

## Every Child Deserves a Safe and Stable Home and Access to Healthcare

### What Kids Need

A child's life starts off right with the basics: housing and healthcare. Every child deserves a safe, stable place to call home. Housing instability causes too many children to miss school and transfer to new schools harming their achievement and social/emotional development.

For every child to remain healthy, they also need regular access to physical and mental health care. Yet, too many kids in Philadelphia lack regular access to physical and mental healthcare.

***To address the chronic and burgeoning affordable housing needs in the city affecting families and youth the next mayor must, at a minimum:***

- Invest more funds in enforcement of safe housing and rental laws;
- Expand the supply of affordable housing;
- Boost the resources and outreach to parents to prevent family homelessness;
- Build affordable housing options for youth who are transitioning to adulthood without supportive adults.

***To make sure children are healthy, the next mayor must:***

- Make sure every child has access to a full continuum of mental health care;
- Use the leverage of the city to make sure every child is tested for lead exposure in accordance with CDC guidelines, where children are poisoned, make sure their homes are lead free and find resources for remediation where children are likely at risk;
- Deploy city resources to provide home visiting services for mothers after childbirth;
- Create programming and accountability that ensures that the city's early intervention services for infants and toddlers reach every child in need;
- Push the state to permit children without legal citizenship status to be eligible for Medicaid.

### Why This Matters To Kids, Parents and, The City

Unstable housing and lack of access to quality health care costs everyone in lost human capital, fewer tax-paying workers, higher expenses in multiple systems, and less positive civic engagement. Facing disruptions due to the pandemic and rising levels of community violence means that, now more than ever, children need healthcare and access to mental health support so that they can recover and heal to navigate new terrains rather than fall into despair.

Indeed, children who experience homelessness have higher rates of academic failure, truancy, and are disadvantaged when competing to access high quality education. Young children experiencing homelessness are at an increased risk of poor physical and mental health, and such experiences can disrupt a child's development, resulting in persistent developmental delays that are likely to accumulate if left unaddressed.

It doesn't have to be this way. The City has developed programs like offering rental assistance or eviction diversion to mitigate the stress on families facing potential moves. Philadelphia has also taken steps to ensure that houses are safe from lead and other toxins, and there are healthcare options that only need to be expanded.

## Why This Matters To Kids, Parents and, The City

Ensuring stability for Philly kids will only benefit the city. In addition to making sure Philly kids can become engaged adults contributing to the city's workforce and civic life, expanding housing and healthcare supports is one way to lower the cost of living for families so that they stay. After all, if approximately 60,000 people, most of whom are ages 18-34, are leaving the city for to live elsewhere, making sure families have sufficient support to raise families can only grow the city.

### The Details

Healthy child development is fostered by healthy parenting and families do the best possible job when they know they can afford a safe place to live and reliable health care for their children.

Philadelphia has led the nation in finding creative ways to help families keep a roof over their head from the highly effective eviction prevention program to direct grants to preserve affordable housing. Yet over half of all Philadelphia households pay more than 30% of their income for housing. In households with children, one unexpected bill can make homelessness an unavoidable reality. More than 5,000 of the city's children and youth experienced homelessness during the 2020 - 2021 school year. These children are at a high risk of experiencing stressful and traumatic life events, which have been linked to disrupted mental and physical development, resulting in higher rates of emotional, behavioral, and physical health problems compared to non-homeless peers.

The shortage of safe and affordable housing is so severe that there are only 30 affordable rental units for every 100 low-income renter households. An estimated \$2.7 billion is needed to develop the supply of affordable housing, as well as an estimated \$1 billion needed to stabilize rental units. Currently, approximately 60% of rental units needing repairs are homes where single mothers are raising children. The recently announced lottery for 10,000 PHA vouchers received 36,767 applicants. Nearly 64.6 percent indicated they were either homeless or at risk of becoming homeless and the applicants may have to wait a long period before they can move into their new homes.

Project Home has a detailed agenda that the Kids Campaign supports that should be embraced by the next mayor as does the Philly Homes for Youth Coalition. The Family Service Provider Network at Hope PHL has also issued policy recommendations.

In short, the next Mayor must ENFORCE safe housing laws already in place, FUND housing programs related to eviction prevention, home repairs and rapid rehousing, and PROMOTE the construction of affordable, family-friendly housing throughout the City. ***Specifically, to curb childhood homelessness, the City must ensure that:***

- The Department of Licenses and Inspections has the necessary funding and staffing to aggressively enforce lead and certificate of rental suitability ordinances, deny landlords who fail to comply with those laws rental licenses, and to crack down on unlicensed rentals;
- Funds are dedicated for right to counsel, rental assistance, and eviction diversion programs that have made Philadelphia a national leader in preventing evictions;
- More local, state and federal funds are spent to expand the city's existing home repair programs and to expand rapid rehousing programs for families who experience homelessness; and
- City programs expand the number of affordable multi-bedroom housing units for families, and affordable apartments for youth who are entering adulthood without a supportive adult in their lives, all backed by good housing counseling supports that make it possible for families and youth to rapidly enter housing and avoid ever being unhoused.

With respect to childhood health, there is also some good news for Philadelphia. Ninety six percent of Philadelphia's children are covered by public or private health insurance. However, there are three areas that require attention.

Less than a third of children under three years old are being tested for toxic lead exposure, as recommended by the CDC. That means that far too many children are likely poisoned by lead and are receiving the critical services needed to treat the damaging impact of the toxin on their development. Further, city funds for home remediation to remove the source of lead poisoning reach less than two percent of children known to suffer from lead poisoning.

## The Details

Second, though the high share of insured children means that nearly every child has access to physical health care, children from low-income families have extremely limited access to the mental health care they need. Far too few mental health professionals serve children on public insurance, resulting in a significant barrier to accessing care. Meanwhile, it's clear from emergency room data, state hotline for youth mental health help, and the first hand accounts of teachers and early childhood staff that a large swath of children are suffering from anxiety, depression, and intense anger issues.

Community Behavioral Health's partnership with the school district provides a useful model for getting mental services to children, but it requires significantly more oversight and it must expand to address challenges in its screening processes, utilization systems and overall quality so that children experiencing mental distress get the services they need. In sum, the city and school district must collaborate to provide a full continuum of mental health services to children from prevention, mental health first aid, counseling options and intensive services.

Further, the Mayor must also advocate for insurance policy reforms so that children insured by private carriers and CHIP can get the mental health services they need.

Health and education begin at home and thanks to home visiting programs new parents can learn how to meet the developmental and health needs of infants, in their home. Currently only 2% of families who qualify for Home Visiting programs receive them. These services prevent families from being engaged in child welfare services, prevent childhood injury, and connect families with necessary resources like early intervention, parenting education, civil legal supports, and much more.

The mayor must align funds from the state, child welfare and other sources to expand proven home visiting models to every family that can benefit from them.

The city operates the federally subsidized Early Intervention program for infants and toddlers to address developmental delays early in a child's life when research shows intervention can have the greatest payoff. Approximately 11% of children under five years old are receiving or have received services from this program. But given the level of children suffering from adverse childhood experiences in Philadelphia who could benefit from Early Intervention many more children should be served by this program.

Further, Early Intervention does not provide mental health services, yet child care providers report that approximately 20% of their children exhibit mental challenges. Meanwhile, services paid for by Community Behavioral Health Services are backlogged with waiting lists for appointments months long. Children who receive good early intervention and mental health support have significantly better health, education and life outcomes. The mayor must ensure that the city's Early Intervention and mental health programs are second to none, reaching every child who needs its services.

Third, every parent in Philadelphia needs to be sure their child can see a doctor for both preventative and urgent health care needs. Children in low-income households who are growing up in our city without legal citizenship status are uninsured because Pennsylvania has failed to exercise the option of permitting them to enroll in Medicaid. This accounts for, as many as 3,000 children in Philadelphia. We want our new mayor to address this problem and help us care for all kids in our City, regardless of their citizenship status.

## About The Kids Campaign

**The Kids Campaign** is a coalition of 60 plus child-serving groups in Philadelphia. Our coalition formed to make sure that the next mayor of Philadelphia is ready to do whatever it takes to ensure a **S.E.C.U.R.E.** future for every kid – a future with Safety, an Education, Careers, Uplift, Recreation, and a healthy Environment. A non-partisan effort, the Kids Campaign will share information parents and voters need to determine which candidate will make every day safer than the one before for children and youth. Organizations and individuals can learn more and join the Kids Campaign at [www.thekidscampaign.org](http://www.thekidscampaign.org).