



WISCONSIN COUNCIL ON

**children
& families**

Raising Voices to Make Every Kid Count

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2011-12 Policy Priorities for Wisconsin's Children and Families

Wisconsin's state motto, "Forward," suggests a place where all families have the opportunity to thrive. For children that means growing up in a just, safe and nurturing family and community. Investing in children now is a social imperative with an economic payoff. Taken together, the following policy priorities point towards a future that fulfills the promise of our state motto.

Early Care and Education

Every Wisconsin child deserves a great start. The first five years are extremely important in setting the foundation for lifetime learning and productive citizenship. 72 percent of Wisconsin's children under age 6 have all available parents in the workforce. We need a coherent system that promotes optimal early learning and development. A successful system would feature:

- Expanded evidence-based home visiting programs and parenting education.
- Increased access to affordable, high-quality early care and education services by continuing 4-year-old kindergarten, sustaining Head Start and Early Head Start for eligible families, and strengthening the Wisconsin Shares subsidy program.
- Successful implementation of the YoungStar Quality Rating and Improvement System for child care, ensuring improved early learning for children and better choices for working families.

Jobs and Employment Supports

Job training and education are vital to expanding economic opportunities and enhancing the quality of our workforce, which is essential to keep Wisconsin's businesses competitive.

- Align job training at various education levels to form a seamless pathway from basic education to postsecondary education.
- Expand and streamline financial aid to make postsecondary education more accessible.

Health Care

Wisconsin is rightly proud to have one of the lowest rates of uninsured children and adults in the nation, but our work is not done until all children and adults have access to quality healthcare.

To achieve this goal we need to:

- Maintain support for BadgerCare Plus and continue efforts to remove red tape in the enrollment and renewal procedures.
- Develop health insurance exchanges that help hold down costs and improve access to coverage for employees of small businesses and people in the individual market.
- Explore and implement innovative strategies to increase access to dental care and mental health services.

Child Safety

Every child deserves to live in a safe home and community, free from danger to their health and well-being.

- Improve the quality, consistency, accountability and outcomes of child welfare prevention, early intervention and intervention services.
- Safely decrease the number of children in foster care through increased focus on maltreatment prevention, placement stability and permanency.

Juvenile Justice

All kids deserve fair treatment in court. WCCF seeks to ensure that youth receive developmentally appropriate services throughout the court and rehabilitative process.

- Improve community safety by returning jurisdiction of the 10,000 17-year-olds arrested each year for non-violent offenses to juvenile court.
- Ensure that no youth under age 18 is confined with adults prior to conviction.
- Raise the age of adult jurisdiction over youth who commit the most serious offenses from ten to fourteen.
- Provide resources to adequately gather uniform data about the juvenile justice process and offenders on a statewide basis.

Racial Equity

Wisconsin has some of the highest levels of racial and ethnic disparities of any state in the country, including disparities in outcomes related to child welfare, health, high school graduation, unemployment, adult incarceration and juvenile justice. As a state we must address these issues and the social, economic, educational and environmental inequities that contribute to them. Addressing racial disparity is essential not only for social justice, but also for economic growth, so that all sectors of the Wisconsin's population are able to contribute to the state's economic vitality.

Budget and Revenue

We support a balanced approach to solving Wisconsin's fiscal challenges in order to ensure that the state has sufficient resources to maintain investments that help make Wisconsin a better place to live and do business.

- Expand efforts to reduce the \$1.2 billion gap between the taxes owed to the state and taxes received.
- Ensure that the state takes advantage of opportunities to maximize the amount of federal funding available.
- Hold the line on recent changes to corporate taxes that level the playing field among businesses.