**The Case for a Cross-Agency Priority (CAP) on Child Well-being**

**THE CHALLENGE**

The American people expect government policy to [advance the best interests of children](https://firstfocus.org/blog/voters-have-spoken-and-they-support-children). Yet, the data shows that U.S. policy lacks the high-level coordination, well-defined indicators, and evaluations mechanisms to advance children’s safety, health, and development. According to a UNICEF report card of the world’s wealthiest countries, the [U.S. performs lower](https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/Report-Card-16-Worlds-of-Influence-child-wellbeing.pdf) than most similarly situated countries on various child well-being indicators, including poverty, healthcare accessibility, nutrition, and education. A recent report found that the COVID-19 pandemic [undermined years of progress in child well-being](https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/covid-19-biggest-global-crisis-children-our-75-year-history-unicef) globally and instead exacerbated child poverty, violence, and exploitation. [Almost every child on earth is exposed to at least one major climate and environmental hazards, shocks, and stresses](https://www.unicef.org/media/105376/file/UNICEF-climate-crisis-child-rights-crisis.pdf), putting their health and safety at risk. Children in marginalized populations suffer all these harms disproportionately due to systemic inequities and discrimination.

**The OPPORTUNITY**

In November 2017, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued a [67-page report](https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-18-41sp.pdf) recommending the creation of a cross agency priority (CAP) for child well-being, given research that it was an area of government that required increased coordination. The report, based on consultation with a wide array of experts, found that improve child well-being “requires attention to a multiplicity of interrelated factors that can contribute to child well-being and the role that families, communities, governmental and nongovernmental organizations play in caring for these children.”

In a more recent [report](https://www.gao.gov/assets/720/716998.pdf), GAO reiterated its recommendation to create a CAP goal to improve child well-being “to better address the needs of children in ways that take into account the interrelatedness of federal actions and policies that aim to improve child well-being.” A CAP goal on improving child well-being would increase the efficacy of government policy for children through shared indicators, data, and evaluation mechanisms.

**THE GOAL**

**The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) should establish a mission-focused CAP goal on improving child well-being.** This goal will:

* Create measurable improvements in child well-being by improving coordination and creating shared definitions and indicators for child well-being
* Mainstream the consideration of child well-being in government policy to ensure that children are not left behind
* Increase trust in federal government programs by making action steps and progress in improving child well-being available to the public

**THE STRATEGIES**

Strategies to implement a CAP goal on improving child well-being should include:

* + Developing a unified definition of child well-being and common indicators, based on “best interest of the child” factors, to be applied across federal policies and programs;
  + designing and implementing modernized data reporting and analytics to generate useful information to help federal, state, and local decision-makers improve program policies and implementation;
  + conducting a child well-being assessment of government policies, program, and budgets based on shared indicators of child well-being; and
  + creating forums to engage community leaders and other outside experts, including children to devise innovative, coordinated solutions to align efforts to improve outcomes for children, youth, and families.

**THE OUTCOME**

A CAP goal on improve child well-being would ensure that all government policy maximizes its potential to improve all aspects of children’s lives. Through improved coordination and clear indicators, a CAP goal would also advance equity in government policy by bringing children to the forefront and ensuring consideration for marginalized children who face barriers of systemic inequities and discrimination. Helping children thrive now and in the future will advance trust in the U.S. government, both at home and abroad.

**THE TEAM**

The Office of Management and Budget should lead this goal. Other participating agencies should include The Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, Education, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Interior, Labor, Justice, State, Transportation, and Treasury, as well as the Agency for International Development and the Council of Economic Advisors.