

National Coalition Calls for Creating New White House-led Focus on Children and Youth

Health, Education, Child and Youth Development, and Nutrition Leaders Urge Incoming Biden Administration to Prioritize Office on Children and Youth

WASHINGTON (November 19, 2020) - More than 350 leaders and organizations across the United States have joined forces to call on President-elect Biden and Vice President-elect Harris to establish a new Office on Children and Youth in the executive branch. The urging for cohesive national leadership is being led by [Nemours Children's Health System](#), [Mental Health America](#), [First Focus on Children](#), [The Education Redesign Lab at Harvard Graduate School of Education](#), and the [Forum for Youth Investment](#). The coalition notes that the confluence of the pandemic, longstanding racial injustice, and the economic downturn have created a critical inflection point for our nation's future.

"Investing in the health of children is the single most powerful lever to create a healthier society and a stronger economy. We should honor the lives lost to COVID-19 due to chronic health conditions by taking action in child health that will prevent these diseases from occurring," said R. Lawrence Moss, MD, FACS, FAAP, president and CEO of Nemours Children's Health System. "This office would be a powerful force toward improving the nation's future health and economic potential. It is our nation's responsibility to ensure that every child, regardless of socioeconomic circumstances, race, ethnicity, or gender receives coordinated support to achieve lifelong health. The payback is huge and continues for decades."

Through executive order, the president could create a White House Office on Children and Youth. The intent is to improve the health, well-being, and education of America's young, advance equity, eliminate disparities, and ensure that federal policies prioritize their unique needs. The office would convene a "children's cabinet" of federal agencies to serve as a single coordinating point across and within existing programs and services. The office and children's cabinet would set a clear national agenda with outcome metrics and a cohesive, multi-agency budget to prioritize the health and well-being of children and youth. The office would also host a White House Conference on Children and Youth to bring in outside experts and stakeholders, including youth, as a catalyst for progress.

"Children's needs do not fit neatly into one box," said Bruce Lesley, president of First Focus on Children. "Federal policies covering everything from health care to education to hunger and taxes deeply affect our nation's 74 million children. Yet children are often an afterthought, with no single federal entity making sure that each agency fulfills its obligation to them. A White House Office on Children and Youth would ensure that leaders at every level prioritize and coordinate children's needs, offering the services and support that will allow them — and our nation — to flourish."

A strong economic recovery hinges on policies and resources to support schools and communities, rebuild the childcare sector, and address the health and mental health needs of children and youth to lift them above the obstacles created by the pandemic. Moreover, raising a nation of young people ready for learning, work, and life requires public systems that actively foster positive youth development based on science and equity. A focus on these issues would create a synergistic response to decrease rates of childhood [mental health disorders](#), expand [educational opportunities](#), and stabilize [food security and housing opportunities](#) as part of a long-term investment in the health, quality of life, productivity, and lifespan of America's youngest generation.

"Fifty percent of youth age 11 to 17 who took a depression screening at [MHAscreening.org](#) in September reported frequent thoughts of suicide or self-harm," said Paul Gionfriddo, president and CEO of Mental Health America. "This is a troubling trend. President-elect Biden must act quickly once in office to ensure the mental health of children, youth, and families is a top priority."

To meet this need, the lead partners, in two related issue briefs, propose a structure for a federal children's cabinet to support the office. This interagency structure would bring together federal leaders to advance, communicate, and align shared goals and priorities. This cabinet model has been successfully used in various states including Maryland, which created a Child Well-Being Scorecard to track outcomes for eight measures of wellness, and Virginia, whose efforts have shown improvements in school attendance, school suspensions, student nutrition, and school accreditation.

"In communities and states across the country, collaborating across the diverse sectors, programs, and fields that support youth has been critical to achieve common goals. These state and local examples can serve as a model on the national scale. We need coherent, integrated policy and action grounded in equity and in our knowledge of what young people need to succeed," said Thaddeus Ferber, executive vice-president at the Forum for Youth Investment.

“Moving beyond the pandemic to a stronger, healthier nation requires a new, collaborative approach to children’s issues,” said Jennifer Davis, MPP, senior advisor at Harvard’s Education Redesign Lab and former education official in the Clinton administration. “Schools alone cannot meet children’s complex needs. At every level of government, we need to focus on a holistic approach to child well-being — one that builds cross-sector support systems for children and youth from cradle to career.”

The need for this federal coordinating office and children’s cabinet is further detailed in the accompanying issue brief and charter from these organizations, which is available at www.Nemours.org/WHOffice4Kids. Follow the conversation on this proposal by using #WHOffice4Kids and #ChildrensCabinet.

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About Nemours Children’s Health System

Nemours is an internationally recognized children's health system that owns and operates the Nemours/Alfred I. duPont Hospital for Children in Wilmington, Del., and Nemours Children's Hospital in Orlando, Fla., along with outpatient facilities in five states, delivering pediatric primary, specialty and urgent care. Nemours also powers the world’s most-visited website for information on the health of children and teens, KidsHealth.org and offers on-demand, online video patient visits through Nemours CareConnect.

Established as The Nemours Foundation through the legacy and philanthropy of Alfred I. duPont, Nemours provides pediatric clinical care, research, education, advocacy, and prevention programs to families in the communities it serves.

About Mental Health America

Mental Health America (MHA) is the nation’s leading community-based nonprofit dedicated to addressing the needs of those living with mental illness and promoting the overall mental health of all. MHA’s work is driven by its commitment to promote mental health as a critical part of overall wellness, including prevention services for all; early identification and intervention for those at risk; integrated care, services, and supports for those who need them; with recovery as the goal. Learn more at MHAnational.org

About First Focus on Children

First Focus on Children is a bipartisan advocacy organization dedicated to making children and families the priority in federal policy and budget decisions.

About The Education Redesign Lab at Harvard

The mission of the Education Redesign Lab is to ensure every child in the U.S. has the opportunity to succeed in education and in life. EdRedesign partners with mayors, superintendents, health and community leaders to create Children’s Cabinets and build cradle-to-career support systems that improve child well-being.

About Forum for Youth Investment

Our mission is straightforward: to change the odds that all young people are ready by 21 – ready for college, work, and life. Doing so requires a range of strategies – from national thought leadership to on-the-ground action.

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