

## What Children and Families Need in Budget Reconciliation: Policy Recommendations to Improve Health and Well-Being

As the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress negotiates provisions for the upcoming reconciliation package, it is critical that lawmakers address the unique challenges facing families. In March, Congress passed the landmark American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) (P.L. 117-2), which included critical provisions to increase funding for the Child Tax Credit and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). While these temporary measures provide essential relief, additional legislative action is needed to protect the health, developmental, and social needs of children and families. As Congress works to develop a robust budget reconciliation package, now is the time to ensure the inclusion of legislation that advances health equity and improves the health of parents and their children.

### Families USA urges Congress to take action on the following legislative priorities for children and families:

» **Mandate permanent extension of Medicaid coverage for all postpartum women for at least 12 months after delivery.**

Medicaid provides essential coverage for pregnant women, covering more than 40% of all births in the U.S. Medicaid coverage significantly improves birth outcomes by increasing access to care. But Medicaid currently covers only 60 days of postpartum care. While the ARPA recently provided states the option to extend coverage to 12 months postpartum, alarming rates of maternal mortality and morbidity require congressional action. Twelve months of postpartum coverage must be equally accessible in every state. All individuals covered by Medicaid must be assured of continued access to coverage for at least 12 months postpartum.

» **Advance the Black Maternal Health Omnibus Act of 2021.** The Omnibus confronts the United States' abysmal maternal morbidity and mortality rates by addressing clinical and non-clinical drivers of health. This maternal health legislation

makes critical investments in addressing the social determinants of health, funding community-based organizations, growing and diversifying the perinatal workforce, improving the data collection process, and addressing the impacts of COVID-19 and climate change on maternal and infant health outcomes.

» **Require Medicaid coverage for evidence-based home visiting programs.** Evidence based home visiting (EBHV) programs are designed to support healthy pregnancies and early childhood development by improving access to prenatal, postpartum, and early childhood services and supports. Research shows that EBHV programs not only improve maternal and child health outcomes, they also reduce health disparities and yield cost savings by investing in early care that prevents the need for more costly interventions later in life. Sustainable Medicaid funding for EBHV would be a critical asset to addressing our nation's dual health equity and maternal health crises.

» **Permanently authorize CHIP.** CHIP insures approximately 10 million children in low-income working families. Despite its 25-year track record of success in providing comprehensive, cost-effective coverage, CHIP is the only federal insurance program that is not permanently authorized. Congress must secure CHIP's future through permanent authorization so it can continue to serve the needs of children in low-income working families without interruption.

## **Children and families are counting on Congress to prioritize their critical health needs**

Our nation is at a pivotal crossroads. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that access to high-quality, affordable, equitable health care and other supports is essential to ensure a strong foundation of health. The ARPA contains important provisions to address the devastating health care and economic impacts of COVID-19, including improved access to affordable coverage and efforts to reduce child poverty, but this relief is only temporary. Congress must take additional steps to make these key provisions permanent and continue to enact policies that prioritize maternal and child health equity.

For the sake of our nation's future prosperity, Congress must ensure that the health and well-being of children are prioritized in any budget reconciliation legislation that is enacted this year.

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