that our nation's children are now majority-minority, advance racial justice. As part of this effort, **the President should establish via Executive Order: 1) a White House Office on Children and Youth** (Office) that would develop a cross-sector National Children and Youth Strategy and Children's Budget; and **2) a Children's Cabinet** (Cabinet) to work with the Office to provide senior-level leadership for children. The White House should work with external stakeholders to revive a **White House Conference on Children and Youth** to elevate solutions to major issues children and youth face and inform the work of the Office and Cabinet.

KEY FUNCTIONS OF THE OFFICE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH

The Office would coordinate, develop and implement policies to improve child health, positive youth development, education and well-being. Key functions include:

- Align with the **Cabinet (described below)** and liaise with Congress to ensure that addressing the unique needs of children and youth “cradle-to-career” (prenatal to age 26) is a consideration in policy decisions.
- Every four years, work with the Cabinet to develop or update **National Goals for Children and Youth** and a **National Children and Youth Strategy** (Strategy) that includes a **federal policy agenda**. The Strategy would set forth an aspirational, yet achievable, collective vision with a measurable goal rooted in shared values and outcomes metrics.
 - » Due to the pandemic, children and youth have experienced learning loss and significant mental health challenges. Rates for vaccinations, primary and preventive services among children in Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program have steeply declined.⁶ Child care capacity could be cut in half.⁷ During the pandemic, young people’s unemployment has skyrocketed, reaching 38 percent for white youth, 45 percent for Black youth, 48 percent for Asian youth, and 53 percent for Hispanic youth. Overall youth unemployment was 7.7 percent in 2018.⁸
 - » In the wake of these major challenges, **the Office should address social determinants of health, reduce health and educational disparities, advance racial justice, and achieve equitable outcomes for children and youth to ensure they can enter child care, school, college, and adulthood healthy and ready to learn.**
- Organize a biennial **White House Conference on Children and Youth** to inform and elevate the Strategy, goals and agenda with stakeholders across the public, private and civil sectors and draft legislative approaches to elevate issues impacting children and youth.
- Develop a **biennial action plan** to make progress on the Strategy. As part of the plan:
 - » Identify and/or elevate a **common set of program goals, metrics and outcomes** for children and youth that could be applied across federal programs.
 - » **Eliminate barriers** to better alignment across federal programs that serve children, youth and their families to support community-led innovation.
 - » Issue **guidance, provide technical assistance, disseminate best practices and implement waivers** to federal awardees regarding how to legally **share data across sectors** and **pool/blend/braid** funding from federal programs serving children, youth and their families in ways that are responsive to the needs of communities.
 - » With state and local partners, design and implement modernized data reporting and analytics to generate useful information to help federal, state and local decision-makers improve program policies and implementation.
 - » Annually submit a **report to Congress** that assesses progress towards the goals and key deliverables included in the action plan and Strategy.
 - » **Create forums for engaging state and local leaders** and other outside experts to devise innovative, coordinated solutions to align federal, state and local efforts to improve outcomes for children, youth and families, including innovative pilots.
 - » Establish coordinating structures and accountability mechanisms for achieving goals, leveraging agency political and career staff, in addition to current coordinating structures/groups (e.g., the Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs).

- Create a coordinated, multi-agency **Children’s Budget** (as part of the President’s annual budget submission), to ensure ample investment. Key steps include:
 - » Identify the percentage of federal funding devoted to children/youth and acknowledge the long-term nature of financial returns from investments in children and positive youth development.
 - » Identify opportunities to generate new revenue for children and youth as well as opportunities to reinvest savings created by effective investments.
 - » Use data and evidence to inform budget policies that will accelerate adoption of more effective practices and enable states and localities to address the unique needs of children in different localities.
 - » Elevate the contributions to improved health and economic equity from the investments represented in the budget.
 - » If Congress provides funding, administer funds to state, regional, local or tribal children’s wellness trusts and children’s cabinets/backbone organizations to support investments in child health, well-being and equity.
- Engage experts; stakeholders; youth and families; and state, local and tribal governments through an **External Advisory Council, a National Youth Advisory Board**, and through public comments, surveys, town halls and events. At state and local levels, this engagement should emphasize policy coordinating bodies, such as children’s cabinets, that also take a holistic look at needs, goals and resources for children, youth and families.
- **Develop partnerships with philanthropy and private sector partners** to carry out activities aligned with the core priorities and initiatives of the Office and Strategy, such as improved capacity to integrate data across programs and to pilot test and evaluate innovative service delivery approaches (further described in Appendix B).





PROPOSED STRUCTURE OF THE OFFICE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Leadership & Staffing

- A Director would lead the Office, which would be housed in the Domestic Policy Council (DPC). The Director would serve as a Deputy Assistant to the President and liaise with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).
- The Director would convene a **Children's Cabinet** (described below) whose members would have decision-making authority for their agencies.
- The DPC and OMB would staff the Director and the Children's Cabinet in collaboration with agency staff as appropriate.
- The Director would liaise with an External Advisory Council and National Youth Advisory Board (described in Appendix B).

Key Functions of the Children's Cabinet

The Office would work with federal agencies to advance and communicate about specific shared goals and priorities as they develop their individual budgets, policies and waivers. In turn, the Children's Cabinet would advise and assist the Director of the Office in implementing the Strategy and action plan within their respective departments. Additionally, the Cabinet would serve as a venue where federal leaders can surface policy challenges involving two or more agencies to resolve issues and align approaches and policies. Ultimately, the Cabinet would ensure that policies and programs within each department result in coordinated solutions for families and the stakeholders that serve them on the ground. Finally, the Cabinet would work with the Office to liaise with state and local-level children's cabinets to inform its work and be responsive to their needs. See Appendix A for recommendations for membership in a federal Children's Cabinet.



WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Since 1909, White House Conferences on Children have led to action within and beyond the government sector. Early conferences had great impact on the programs and services for children and youth with special health care needs. Accomplishments of more recent conferences include the growth of adoption agencies, administrative action to strengthen the Amber Alert system, and greater awareness of research on early brain development that informed policy and resource allocations. White House conferences in other areas have resulted in landmark legislation, including the implementation or improvement of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, and the National School Lunch Program.⁹ Moreover, at the 2015 White House Conference on Aging, the administration and the private sector announced actions and initiatives to address the most pressing concerns of older Americans and their families.¹⁰

Given the enormous stressors on the systems serving children in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a powerful opportunity for another conference to spur collective action across the public, nonprofit and private sectors to address the most pressing needs of children, youth and their families.

APPENDIX A: CHILDREN'S CABINET MEMBERSHIP

The Children's Cabinet should include high-level representation from key departments across the federal government. A smaller Executive Committee could provide leadership and direction to the Cabinet. The Cabinet could convene working groups with agency heads. Examples of key agencies and departments to be considered for inclusion in the Cabinet or its working groups are listed below.

Potential Cabinet Membership

- Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, Co-chair
- Secretary of the Department of Education, Co-chair
- Attorney General
- Director of the Council of Economic Advisors
- Director of the Office of Management and Budget
- Head of the Domestic Policy Council
- Secretary of the Department of Agriculture
- Secretary of the Department of Commerce
- Secretary of the Department of Defense
- Secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development
- Secretary of the Department of Labor
- Secretary of the Department of State
- Secretary of the Department of Transportation
- Secretary of the Department of Treasury

Potential Working Group Membership

- Administrator, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services
- Administrator, Food and Nutrition Service
- Administrator, Health Resources and Services Administration
- Administrator, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
- Administrator, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
- Administrator, United States Agency for International Development
- Assistant Secretary, Administration for Children and Families
- Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education
- Assistant Secretary for Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development
- Associate Administrator, Maternal and Child Health Bureau
- Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Director, National Institutes of Health
- Director, Office of Minority Health

APPENDIX B: EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS

It will be important to ensure the latest research and recommendations, as well as the lived experience of youth and families, inform the Office and the Cabinet. An External Advisory Council could liaise with a National Youth Advisory Board and support the work of the Office. Philanthropic organizations and the business community could also align with and amplify the work of the Office.

Membership of the External Advisory Council

- Members of the External Advisory Council could include members of existing federal Advisory Committees focused on health, education and well-being.
- Additionally, representatives from the following sectors could be considered for inclusion: pediatric health, public health, education, child care, civil rights, housing, child welfare, equity, maternal health, child/adolescent mental health, trauma, health care financing, juvenile justice, labor/job training, economic development, business, philanthropy, state and local government, youth and families.
- Ensuring equity, diversity and inclusion in selection of members should be a key priority.
- The White House could nominate members to serve staggered 4-year terms and reflect political balance.
- The Advisory Council could develop subcommittees based upon specific issues.
- The Advisory Council could liaise with a [National Youth Advisory Board](#) and incorporate their input and perspective in policy recommendations and priorities.

Key Functions of the External Advisory Council

- Synthesize for the Cabinet, the President, the Vice President and Congress [existing and emerging research and data on child and family health](#).
- Provide the Office with [recommendations for the National Goals for Children and Youth and a National Children's Strategy and an accompanying prioritized, cross-sector, evidence-informed, multi-year federal, state and private sector policy agenda](#) and implementation plan to improve health, reduce health and educational disparities, advance racial justice, and promote equity for children, youth and families.
- Provide [recommendations regarding key developmental and outcomes metrics](#) for children and youth.
- Provide recommendations for a [federal Children's Budget](#), including specific programs and initiatives needed to improve the health of children and youth and [advance equitable outcomes](#).
- Provide recommendations for improving data integration and analytics across programs and levels of government to provide useful information to federal, state and local governments that can help improve outcomes for children.
- Provide recommendations regarding the agenda and invitees for a biennial [White House Conference on Children and Youth](#), drawing input from a [Youth Advisory Council](#).
- [Elevate the needs of states, localities and communities](#) and identify how federal coordination, flexibility and resources can meet those needs while fostering community-led innovation.

NATIONAL YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD

Centering the lived experiences and knowledge of young people is a crucial step toward equitable, representative policymaking. Across the country, Youth Advisory Boards aim to empower youth, provide a forum to express ideas and bridge the gap between elected officials and the youth they serve. They help inform youth programs, review existing programs and initiatives, make recommendations on policies impacting youth and envision new solutions. A National Youth Advisory Board could consist of young people aged 14-24 that would consult with State Youth Advisory Boards, the External Advisory Council and the Office in order to ensure that the perspectives of youth on what the government is — and should be — doing to help them, and ultimately our nation, collectively succeed. Ensuring equity, diversity and inclusion in selection of members would be a key priority (such as homeless youth; youth in foster care; justice-involved youth; Black, Indigenous, Hispanic, and youth of color; and LGBTQ+ youth).

PHILANTHROPY AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR

Philanthropy and the business community could play a helpful role in aligning with and amplifying the work of the Office. They could support: (1) technical assistance from expert organizations (for example on blending and braiding funds or creating children’s wellness trusts, as discussed above); (2) policy development advocacy for programs to support activities aligned with the major initiatives of the Office and the National Children’s Strategy; (3) incentive grants for innovative programs; (4) convenings to identify key barriers states and localities are facing regarding achieving outcomes aligned with the Strategy and associated solutions; and (5) research and evaluation activities.



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