

Child Allowance Principles

The well-being of our society is rooted in the well-being of our children. Today, families all over the country are struggling with the rising costs of raising kids. Families with moderate incomes struggle to cover costs, while families with low incomes often cannot afford basic necessities. These struggles, as well as the United States' uniquely high child poverty rate and persistent racial inequality, are the direct result of underinvestment in families and children by policymakers. For decades, policymakers have put up barriers to prosperity for families and communities by decimating cash assistance programs for families with children and failing to provide the necessary investments in other programs that meet basic needs. This systemic failure has left families to fend for themselves, without societal support for their well-being and the immense amount of work and resources that it takes to raise children.

We have an opportunity to make a new choice and establish a permanent, robust child allowance—a stable source of direct cash to supplement family income—to ensure the general welfare of all children, youth, and families so that they may grow and thrive. The stakes could not be higher.

When children's basic needs are met, they are healthier and happier. In their 2019 landmark report, [the National Academy of Sciences](#) (NAS) concluded that increasing families' incomes improves children's well-being across a range of outcomes including nutrition, mental health, and education—both because it allows families to afford goods and services that support children's healthy development and reduces toxic stress experienced by children, youth, and families,

ultimately promoting positive parent-child interactions and creating a more responsive environment.

We know a child allowance will improve overall family well-being and cut child poverty because we've seen something similar in action. In 2021, the expanded Child Tax Credit (CTC) provided monthly payments to families with children and the results were clear: [food insufficiency](#), [stress](#), and the child poverty rate all [plummeted](#), while indicators of family well-being increased. We must build on those gains by creating a permanent child allowance program that goes beyond the CTC expansion to help families; a program that is designed to help those who have been harmed by systemic racism and failed by existing social supports, including Black, Latinx, Indigenous, AAPI, and immigrant children and their families. A robust, permanent child allowance will not eliminate racial inequality on its own and should be coupled with complementary policies that equitably support families. However, it will be a strong start, particularly if it is informed by the lived experiences of those who would be helped by the program and those who have been impacted by the harmful, racist policy design endemic in existing programs.

Led by the Parent & Caregiver Advisory Board and volunteers from several member organizations, the Automatic Benefit for Children (ABC) Coalition has developed the following principles to guide advocates and policymakers in the fight for a permanent, inclusive, and transformative child allowance program.

- All children should be eligible to receive a child allowance regardless of family structure, number of children in the household, immigration status of any household members, or place of residence within the U.S. and its territories. This includes children living with non-relative and kin caregivers and children in and out-of-home placements in the youth justice or child welfare systems.
- A child allowance should provide meaningful support to families. The benefit level should provide an amount that meaningfully helps families with children meet their needs. The benefit amount may be adjusted to account for differences in cost of living, to keep up with inflation, and to ensure that the benefit advances economic equity, especially for low and middle income households. Benefit amounts should not impact eligibility or benefit amounts for other programs such as SNAP or housing assistance, nor should the benefit count as taxable income.
- A child allowance should be available through regular payments. The benefit should be delivered monthly by default, but families should be able to opt into alternative delivery schedules that work best for them, if they so choose.
- A child allowance should be available to all children with no strings attached. All children deserve equal concern and respect, and parents and caregivers deserve recognition for the valuable and critical work of raising children. A child should not be denied a child allowance based on the market employment status of their parents or other family members. Parents and other adults living with the child should not be subject to earnings tests, work, or other behavioral requirements to receive a child allowance for their child. As the experts on their own families, parents and caregivers should be free to use the benefit as they see fit for their families.
- A child allowance should be easy for families to access, with limited paperwork and administrative burdens for families. The benefit should be delivered automatically to a child's primary caregiver. Primary caregivers should be identified using reliable information already available to the government, in as many cases as possible, to minimize the need for application or claim-filing processes. The administering agency should have the authority to obtain and use reliable information from state agencies for this purpose. Children should be enrolled automatically at birth. Families who are not automatically enrolled should be able to simply sign up online or in person.
- A child allowance should be administered by an agency that is equipped to meet the needs of families and ensure the benefit advances equity. The agency administering a child allowance must center the needs of the families it serves, have a documented history of working with stakeholders and advocates to build and improve systems, and use trauma-informed and culturally and linguistically appropriate practices. The agency must also have sufficient, designated resources to meet families where they are, through community outreach and engagement as well as comprehensive customer service to assist families, especially communities who have been marginalized and excluded from past supports, such as Black and Latinx families, Native American families, immigrant families, people living in US territories like Puerto Rico, families with limited English proficiency, families with safety risks due to domestic violence, and families with disabilities. The agency should have dedicated funding for robust dispute resolution to ensure the legal rights of families are respected through clear and accessible dispute resolution processes.
- A child allowance should complement—not replace—other supports for families. A child allowance program is an important societal investment in families and children that should complement existing public benefits, such as SNAP, cash assistance, housing assistance, and others. Investing in a child allowance should be accompanied by increased investments in other public benefits and family support programs, and should in no way detract from existing public benefits. Families should not be penalized for receiving the child allowance.

Signed by members of the ABC Coalition, including:

- Association of Children's Residential & Community services (ACRC)
- Boston Medical Center
- Care Income Now
- Center for Economic and Policy Research
- Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
- Center for the Study of Social Policy
- Children's Defense Fund
- Children's Defense Fund-Southern Regional Office
- Children's HealthWatch
- Citizens' Committee for Children of New York
- Coalition on Human Needs
- Community Change
- Community Legal Services of Philadelphia
- Economic Mobility Pathways (EMPath)
- Economic Security Project Action
- Educational Alliance
- Family and Home Network
- First Focus on Children
- Foster America
- Futures Without Violence
- Generation Hope
- Georgetown Center on Poverty & Inequality
- Global Women's Strike
- Golden State Opportunity
- GRACE & End Child Poverty CA
- Greater Boston Legal Services
- Guilford Parent Leader Network
- Hispanic Federation
- ideas42 Policy Lab
- Income Movement
- Instituto del Desarrollo de la Juventud
- Maine Children's Alliance
- National Community Action Partnership
- National Diaper Bank Network
- National WIC Association
- Network Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
- ParentsTogether Action
- Prevent Child Abuse America
- Prosperity Now
- RESULTS
- San Diego for Every Child
- SaverLife
- Stand for Children
- The Arc of the United States
- The Expectations Project
- The Invisible Americans Podcast: Ending Child Poverty
- The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
- TOOTRiS Child Care On-Demand
- UnidosUS
- Universal Income Project
- Youth Law Center
- Youth On Fire Inc.
- ZERO TO THREE