

2023 Legislative Agenda

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Here in Washington, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated longstanding inequities faced by kids and families in communities of color. Access to health care, high-quality early experiences for children ages birth to 5, and progressive revenue are promising strategies to ensure that every child has an abundance of what they need to grow up into the people they dream of becoming.

Early Learning

The first five years of a child's life sets the foundation for their success in school. Whether in child care, home visiting, or pre-K, all children deserve quality early experiences with caregivers committed to helping them flourish.

- **Invest in early learning** by supporting fair wages and strengthening language access to retain and recruit highly skilled and multilingual early childhood professionals.
- **Continue to implement and fund the Fair Start for Kids Act**, the landmark 2021 legislation that dramatically expanded the state's early learning resources.

We also support the following early learning measures:

Address the Child Care Crisis

- Cut red tape and administrative fees for dedicated early childhood professionals.
- Help more families receive affordable child care and early learning services by expanding eligibility for Working Connections Child Care.

Give Every Child a Great Start

- Invest in the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP), quality pre-K for 3- and 4-year-olds growing up below or near the poverty line;
- Increase investments in child care mental health consultation and the complex needs grants for ECEAP and child care, so that more early childhood professionals have the resources they need to provide essential services.
- Support families from birth to the first few years of a child's life by investing in and expanding home visiting.
- Ensure high-quality Transitional Kindergarten programs within local schools.

Health Equity for Kids and Families

Every child deserves to experience their optimal health.

- **Support and Expand Oral Health Access & Care.** Authorize dental therapists to meet urgent needs for community-based oral health care. Appoint a state Dental Director to lead for equity in oral health in Washington.
- **Address the Youth Behavioral Health Crisis.** Provide a substantial rate increase for all providers of Apple Health for Kids behavioral health services, and take additional measures to invest in the behavioral health care workforce. Support efforts recommended by the state Health Care Authority's Children and Youth Behavioral Health Work Group to invest in behavioral health programs in early learning, schools, and beyond.

We also support the following health measures:

Protect and Expand Reproductive Health Care

- Cover abortion services and travel costs to Washington clinics for anyone who needs them due to abortion bans in their own states.
- Raise the eligibility limit for Apple Health pregnancy and postpartum services to eliminate the coverage gap.
- Invest in the development of new culturally appropriate birthing centers in historically underserved areas of Washington.

Invest in Public and Community Health

- Provide free school breakfast and lunch to all students regardless of household income, and define the inclusion of healthy meals as part of basic education, the state's paramount duty.
- Protect Community Water Fluoridation efforts, including requiring 90 days' public notice when a Washington city is considering ending the practice of fluoridating tap water.
- Protect children, teens, and young adults from the pervasive marketing of e-cigarettes that fuels the youth vaping epidemic.

Improve Health Coverage for All

- Improve the quality and value of pediatric primary care for children and youth enrolled in Apple Health for Kids by raising reimbursement rates for developmental screenings.
- Provide adults insured under Apple Health with coverage for preventive health care services.
- Support efforts to improve access to care for immigrant communities, including through implementation of a new subsidized health care program available to people who have been ineligible for coverage due to their immigration status.

Revenue to Invest in Kids

- Close wasteful tax breaks and adopt new sources of revenue, building on the success of the 2021 capital gains excise tax.

Other issues we support:

We will work on the following as resources and capacity allow.

Guaranteed basic income: Implement a pilot program to support economically vulnerable individuals in the midst of adverse circumstances, such as engagement with the criminal justice system, experiencing homelessness or raising a young child, by delivering 24 monthly payments from a newly established state fund, the Evergreen Trust.

Family economic security: Expand the Working Families Tax Credit to better reach immigrant families and young adults ages 18-25.

Support the language access needs of Washington's families: Boost funding in the Department of Children, Youth & Families to qualified interpreters and professionally translated materials.