



In partnership, we gather today—both in person and virtually—united by a shared commitment to California’s children and families. We are here to bring forward data, community experience, and policy insight that support smart investments to end child poverty, strengthen access to child care and sustainable rates, address food insecurity, and meet the full needs of families where they live and work.

California is the fifth-largest economy in the world. Yet more than **five million Californians live in poverty**, without enough income to meet their most basic needs. [Alarming, child poverty has risen from 11% in 2021 to 18.9 % in 2023, reversing years of progress.](#)

The pandemic demonstrated that when California invests intentionally, poverty can be reduced. One-time federal and state investments strengthened the safety net, expanded child care access, improved food security, and provided families with critical income supports. As many of those funds have now expired, California must act decisively to **protect prior investments, replace lost federal dollars with state resources, fully draw down available federal funds, and advance a long-term strategy to permanently end poverty.**

Families with low incomes are facing mounting pressures. Economic uncertainty, changes at the federal level, and the devastating Los Angeles fires have compounded instability for households already struggling to make ends meet. Poverty in California was declining prior to the pandemic; today, it is rising—especially for families with children.

Many of the households most affected are led by women, particularly single mothers and women of color, who face persistent barriers to stable employment due to the lack of affordable and accessible child care. Addressing these challenges requires sustained investments in **human infrastructure** that support families now and create long-term economic mobility for children.

Policy Priorities to End Poverty and Strengthen Families

Ending Poverty and Strengthening the Safety Net

- **End Deep Child Poverty:** Ensure CalWORKs grants reach at least 50 percent of the current federal poverty level for all families.
- **Expand Tax Credits:** Continue expanding the California Earned Income Tax Credit and the Young Child Tax Credit so families can afford basic necessities without having to choose between utilities, transportation, and food.
- **Comprehensive Housing Supports:** Increase housing availability and prevent evictions so families avoid the trauma and instability of homelessness.
- **Health Care Expansion:** Strengthen community-based organizations and school-based health clinics to deliver comprehensive, culturally responsive care where families already are.
- **Coordinated Services:** Improve the effectiveness and accessibility of anti-poverty programs through streamlined, research-based, community-driven solutions grounded in equity.
- **Support Guaranteed Income:** Ensure families have a basic income sufficient to house and feed their children.

Child Care and Early Learning

- **Provider Rate Reform:** Honor the commitment to a single child care rate structure that reflects the true cost of care.
- **Supplemental Cost of Care Plus:** Increase supplemental payments until a unified rate structure is fully implemented.
- **Invest in the Mixed Delivery System:** Fund family child care providers, Head Start, California State Preschool, and community-based centers offering full-day, full-year care aligned with California's 24/7 economy.
- **Grow the Workforce:** Provide multi-year funding to recruit and retain child care educators and home-based providers.
- **Expand Capacity: Fully fund 206,800 new child care spaces by 2027–28.**
- **Facilities Investment:** Increase multi-year funding for the California Infrastructure Grant Program to expand and modernize child care facilities.

Food Security

- **Universal Access to Nutritious Food:** Ensure all eligible children can access CalFresh, WIC, and free school meals that are culturally affirming and served when students can eat.
- **Summer Nutrition:** Sustain summer meal programs, maximize Summer EBT benefits, and expand grab-and-go options to reach more children.
- **Strengthen School Meals for All:** Ensure adequate time to eat and flexible meal options, including on half school days.

Additional Family Supports

- **No Wrong Door:** Fund and provide flexibility to community-based organizations and alternative payment programs to braid services and connect families to supports wherever they seek help.
- **Home Visiting:** Expand voluntary, evidence-based home visiting programs statewide.
- **Paid Family Leave:** Ensure paid leave is affordable, accessible, and family-centered.
- **Stable Homes & Relationships:** Prioritize placement stability, family-based care, and trauma-informed services for children and youth in foster care.

Call to Action

The priorities outlined above represent strategic, proven investments in California's families and children. To weather future uncertainty and reverse rising poverty, California must **protect hard-won progress, stabilize critical programs, and commit to a long-term vision that ensures every child and family can thrive.**

"A budget is more than just a series of numbers on a page; it is an embodiment of our values."



Scan the QR code above to access 120 legislative links that provide district-specific information and resources available in each county to serve families. Please reach out to thriving@thrivingfamilies-ca.org with any questions.