

# New Mexico Kids at the Crossroads

## *A Children's Agenda for Making KIDS COUNT with Candidates*



**T**here's a reason we call it the Land of Enchantment—everything from our colorful traditions to our diverse cultures and breath-taking landscapes makes New Mexico so special.

But even the most spectacular traditions, cultures, and landscapes can't make growing up in New Mexico enchanting for children who don't have the opportunities they need to thrive. With the highest rate of child poverty in the nation, New Mexico is not providing the opportunities our children need to succeed. And if the future isn't bright for our children, it's not bright for our state.

But the good news is that we know what works. We have the power to improve opportunities for New Mexico's kids in a very big way, and we can do it through public policy.

Elections put New Mexico at a crossroads. Will candidates adopt policies that keep us on the current course or will they opt for a path that will lead us to prosperity?

Prosperity is not possible without investments. The best investments we can make are those that build up our people. Investments in people lead to a skilled, educated, and productive workforce, which is essential to a stable business landscape and a strong New Mexico economy.

What follows are recommendations for investments that will put our people first. Fundamental to all of these recommendations is a fair, responsible, and transparent tax system that generates sufficient revenues to support programs and services that can ensure that all New Mexico kids have the opportunity to thrive and succeed.



## Economic Well-Being

**C**hildren do best when their families have the economic security that comes from having good jobs that pay family-sustaining wages. When there are simply not enough of those jobs to go around or when families fall on hard times, policy-makers can enhance economic security for hard-working families with work supports that help provide the opportunities that children need to thrive. To best support economic well-being for New Mexico's children, policy-makers can:

- Increase the Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC) and the Low Income Comprehensive Tax Credit (LICTR).
- Enact a new state-level Child Tax Credit (CTC) for families with children.
- Immediately increase the minimum wage to at least \$10 an hour, rising to \$12 an hour by 2022.

- Immediately restore child care assistance to the previous eligibility level so more low-wage working parents can afford safe care for their kids.<sup>1</sup> Within two years, increase eligibility even more to help working parents who still struggle with child care costs.<sup>2</sup>
- Simplify enrollment and recertification processes for family supports including Medicaid, the supplemental nutrition assistance program (SNAP), and child care assistance, as well as enact express-lane eligibility to reduce duplication of paperwork.
- Enroll all eligible families in Medicaid, SNAP, and child care assistance and increase participation in other work supports.
- Reject cost-sharing measures and reductions in benefits or income eligibility for Medicaid.
- Support a maximum APR of 36% on all small loans, and empower the Regulation and Licensing Department to end predatory lending practices in payday, car title, and tax refund loans, and pawn and rent-to-own schemes.
- Support low-income housing and enact a comprehensive plan to reduce homelessness.
- Support increased low-income home energy assistance (LIHEAP) funding.

## Education

**T**he most effective path out of poverty is education. But when children from low-resource families start school already behind, they are unlikely to catch up. High-quality early care and learning programs are proven to help prepare children for success in school and in life. Policy-makers should ensure equitable access to an affordable and high-quality cradle-to-career system of care and education for all of New Mexico’s kids. To best support education for New Mexico’s children, they can:

- Significantly increase funding to achieve universal voluntary parent coaching, child care assistance, and pre-kindergarten as part of a comprehensive pre-school early care and learning continuum.
  - Support a constitutional amendment to use a fraction of the Land Grant Permanent Fund for early education.
  - Significantly increase K-12 per-pupil funding and compensation for teachers and support staff.
  - Ensure that schools whose students have the highest needs receive the most funding by increasing the at-risk factor in New Mexico’s education funding formula.
  - Support evidence-based methods for closing achievement gaps at all stages of education.
  - Increase funding for youth mentoring and after-school programs.
  - Expand community schools and other wrap-around strategies and programs that help families and kids.
  - Increase funding for bilingual education to assure that all children have access.
- Restore the College Affordability Fund so it can support at least \$2 million in distributions per year.
  - Make the lottery scholarship need-based.
  - Expand access to education for adults, including high school equivalency programs, service learning opportunities, career pathways for disconnected youth, adult basic education, and English-as-a-second-language (ESL) programs.




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1. Those earning up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level, or \$41,560 for a family of three.  
 2. Those earning up to 250 percent of the federal poverty level, or \$51,950 for a family of three.

# Health

A person's health should not depend on their racial or ethnic heritage or what zip code they live in, but too often it does. Americans value the ideas of equality that are enshrined in our Constitution but, despite the gains made toward universal health coverage, we are still a long way from true health equity. Policy-makers should ensure that all New Mexico children and families have access to a comprehensive and high-quality system of health care coverage and wellness resources, and that all New Mexicans live and thrive in safe and supportive communities. To best support health for New Mexico's children, they can:

- Support full implementation of all provisions of the Affordable Care Act to improve access and achieve health equity.
- Support full-funding of Medicaid for all eligible New Mexicans and oppose barriers to access such as cost-sharing premiums and co-pays for most Medicaid recipients.<sup>3</sup>
- Re-open the school-based health care centers that were forced to close due to spending cuts and support the creation of more school-based health centers.
- Support a rebuilding of New Mexico's behavioral health system with a special emphasis on access to substance abuse treatment programs.
- Support treatment instead of incarceration for non-violent drug offenders.
- Develop and fund a plan to end the Medicaid waiting list for those with developmental disabilities.
- Support common-sense gun safety legislation, including universal background checks and allowing a judge to prohibit those accused of domestic violence from possessing firearms.
- Increase funding for child and teen suicide prevention, tobacco-use prevention, teen pregnancy prevention, and alcohol and drug prevention programs.
- Support strategies to move rapidly toward more wind and solar energy, and strategies to reduce harmful emissions from other energy sources.

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3. Those earning less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level, or \$41,560 for a family of three.



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New Mexico Voices for Children

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