

# Proven Plays for Strengthening Families

Common sense and strong research demonstrate that the well-being of parents matters to their children's social-emotional, physical, and economic well-being, to their children's educational and life success, and to the strength and stability of families. Research shows that adversity in childhood affects the very architecture of the brain with lifelong implications.

Too many families face barriers to opportunities including poor mental health, violence, and economic instability, making it more difficult for their children to grow up physically and emotionally healthy and ultimately leading to greater difficulties learning, entering the workforce, and supporting families of their own. The families with the most challenges deserve consistent support to maintain safe environments.

## Keeping All Families Strong

Families are stable when they are free from violence, substance abuse and mental health challenges; when they have parenting knowledge and skill as well as access to parenting supports; and when they have resources and the skills to get resources including adequate support for work and school.

- X** **Preserve and expand state support for adult education programs** that provide opportunities for young adults and parents to build literacy skills, earn a GED, and prepare for a career, improving workforce participation and family literacy rates.
- X** **Invest federal and state funds into child care family support eligibility and provider payments**, which will ensure young children are closing the early learning gap, protecting against poverty-related risk factors, and enabling their parents to access a job or job preparation.
- X** **Ensure early diagnosis and treatment for developmental delays, physical or mental health challenges and other learning disabilities.** This includes preserve and expand recent state investment in Medicaid and *Early On Michigan* and school-based health services.
- X** **Increase state support to provide statewide access to voluntary evidence-based home visiting programs based on local needs assessments.** These quality programs work with families exhibiting some risk to promote early learning and healthy child development and improve birth and early learning outcomes.
- X** **Increase state support for local abuse and neglect prevention councils** which coordinate community support, assess needs and build partnerships to be able to provide needed services for families who without concrete support might experience trauma.
- X** **Increase state support for child abuse and neglect prevention direct services statewide.** Community-identified needs lead to evidenced practices like home visiting, parenting classes, counseling, child care, referrals, transportation and prenatal care for families preventing instability.

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- X** **Conduct comprehensive needs assessments of parent basic skill levels including literacy** and use those assessments to guide additional program and investment decisions.

## Supporting Struggling Families

Caregivers of all kinds need access to services and programs to support their families' overall success and help maintain family stability, including keeping children and youth out of the foster care system.

- X** **Expand state funding for statewide adoption of problem-solving courts** for mental health and substance use, which help parents and young adults receive the treatment they need to avoid losing custody of their children and spending time in jail or prison.
- X** **Supplement recent federal funding to create a kinship navigator program for relative caregivers** that provides the services and supports families need.
- X** **Ensure state funding to match federal match dollars for maintenance payments to approved kinship caregivers** and allow informal kinship caregivers to receive payments to meet the needs of the children in their care. Out-of-home placements with relatives and other kin, when paired with supports and services, can maintain important relationships and mitigate trauma.
- X** **Identify a four-year strategy to build investment in trauma prevention and intervention that will support existing community efforts.** Utilize the good work invested within DHHS to address adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and build trauma-informed systems and policies.

## Responsibility for the Most Vulnerable Children, Youth and Families

When we decide to separate families, we bear the responsibility to definitively say that children and youth, and often their families and caregivers, are doing better with system attention than they would be otherwise, regardless of where they are born or currently living.

- X** **Include more citizen voices in Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) Citizen Review Panels and require public discussion of panel findings in the legislature and state agencies** to ensure that state efforts around prevention; Children's Protective Services, foster care, adoption, and child fatalities panels are effective and well-informed.
- X** **Mandate public responses from MDHHS and appropriate Courts to all recommendations made by Foster Care Review Boards,** who review child welfare complaints.

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- X** **Strengthen the recently passed Children’s Assurance of Quality Foster Care Act by adding reporting requirements about child welfare complaints and corrective actions taken.** Make these available to an independent evaluator like the Foster Care Review Boards to ensure that the voices of citizens in the system are fully acknowledged.
- X** **Direct MDHHS to analyze the root causes of family removals and barriers to reunification,** including poor or substandard housing, substance abuse, and mental health. Existing data should be reviewed, research partnerships should be supported, and constituent voice utilized.
- X** **Improve communication between caregivers, birth families, and caseworkers** by leveraging new technology and applications designed to improve child welfare experiences.
- X** **Expand Court-Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) coverage statewide** to allow all children in the court system to have access to that resource. This expansion could begin by ensuring access in Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties.
- X** **Create an enhanced child care support system for relative caregivers and other families in the foster care system.**