

# Healthy Children and Families

## Aspiration

The people of Illinois are our state's greatest strength and we must invest in the health and well-being of every Illinoisan to reach our greatest potential. We must remove barriers so every child, individual, family, and community in Illinois has access to the tools of health and opportunity that allow them to thrive. We must create and expand equitable, inclusive health systems that eliminate racial and economic disparities across Illinois. And we must recognize mental, emotional, and behavioral health as inseparable from physical well-being and essential to a healthy, productive society.

Children, individuals, and communities thrive when they have access to the tools they need to build healthy foundations. Illinois has a strong history of partnering with community-based agencies that meet children, individuals, and families where they are to help them build healthy lives. However, a number of barriers, including systemic disinvestment, have left some communities without essential building blocks of healthy foundations.

## Illinois Today

Years of late payments and non-payments and low service reimbursement rates stemming from the state's budget impasse and fiscal challenges harmed our children, families and communities by weakening our network of human service providers, many of whom were forced to lay off staff or shut their doors. Illinois' child welfare system has been long plagued with a lack of continuity in leadership and inadequate state investment, causing insufficient prevention, intervention, and placement services for children and families involved in or at risk for involvement in the foster care system. As a state, Illinois has lagged behind others in supporting non-institutional care and community-based solutions that give seniors and people with disabilities the tools they need to live integrated, independent lives.

A lack of centralized leadership in the executive branch for the departments and agencies serving children, individuals and families has resulted in a lack of collaboration and strategic vision, and has added to ineffective relationships between state agencies, community-based providers, and the populations they serve.

Opportunity exists to rebuild both the infrastructure for healthy foundations, as well as trust and respect between the state, communities, and providers. Illinois should take steps to ensure every child, individual, and family has access to stable resources that are the foundation of healthy lives.

Health systems present another challenge to the incoming administration, but with those challenges comes great opportunity to meet the health care needs of the entire state. Health care is a right, not a privilege, and Illinois came closer to ensuring that right for everyone with the passage of the Affordable Care Act and its Medicaid expansion option. Before the ACA, 14.5% of Illinoisans were uninsured.<sup>1</sup> After ACA implementation, the uninsured population of Illinois shrunk to 7.5%.<sup>2</sup> But that trend has reversed

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.kff.org/uninsured/fact-sheet/key-facts-about-the-uninsured-population/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.kff.org/uninsured/fact-sheet/key-facts-about-the-uninsured-population/>

during recent attacks on the ACA, and between 2016 and 2017, 37,000 fewer Illinoisans were enrolled in health insurance.<sup>3</sup>

Inefficiencies and failures in the state's Medicaid system have led to an 8.1% drop in Medicaid enrollment<sup>4</sup> since 2015, including a reduction in the number of children enrolled. Enrollment declines are the result, in part, of delays from increased hurdles enrollees face because of the added barriers of new verification procedures for application and redetermination processing. Failure to enroll and re-enroll people in a timely manner has created a cycle of "churn" in enrollment, leaving thousands of people without insurance for months at a time. In addition, low reimbursement rates and confusion during the transition to managed care threaten the stability of provider organizations and reduce the number of medical professionals available to serve patients with Medicaid coverage. Underinvestment in community-based health providers has added to the lack of stability in care for individuals, including those with complex medical needs, including substance use, addictions, and mental health challenges.

Affordable health insurance is key to ensuring people—including those with pre-existing conditions—receive the health care they need without going into debt from medical bills. Illinois has the opportunity to stabilize health systems to ensure every Illinoisan has affordable, accessible and comprehensive health care that meets their individual health needs. By ensuring that health systems are designed to eliminate racial and economic disparities with a full continuum of care, parity, innovation and accountability, we can meet the evolving health care needs of the people of Illinois.

## **Path Forward**

Despite significant challenges, Illinois has a renewed opportunity to establish quality, accessible, person-centered health systems for children, individuals, and families across the state. We can rebuild systems to eliminate disparities and increase access to affordable health care and preventative services. This starts with policy and process changes along with innovative approaches to service delivery that focus on eliminating barriers to health and opportunity for children, individuals, and families. Eliminating obstacles in data sharing across health systems and human services will lead to better policy decisions and coordination.

We must also foster and nurture partnerships with our communities, providers and the private sector. Communities impacted by policy decisions should be included in the process, and we should prioritize listening to varied perspectives and ideas to ensure voices across the state are heard as we develop solutions help build strong foundations for all Illinoisans.

- 1. The new administration should break down racial and economic barriers to ensure every child, individual, family and community has the tools they need to build healthy lives, so all Illinoisans may reach their full potential.**

The new administration should provide a centralized strategic vision that utilizes a racial equity lens to improve health systems and healthy foundations. The state should prioritize investment in community-

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.kff.org/uninsured/fact-sheet/key-facts-about-the-uninsured-population/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.civicfed.org/iifs/blog/illinois-medicaid-enrollment-continues-drop-2018>

based prevention and intervention services that seek to eliminate racial and economic disparities and provide children, youth, families, seniors, returning citizens, people with disabilities, refugees, and immigrants with strong foundations to build healthy lives. A person's health and well-being are influenced by the conditions present where they live, go to school, and work. Those conditions, called social determinants of health, include factors like education, nutrition, housing, employment, and economic stability.

Across agencies that serve children, individuals, and families, the new administration should prioritize improving the equity of social determinants of health in communities to improve health and well-being outcomes for all Illinoisans. The state should maximize and strengthen programs that utilize state and federal funds to eliminate poverty, health disparities, and hunger. To improve the well-being of all Illinoisans the state should make strategic investments in housing and homelessness prevention. The new administration should work to remove barriers and make housing safe, healthy, accessible, affordable, and stable for every Illinoisan regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, age, returning citizen status, criminal record, disability status, immigrant status, family status, source of income, employment status, or sexual orientation. One way to create affordable housing and modernize state and community facilities is to include those infrastructure improvements in a capital bill.

The new administration should commit to strengthening, rebuilding, and stabilizing the health and human services workforce in Illinois within state government, and for human service provider agencies statewide. Following years of instability, trust needs to be rebuilt between the state, agencies, providers, and communities. Within state agencies, the new administration should prioritize cultivating a workforce with policy expertise in and knowledge about the program areas they administer. Breaking down silos and establishing central policy oversight in the new administration will provide a shared vision of success and allow agencies and providers to coordinate services.

In communities, the new administration should partner with human service providers to create policies that help them attract, train, and retain skilled, quality workers. That means increasing reimbursement rates so providers can pay workers living wages, and increasing opportunities for training and professional development.

The administration should implement inclusive, transparent and accountable long-term fiscal planning between state agencies and providers, like long-term contracts or multi-year budgeting, to promote predictability, stability and effectiveness. Ensuring human service providers receive regular and reliable payments for services, and working with them to renew contracts, will help them stabilize their internal workforces and improve their ability to serve populations.

**2. The new administration should eliminate health disparities by increasing access to affordable health care and preventive services, including mental health and substance use treatment, in every community across Illinois.**

To achieve this goal, the state can work to improve existing systems to give more people access to health care. The state can improve Medicaid access, quality, and service delivery by increasing oversight, transparency, outcome reporting, and enforcement of Managed Care Organization (MCO) contracts. To allow for growth in access to care across specialties in all areas of the state and ensure a sustainable network, the state can increase Medicaid reimbursement rates across all services. Improved care

coordination between providers and MCOs will improve patient outcomes and increase efficiencies. For Illinoisans who use Medicaid as their health insurance provider, the state can ensure continuity of care by improving determination and redetermination processes to prevent children and individuals from getting kicked out of coverage.

The new administration should prioritize breaking down the stigmas around mental health and ensure health treatment for the brain is treated the same as health treatment for the body. In addition to enforcing existing mental health parity laws, the new administration should require health insurance companies to cover treatment aimed at early intervention for serious mental illnesses that reduce long-term costs for mental health treatments and connect patients with the care they need. By investing in and expanding access to integrated, community-based services, improving the service array in communities, and embracing innovative solutions like telehealth, individuals receive the right care, at the right time, in the right venue of care. To ensure continuity of care, the administration should prioritize stable housing for people who are in recovery. Encouraging better coordination among behavioral health, mental health, substance use, addiction programs, and other human services will also improve patient outcomes and increase efficiencies across sectors.

In the long-term, the new administration should be bold in exploring a Medicaid buy-in option to bring down consumer costs and move towards a system of universal healthcare. Allowing higher-income Illinoisans to enroll in Medicaid through a buy-in program provides opportunity to control insurance costs, stabilize health insurance markets and provide consumers with more coverage options. The new administration should also explore federal Medicaid match opportunities we are not currently leveraging to connect more people with the individualized, community-based care they need.

In the short term, the new administration should protect Illinoisans from impacts of a weakened ACA by improving state law to protect consumers. The state can stabilize the health insurance marketplace by investing state funds in community-based navigators to conduct outreach, public education and enrollment assistance about the availability of comprehensive and affordable plans offered through the Marketplace and Medicaid.

To protect people with pre-existing conditions, the new administration can prevent health insurance companies from varying premiums within a geographic area based on age, gender, health status, or other factors, and can prohibit discrimination based on pre-existing conditions in state law. The state can also take steps to protect health insurance consumers by enforcing protections for people with pre-existing conditions by implementing the new Short-Term Limited Duration Health Insurance Coverage Act ([SB 1737/ PA 100-1118](#)) to begin to regulate junk plans in IL and to educate consumers about them. In addition, the administration can regulate so-called “association health plans” and “health care sharing ministries” that limit access to comprehensive health care to ensure consumers are receiving a product that allows them to access the health care they need.

### **3. The new administration should stabilize and transform prevention and intervention services for children and families to better support families and care for children and youth.**

The new administration should prioritize effective reform of the child welfare system. They should establish new department leadership that recognizes the challenges and historical shortcomings that must be overcome, and has a strategic vision for improvement. To resolve the current crisis in the child

welfare system, the administration should readily and willingly work with new court appointed special master overseeing the BH consent decree to ensure Illinois is keeping children and youth safe and stable where there are allegations of abuse or neglect. In the short term, the new administration should remediate current inappropriate placements of children and youth.

The administration should prioritize the proper collaborative planning and implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) to support prevention and stability, and to promote permanency in placement. Proper implementation will allow the state to provide additional, needed preventative services to children and families who are at risk of entering the child welfare system. Moving forward, the state should value interdepartmental-and-agency collaboration to ensure children, youth, and families are receiving coordinated support. Coordinated support will ensure children, youth, and families who need intervention are identified, protected, strengthened, and supported.

The new administration should create a plan to effectively utilize state and federal funds to provide enhanced trauma-informed support to prevent placement of children and youth into the foster care system. To reduce the likelihood that youth will be involved in the child welfare or juvenile justice systems, the administration should invest in prevention and positive youth development and support services. Permanency for children in care should be a priority, and the administration should ensure children and youth receive appropriate, supportive placement when placement is necessary.