

Alliance for Strong Families and Communities Federal Public Policy Agenda 2020-2022



Alliance
*for Strong Families
and Communities®*



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The Alliance for Strong Families and Communities...

believes that our country thrives when everyone can reach their full potential. Because we work at the nexus of families, communities, and systems every day, our strategic action network is a vital partner with policymakers in pursuit of culturally responsive solutions that accelerate progress toward achieving a healthy and equitable society.

This public policy agenda is built on a unifying set of **core values** and **building blocks** articulated in the Alliance member-created public policy platform, A Blueprint for Strong Families and Communities.

CORE VALUES

- Engage All Voices
- Secure Access and Opportunity
- Bolster Prevention and Early Intervention
- Accelerate Neuroscience
- Cultivate Collaborative and Interconnected Ecosystems

BUILDING BLOCKS

- Safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments that prevent and mitigate the impact of trauma through quality care options across the lifespan
- Equal opportunity employment that provides a living wage, economic mobility, and comprehensive workforce supports
- Affordable, preventive, quality health care that provides parity for behavioral health and addresses the social determinants of health
- Affordable, livable homes in safe, vibrant neighborhoods that have accessible healthy food, transportation, child care, and other fundamental services
- Educational success that begins with nurturing and supportive families and continues with early childhood development through post-secondary advancement

This agenda is aligned with the Alliance’s theory of action and results-based accountability plans to advance equity; support organizational excellence and sustainability; and improve health and well-being, safety and resilience, educational success, and economic mobility. Community-based human services organizations are critical partners to government in implementing high-quality programs, services, and supports to achieve enduring positive outcomes for children, adults, families, and communities.



Accelerate through Leadership

As change agents, the Alliance strategic action network will take a leadership role.



Accelerate through Partnership

The Alliance will lean in with active and committed partners.



Organizational Excellence & Sustainability

Community-based organizations (CBOs) provide critical supports and help create conditions so that millions of families and communities in the U.S., particularly people of color and low-income people, can flourish. Federal policies must help create an environment that allows these organizations to thrive through investing in capacity, achieving meaningful outcomes, and attracting and retaining a strong and diverse workforce. One of the biggest barriers to attracting a workforce that reflects our communities is significant student debt that prohibits talent from entering the sector. The Alliance strongly supports policies that bolster a strong human services workforce, promotes the financial health of organizations, and provides resources for mission-related work.

With this in mind, the Alliance will work to:

- Advocate for robust and equitable distribution of federal dollars to the nonprofit sector to compensate for increased demand and decreased resources as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and economic crisis, in the form of loans, grants, and appropriations. **AL**
- Monitor and promote local and state contract and procurement reform efforts and advance similar efforts at the federal level through legislation that prioritizes and engages minority and women-owned vendors, improves outcomes, reduces unnecessary costs, ensures full cost coverage, and timely payments. **AL**
- Support tax code enhancements that encourage and incentivize charitable giving, including an increase to the universal charitable deduction for individuals at all income levels and making the deduction permanent. **AL**
- Defend current federal tax law protections (i.e. the Johnson Amendment) that prohibit 501(c)(3) organizations from endorsing, opposing, or contributing to political candidates. **AP**
- Safeguard charitable immunity and corporate and volunteer liability protections for community-based organizations. **AP**
- Support efforts to maintain charitable IRA rollover opportunities to give directly to charitable 501(c)(3) organizations with tax benefits. Support efforts to increase transparency related to charitable giving through donor-advised funds. **AP**
- Sponsor and proliferate voter mobilization and civic engagement tools to empower the people and communities they serve, with an emphasis on minorities, youth, immigrants, and other under-represented populations. **AP**
- Strengthen student loan debt relief, including making the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program more robust, accessible, and transparent in order to recruit and retain a strong and diverse workforce. **AP**



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★ Health & Well-Being

Community-based organizations (CBOs) are integral to the achievement of health equity for the advancement of health and well-being. A new integrated person and family-centered healthcare model must be scaled to include social determinants of health (SDOH), or the conditions in which people live, work, play, and worship. To achieve meaningful transformation, CBOs should be welcomed as key partners with traditional healthcare organizations. As trusted community entities and partners, CBOs build the capacity of communities, eliminate food deserts, build affordable housing, and develop other assets. These organizations have firsthand expertise in how to work with people to improve their lives, well-being, and their communities. Alliance members have the knowledge and experience to partner with health care leaders in the design and implementation of community interventions impacting populations with chronic conditions and strengthening the overall health and well-being of the community.

The Alliance and our members already partner with health organizations in our communities to improve health outcomes for low-income communities and communities of color by removing barriers to primary care, prevention, early detection resources, as well as resources to meet SDOH. Partners include Federally Qualified Health Centers, community health centers, private health systems, managed care organizations, national health organizations, and others.

All people and communities need person-centered, equitable access to affordable, preventative, and fully integrated physical and behavioral health care. The Alliance is committed to eliminating racism and advancing health equity by driving targeted early intervention and prevention programs that result in positive population health outcomes, particularly for communities of color. Alongside our members, the Alliance advocates for policies that create parity between physical and behavioral health coverage and support efforts to reduce the number of uninsured individuals.

To that end, the Alliance will work to:

- Require the Medicaid system to provide coverage that addresses SDOH—including food and nutrition access, stable housing, and other key social needs—and require a carve out for CBOs in the Medicaid system to pay for SDOH. **AL**
- Ensure that 1115 waivers through Medicaid include financing for in-home interventions and strongly encourage state Medicaid systems to partner with CBOs to provide needed social services. **AL**
- Develop and support a diverse workforce of community health workers by scaling up and standardizing training and credentialing, and ensuring the workforce is increasingly part of health care models and compensated fairly with family-sustaining wages and benefits. **AL**
- Create a net positive impact on populations served by Medicaid in the face of efforts to redesign Medicaid's federal-state partnership. **AP**
- Increase funding for information technology systems and additional infrastructure improvements that help the human services sector more efficiently collect, protect, and share data across the health ecosystem. **AP**

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Safety & Resilience

At some point, all families need help weathering life's storms. Above and beyond what others face, communities of color and low-income families are presented with institutional and historical injustices that have a significant impact on their well-being. When people do not have access to community resources and opportunities to thrive, their well-being can be threatened. While people with many supports can weather the storm, people without enough support may struggle to do so. Community-based organizations (CBOs) are well-positioned to support the well-being of families and communities by providing much needed services and supports, and at the same time can address the systemic issues that challenge people's ability to thrive. CBOs are an essential partner in a broader ecosystem focused on keeping children safe at home, preventing child abuse and neglect, and mitigating adverse childhood experiences and toxic stress.

The federal government can support CBOs in strengthening safety, resilience, and well-being by reinforcing safe, stable, and nurturing relationships and environments. We support federal policies that are informed by neuroscience and integrate evidence-based or innovative prevention and early response strategies to proactively build child and family well-being. CBOs stand ready to support federal efforts to move the current child welfare system into a child and family well-being system more focused on primary prevention.

The Alliance supports policies that promote equity and fairness in all corners of the child protection system including investigations, screenings, removals, placements, and funding priorities. Further, the Alliance opposes discrimination in all forms in the child protection system including changes that further discrimination in reporting systems, foster parent recruitment and licensing, and the placement of children who are removed from their home. We will continue to oppose proposals that enable discrimination in the system and remain focused on keeping the safety and well-being of children and families at the center of our work.

To that end, the Alliance will work to:

- Ensure families have services that keep children safe by reauthorizing and increasing funding for the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, keeping a focus on primary prevention. **AL**
- Advance a public health, population-based approach to the child welfare system and advocate for the necessary financial levers to support it. **AL**
- Advance trauma-informed and brain science-aligned principles in policy. **AL**
- Amplify and advance the recommendations of the federal Commission to Eliminate Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities. **AL**
- Monitor, guide, and support stakeholders in the implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act to ensure it is consistent with the intent of the legislation, and advocate for evidence-based programs that address systemic issues, like racism and poverty. **AP**

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- Through the federal Title IV-E training program, incentivize states to recruit more social workers of color in the child welfare system and attract talent through loan forgiveness programs. **AP**
- Enhance protections for vulnerable children at the border. Policies should ensure that if families or unaccompanied children are detained at the border, they are treated with dignity and respect and are provided with the same level of safety, protection, services, and care that children under the U.S. child welfare system receive. **AP**
- Reauthorize and fund the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program to support evidence-based home visiting services for at-risk families and ensure equitable access to the program. **AP**
- Support reauthorization and funding for the Violence Against Women Act to improve criminal justice and community-based responses to domestic violence, dating violence, and sexual assault. **AP**
- The Alliance supports reforms to gun policies including funding research on gun violence as a public health issue, prohibiting assault weapons, strengthening background checks, limiting gun access for domestic abusers, and creating red flag laws to help prevent tragedies. The Alliance network also supports policies and funding that prevent community gun violence, such as violence interruption models, positive youth development programs, and other evidence-based prevention models. **AP**
- Support efforts to make policing more accountable, transparent, and prevention-focused through deeper partnerships with community, particularly communities of color. Such policies include: reigning in chokeholds and carotid holds, requiring police departments to send use-of-deadly-force reports to the federal government on a regular basis, utilizing officer disciplinary records in hiring and making them more transparent, proliferating body cameras, investing significant resources in anti-racial bias and de-escalation training, and adding mental health professionals to police emergency response teams in appropriate situations. **AP**

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★ Educational Success

Community-based organizations (CBOs) support the educational success of young people of all ages by providing early care and education; operating innovative K-12 schools; improving school culture and climate through partnerships, consultation, and service provision; and contributing to post-secondary success through adult education and partnerships with colleges. The Alliance seeks to sustain and expand this continuum of educational supports our network provides for young people from birth to career, with an emphasis on developing a strong national workforce prepared for the jobs of the 21st century.

In line with our network's values, we will prioritize policy opportunities that advance equity for young people who experience significant barriers to educational success caused by systemic racism. This means we will focus on policy solutions related to inequitable school funding; culturally relevant, trauma-informed, and resilience-focused school cultures; supporting diverse learners; restorative justice; parent and community engagement; supports for remote schooling; anti-racist professional development for educators; and diversifying the education workforce.

We will support policies that recognize the importance of whole-child, whole-family, whole-school, and whole-community development. We recognize that CBOs are a critical piece of local education systems and, in partnership with local school districts, should have access to equitable and sustainable financing that encourages upstream solutions. We will fight for policies and funding mechanisms that promote student well-being (versus "fail first" funding). We will advocate for cross-system partnerships that provide flexible funding streams and incentives for collaboration among key federal agencies (departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Justice, Housing and Urban Development, and more).

The Alliance will work to:

Early Care and Education

- Protect and increase funding for, and access to, high-quality early care and education opportunities for children ages zero to five years old including Head Start and Early Head Start, the Child Care Development Block Grant, Preschool Development Grants, and Special Education Preschool Grants. **AP**
- Promote policies that incentivize universal developmental screenings in early childhood education settings. **AP**
- Advocate for increased funding to support higher pay and more professional development for early childhood educators. **AP**
- Simplify the early childhood education ecosystem, streamlining local, state, and federal funding and striving toward universal pre-K nationally, administered in partnership with CBOs. **AP**

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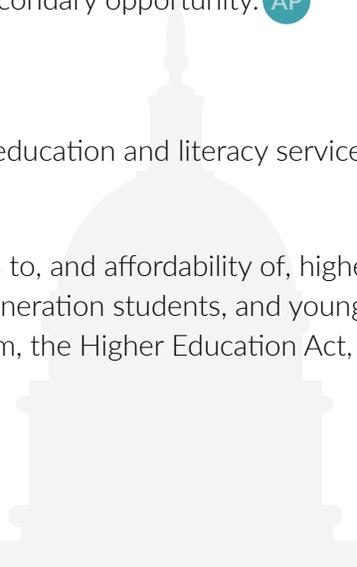
The Alliance will lean in with active and committed partners.

K-12 Education

- Advocate for policies that expand the capacity of schools and CBOs to create a school culture and climate that ensures equitable opportunity and success for all students by prioritizing social and emotional learning, trauma-informed practices, and restorative justice practices. **AL**
- Protect and increase funding streams that close the racial gap in education funding and that support academic achievement of all students with a primary focus on behavioral health, special education, family engagement, and approaches that address barriers to learning including 21st-Century Community Learning Centers, Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Grants, IDEA State Grants (special education funding), Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Title I Funds, ESSA Title IV Funds (for Statewide Family Engagement Centers), and the McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program. **AP**
- Promote policies that incentivize the use of ESSA Title II State Grants for recruitment and retention of educators of color and providing anti-racist and cultural competency professional development to educators. **AP**
- Promote policies that incentivize universal mental health screenings and enhance school-based mental health services in K-12 school settings. **AP**
- Protect and increase funding for the Career and Technical Education program to build career skills and pathways for students. **AP**
- Support innovative school operating models that are funded in a fair and equitable way (e.g. community schools, charter schools, alternative schools), and are high performing as measured by appropriate accountability metrics that prioritize: (1) whole-child development (2) whole-school development (3) family and community experience; and (4) post-secondary opportunity. **AP**

Post-Secondary Education

- Protect and increase funding for adult education and literacy services provided through Adult Education Basic Grants to States. **AP**
- Strengthen policies that support access to, and affordability of, higher education for students with exceptional financial need, first-generation students, and young people in or aging out of foster care including the Federal Pell Grant Program, the Higher Education Act, and Chafee Education Training Vouchers. **AP**


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Economic Mobility

In order to overcome systemic barriers that prevent equitable access and opportunity, community-based organizations (CBOs) must work with and in community to provide important programs and services, engage community members, and deliver community-based solutions and policy changes that enable social and economic mobility at a multi-generational level.

The Alliance advocates for coordinated federal policies that create economic opportunity and upward mobility for all, especially communities of color, low-income and rural communities, as well as youth, the formerly incarcerated, LGBTQ individuals, women, and differently abled individuals. Adults of all ages seek pathways to family-sustaining careers, which include the right training and education, re-entry supports for formerly incarcerated individuals, as well as fair wages and workplace policies. We oppose attempts to reduce eligibility to federal programs that provide pathways to upward mobility, such as food assistance, healthcare, and housing. We will support policies that harness the power of CBOs to help people improve their own lives. We also will explore and investigate the data behind other means for improving economic mobility, such as Universal Basic Income, reparations to African-Americans for enslavement, and American Opportunity Accounts (“baby bonds”).

The Alliance will work to:

- Reauthorize the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to prepare individuals to obtain high-quality, in-demand careers through job training and education. WIOA should also incentivize new pre-apprenticeship, apprenticeship, and work-based learning programs. 
- Bolster efforts to increase the minimum wage to a living and family-sustaining level. 
- Incentivize lending institutions to offer loans to individuals with low or no credit through the Community Reinvestment Act, opening the door for new entrepreneurs. 
- Protect programs that help families meet basic needs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Community Service Block Grant (CSBG), Social Security Insurance (SSI), Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), and the Free and Reduced-Price School Lunch Program. 
- Strengthen and expand policies that provide paid family leave and affordable child care. 
- Combat the national affordable housing, eviction, and homelessness crises by supporting policies that promote homelessness prevention programs, provide flexible rent and utility assistance, adequately fund public housing agencies, expand the Section 8 housing voucher program, and implement a Housing First approach. In addition, protect and expand the Promise Zone initiative to build economically vibrant communities, with employment opportunities, affordable housing, and safe neighborhoods. 



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- Bolster public and private transportation benefits, programs, and systems to increase access to potential employers and community services. **AP**
- Address the “benefits cliff” by supporting policies that redesign public benefits programs to ensure individuals have the support they need during the transition to financial independence. **AP**



Take Action

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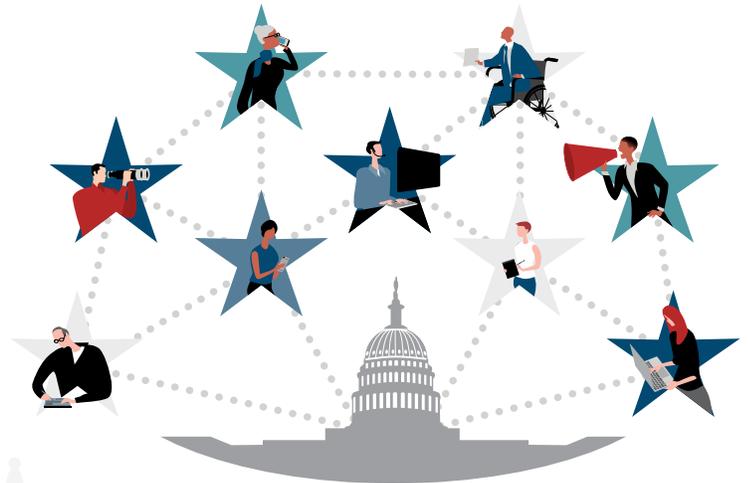
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To achieve a healthy and equitable society, our strategic action network must remain adaptable to this unpredictable public policy and advocacy environment. Agility, without wavering from our values and commitments, is the key to successfully navigating and advocating in today’s landscape.



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