

2022-2024 Federal Public Policy Agenda

 **social current**
Activating the Power of the Social Sector



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Our Policy Principles

Social Current's mission is to advocate for and implement equitable solutions to society's toughest challenges through collaboration, innovation, policy, and practice excellence. We work to ignite change toward an equitable society where all people can thrive. In all that we do, we are guided by our core values: To be unified, intrepid, just, and purposeful. Social Current is committed to research-based, field-informed strategies to achieve these ends. With that foundation, our federal policy work is further shaped by our beliefs and policy principles.

Place Equity at the Center

We are committed to [advancing equity](#) and justice across populations, organizations, and systems. This includes attention to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, and disability. The racial and ethnic disparities that persist across economic, education, health care, criminal justice, and other sectors make clear that systemic racism continues to hinder the well-being of communities of color by denying access and opportunity, and ultimately impacting outcomes. Addressing disparities requires active engagement with law, policy, and practice.

Social Current calls for a comprehensive approach that invests across systems and results in healthy, strong, safe, and vibrant communities. In all our work, we promote policies that are supported by research; work to eliminate disparities; and result in positive identity development, health, and well-being.

Engage Voices with Lived Experience

We are committed to engaging the voices of individuals with lived experience to strengthen public policy and make it more equitable. We respect all viewpoints in the pursuit of strong public policy, and we strive to elevate, empower, and prioritize the voices of marginalized communities in partnership with community-based organizations. Strong policymaking should include community engagement and active and equal participation between those with lived experience and those working within the social sector. This includes ensuring equitable civic and voter engagement for all people.

Promote Prevention

We are committed to promoting early interventions and prevention in our policy work. Prevention and early response strategies in all systems proactively strengthen individuals' self-sufficiency and build a solid foundation for well-being. Prevention strategies should be integrated across policies and funding streams to reduce risk, promote well-being, and reduce long-term costs. Our work integrates the latest findings in brain science to identify and promote protective factors and elevate effective prevention strategies that promote well-being. We support policies that take an upstream and public health approach to the safety and well-being of all people, which requires supporting children, parents, families, and communities; addressing root causes; and coordinating across systems.

Advance Whole-Person Approaches

We are committed to breaking down silos across federal agencies, programs, funding streams, and policies. We center our work around the [social determinants of health](#), recognizing that to achieve a healthy, thriving society, a holistic approach is necessary. We promote policies that use a 2Gen approach, which integrates services and supports to move whole families (as families define themselves) toward their goals. We promote strategies that recognize the [political determinants of health](#), which include the systemic process of administering power, distributing resources, and structuring relationships that ultimately exacerbate health inequities (Dawes, 2020). We work to promote a full and robust array of services that are needs-driven and individualized. We foster generative partnerships between large and small community-based organizations and people within communities to leverage all assets (grassroots partnerships, fiscal capacity, etc.) in pursuit of health and well-being.

Create Access and Opportunity

We are committed to creating and improving access and opportunity so that all people in our country can thrive. Recognizing that historical policy decisions have created racial and economic disparities, we advocate for policies that eliminate disparities. We strive to incorporate multi-generational, intersectional, and multi-sector approaches to community challenges, including investments that are needed to fully implement and achieve equitable outcomes. We encourage policies that offer increased flexibility for eligibility. We also seek to better aggregate and use data to guide policymaking with the goal of reducing disparities and improving access.

Ensure the Health and Resilience of the Social Sector

We are committed to ensuring that our social sector is strong and has the resources it needs to solve society's toughest challenges. Given the emotionally taxing work being done by direct-service staff and other personnel, community-based organizations need workforce supports to promote resilience and well-being for their staff. They need reduced administrative burdens. Social sector organizations need reliable, flexible, direct, and sustainable financing that covers the full cost of doing business, including necessary administrative and infrastructure expenses and competitive salaries that allow them to attract and retain talent. The social sector needs investments in research, innovation, and implementation that ensure the ability to grow and scale practices supported by evidence.

Policy Agenda Key

AL = Accelerate through Leadership

AP = Accelerate through Partnerships

Advancing Equity



Advancing Equity

Amplifying and Empowering Community Voice

- Ensure that all who are eligible to vote can vote safely and that voting policies facilitate increased participation, including for those who have experienced incarceration. Prevent barriers to voting, particularly for historically marginalized and disconnected communities. **AP**

Utilizing Data for Equity

- Fund clinical research on protective factors that prevent or reduce the negative impact and poor health outcomes associated with childhood trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Fund more asset-based clinical research on outcomes. **AL**
- Fund clinical research that studies the connection between racial trauma in childhood and poor health outcomes in adulthood, including substance use disorders. **AP**
- Require all federal agencies to assess and collect demographic data that segments by racial and ethnic backgrounds and by sexual orientation and gender identity (while protecting the privacy of individuals), across all human services programs and establish enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance from states. Provide federal funding and technical expertise for this data collection. **AP**
- Support the 21st-Century Child Welfare Research agenda to address research gaps, including prevention; improve research equity; and strategically incorporate lived expertise. **AP**
- Expand research opportunities on the impact of various government programs and services on children ages zero to three. **AP**
- Invest federal resources in data system improvement, with a goal of improving interoperability across systems (government, social, private sectors) in ways that better serve individuals and communities. **AP**
- Require uniform data collection to identify and address racial and ethnic disparities in the juvenile justice system. **AP**

Ensuring Equitable Access and Resources

- Advance policies that promote equity and justice in all corners of the child protection system including investigations, screenings, removals, placements, and funding priorities. Promote improvements to the child protection system that eliminate discrimination in reporting systems, foster parent recruitment and licensing, and the placement of children who are removed from their home. **AL**
- Support policies that reduce and ultimately eliminate disparities and disproportionality in child protection and foster care. **AP**
- Support immigration policies that ensure families are not separated at the border and that provide children with the same level of safety, protection, services, and care children under the U.S. child welfare system receive. **AP**
- Support policies that promote the well-being of kinship caregivers, including allowing Title IV-E dollars to be used for unlicensed kinship caregivers to ensure equitable resources and incentives for kinship placements. **AP**

- Build on telehealth flexibilities allowed during the COVID-19 pandemic, including reciprocity across state lines, a focus on quality care, parity in reimbursement rates across modalities, and improved access to crisis services. ^{AP}
- Protect and expand programs that help individuals and families thrive, including the Child Tax Credit (CTC), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), 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. ^{AP}
- Combat the national affordable housing, eviction, and homelessness crises by supporting policies that promote homelessness prevention, provide flexible rent and utility assistance, adequately fund public housing agencies, expand the Section 8 housing voucher program, and implement a Housing First approach that does not discriminate based on criminal background and continues services until beneficiaries have attained stability. ^{AP}
- Ensure youth aging out of foster care have the housing and supports needed to be successful. ^{AP}
- Ensure the child tax credit is accessible to all low and middle-income families by expanding eligibility to immigrant families, families involved in the child welfare system, and others that have been excluded. ^{AP}
- Protect and increase funding for and access to high-quality early care and education opportunities for children ages zero to five, including Head Start and Early Head Start, the Child Care Development Block Grant, Preschool Development Grants, Special Education Preschool Grants, and home-based early care and education. ^{AP}
- Protect and increase funding streams that reduce disparities in education funding and that support whole-child development for all students, including Full-Service Community Schools, Nita M. Lowey 21st-Century Community Learning Centers, IDEA State Grants, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Title 1 Funds, ESSA Title IV Funds (for Statewide Family Engagement Centers), and the McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program. ^{AP}
- Increase federal resources to continue to expand broadband and to provide affordable and universal coverage and access. ^{AP}
- Advocate for policies that empower individuals to succeed as they transition from incarceration to their communities, including expungement for low-level offenses, cancellation of fines, elimination of barriers to the workforce, and equitable access to programs and benefits that foster economic well-being. ^{AP}
- Support policies that reinforce that the primary response to crisis calls should come from mental health crisis response professionals, rather than law enforcement. ^{AP}
- Protect and expand place-based initiatives that use holistic approaches to community impact/development to create safe and vibrant neighborhoods and make employment opportunities, affordable housing, and other basic needs a reality across the nation. ^{AP}

Improving Health and Well-Being



Improving Health and Well-Being

Infusing Healing-Centered and Trauma Informed Approaches

- Ensure families have services that keep children safe and thriving by reauthorizing and increasing funding for the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, keeping a focus on primary prevention and alternative pathways to support families outside of child welfare systems. **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. Advocate for programs supported by evidence that address systemic issues, like racism and poverty. Advance policies that assist community-based organizations with program costs, workforce challenges, training, and research associated with well-supported programs. Support improvements to the Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse, including timely reviews and comprehensive feedback to applicants. **AL**
- Advance recommendations of the federal Commission to Eliminate Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities, which called for transforming child welfare into a 21st-century child and family well-being system that supports families early and outside of child welfare. **AL**
- Advance efforts that allow Title IV-B to support community-based prevention services before a candidacy determination is made, and without an evidentiary standard. **AL**
- Advocate for policies that expand the capacity of K-12 schools and community-based organizations to implement integrated services approaches that prioritize whole-child, whole-family, whole-school, and whole-community development. This includes funding the Full-Service Community Schools and Promise Neighborhoods programs. Support a comprehensive bill to improve school culture and climate, promote social emotional learning, expand mental health and well-being supports for students and staff, and include restorative justice practices. Integrated services could include behavioral/mental health services, health services, and social services. **AL**
- Advance trauma-informed and brain science-aligned principles in policy, including the RISE from Trauma Act. **AP**
- Promote community prevention efforts against gun violence, such as funding violence interruption models, positive youth development programs, and other prevention models supported by evidence. Support efforts to provide federal funding for research on gun violence. **AP**
- Continue the COVID-19 flexibility and expansion of funding for sexual assault victims to access emergency and basic needs funding as domestic violence victims, as well as investing in prevention programs for domestic and sexual violence. **AP**

- Support policies that divert youth from the juvenile justice system, such as investments in prevention and intervention programs for youth that address trauma and promote social, emotional, and relational health in schools. Promote individual assessments (e.g., biopsychosocial) and enhance access to and expand provision of behavioral health treatment services for youth as an alternative to detention or while placed in detention. Improve conditions and educational services for youth in detention facilities. ^{AP}
- Expand access and eligibility to a full array of community-based services and supports to address the mental health needs of young people without necessitating custody relinquishment. ^{AP}

Responding Effectively to Behavioral Health Needs

- Address the youth mental health crisis by advocating for prevention programs; supporting the Mental Health Services for Students Act of 2020; and providing more funding to school and community-based mental health programs that build awareness of trauma, train appropriate staff to identify and screen for behavioral health challenges, and incorporate positive behavioral health interventions, family engagement, and treatment. Increase access to behavioral health services for youth in foster care. ^{AP}
- Strengthen community mental health services by increasing access and availability and supporting innovative strategies, such as Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHC). ^{AP}
- Support continued funding and programming for crisis response services, including access to the 988 suicide prevention hotline, as defined by the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act. ^{AP}
- Advocate for mental health parity in health care insurance to eliminate limitations on mental health access. ^{AP}
- End exclusions of coverage for people in inpatient settings (IMD exclusion) or detention and jails. ^{AP}

Integrating Cross-Systems Approaches to Address Health Equity

- Support the Ensuring Medicaid Continuity in Foster Care Act, to provide a narrow exemption for the IMD exclusion to ensure children in QRTPs can continue to receive care in those settings without losing Medicaid coverage. ^{AP}
- Require that Medicaid/Medicare provide coverage that addresses the social determinants of health, including food and nutrition access, stable housing, and supports that meet other social needs. ^{AP}
- Increase resources for the Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services program to create well-paid direct care jobs and expand access to home and community-based services for people with disabilities and aging adults. ^{AP}
- Expand access to health care by expanding Medicaid to non-expansion states. ^{AP}
- Ensure Medicaid, through federal approval of state plan amendments/waivers, include financing and care planning for in-home interventions that strongly encourage state Medicaid programs to partner with community-based organizations to provide needed social services. ^{AP}
- Expand coverage of peer and family support services in federal health coverage programs. ^{AP}
- Promote policies that support integration and care coordination of behavioral health (mental health and substance use) and physical health to improve health outcomes. This includes financing models that support integration, such as expansion of Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic and aligning 42 CFR Part 2 with HIPAA to improve cross-system care coordination and integration. ^{AP}

Increasing Economic Opportunity and Mobility



Increasing Economic Opportunity and Mobility

- Expand economic policies and practices with demonstrated effectiveness for families, including the extension of the expanded Child Tax Credit, home visiting programs, domestic violence programs, expansion of Family Resource Centers, a refundable Adoption Tax Credit, and more. **AL**
- Reauthorize the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act to prepare individuals, with varying skill levels and barriers to employment, to obtain high-quality, in-demand careers through job training and education, while incentivizing pre-apprenticeship, apprenticeship, and work-based learning programs. **AP**
- Support efforts to increase the minimum wage to a living and family-sustaining level.
- Strengthen and expand policies that provide paid family leave, universal pre-K, and affordable child care, with a focus on quality care. **AP**
- Protect and increase funding for adult education and literacy services provided through the Adult Education Basic Grants to States. **AP**
- Strengthen policies that support the affordability and successful completion of higher education and career training 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. Ensure youth aging out of care have wraparound supports in place to help them succeed in higher education. **AP**
- Protect and increase funding for the Career and Technical Education program to build career skills and pathways. **AP**
- Support innovative policies and program evaluation for new program models that provide direct cash assistance to individuals and families. **AP**
- Address the benefits cliff by redesigning public benefits programs to ensure individuals have the support they need during the transition to financial independence. **AP**

Achieving Social Sector Health and Excellence



Achieving Social Sector Health and Excellence

Strengthening the Social Sector Workforce

- Carve out funding within federal grant programs to train and recruit people with lived experience to work in human services to help address gaps in the workforce. Create alternative methods of credentialing for individuals with lived experience to help expedite their path into the sector. **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**
- Strengthen student loan debt relief, including making the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program more robust, accessible, and transparent to recruit and retain a strong and diverse workforce. Support efforts to extend and expand the PSLF waiver to promote access for more nonprofit employees. Improve outreach and communication efforts to help nonprofit professionals understand eligibility criteria. **AP**
- Expand the National Health Service Corps to include community-based nonprofit staff (mental health professionals, LPCs, LCSWs, community health workers, and others) to qualify for student loan repayment for service in underserved communities. **AP**
- Support the Mental Health Professionals Workforce Shortage Loan Repayment Act, which requires HHS to establish a loan repayment program for mental health professionals who work in designated workforce shortage areas. **AP**
- Promote pay parity for early childhood educators (compared to K-12 educators), including higher salaries and more professional development. **AP**
- Support the Mental Health Access Improvement Act, which would require Medicare to cover certain mental health professionals to help address workforce shortages and access for aging populations. **AP**

Promoting Financial Health

- Use federal incentives to increase reimbursement rates in state and local government contracts, to cover the full cost of performing services, including wages competitive with similar government and private sector positions, professional development funds, and administrative and operating costs. **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 BIPOC-owned and women-owned vendors, creates multiyear agreements and grants to provide stability, improves outcomes, reduces unnecessary costs, and promotes timely payments. **AL**
- Expand and make permanent the universal charitable deduction, so that all can participate in charitable giving. **AP**
- Advocate for robust and equitable distribution of federal dollars to the nonprofit sector to compensate for increased demand and decreased resources as the nation recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic. **AP**

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