



# The Head Start Policy Agenda

## NHSA's 2021-22 Federal Policy Positions

The national [Head Start Policy Agenda](#) serves as the guiding document for the National Head Start Association's government affairs-related efforts. Based on the needs and feedback of the Head Start community, the agenda provides a roadmap for NHSA's policy engagement and informs advocacy for changes in current law, regulation, and practice. These recommendations are pursued independently and collectively, and importantly, their implementation requires great intentionality and should be pursued in consultation with local Head Start practitioners and Head Start families.

The agenda includes an overview of Head Start's positions and priorities on policies affecting at-risk children and their families, including legislative and regulatory policy at the federal and state levels. Then, covering a range of topics, the agenda shares recommendations that represent the Head Start community's priorities.

## The Guiding Principles Behind the Agenda

1. We aim to **strengthen the Head Start model** of support for the whole child, the family, and the community, including ensuring comprehensive support of children, families, and programs as they recover from the effects of COVID-19.
2. We must **maximize federal and state support** for Head Start in order to secure resources to meet COVID-19 costs and recovery, invest in the Head Start workforce and infrastructure, and strengthen quality.
3. We commit to working to **expand access to Head Start** for the nation's at-risk children and families, including pregnant women, infants, and toddlers.
4. We will leverage Head Start and Early Head Start to support individuals, communities, and our country in the **fight against racism and for equity**, including through greater measurement, accountability, and intentionality.
5. We recognize the urgent need to comprehensively and **equitably address Head Start's workforce crisis** in a way that values experience and generates greater interest in early childhood professions.
6. We prioritize a focus on strengthening Head Start programs to **support the mental health and wellbeing of children, families, and staff**.
7. We seek to **simplify administrative procedures** to best support Head Start programs in providing efficient, high-quality services.
8. We **encourage collaboration** between Head Start and local education, health, and social service providers to comprehensively support children and families.

## Prioritizing Equity

In addressing how to elevate Head Start's role as a tool for shaping a more equitable future for children and families across the United States, these recommendations are informed by the fact that inequities and systemic racism pervade every aspect of society.

As a result, recommendations addressing how Head Start can build equity and what policies will support this work are interwoven through all sections of the agenda.

## National Head Start Policy Agenda Highlights

The agenda covers topics ranging from funding to health to infrastructure to several other areas that affect Head Start children and families. Each topic includes recommendations intended for Congress and the federal administration. Here are a few examples of recommendations:

### Funding

- The U.S. Congress and President Biden should ensure that any COVID-19 relief signed into law includes the funding necessary for Head Start and Early Head Start programs to **address the costs acutely attributable to COVID-19** (20% of program funding since March 2020).
- The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) and the Office of Head Start (OHS) should **provide guidance on braiding/blending funding** across multiple funding streams to encourage more socioeconomically diverse classes.

### Workforce

- The U.S. Congress and President Biden should mitigate the growing workforce crisis through including substantial and sustained investment for local programs to **improve salaries**.
- The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) and the Office of Head Start (OHS) should assess and inform improvements to the current **Child Development Associate (CDA) credential**.

### Infrastructure

- The U.S. Congress and President Biden should **address the technology gap**, including hardware, software, and connectivity deficits, that pervades education and compromises children's ability to participate in virtual education.

### Program Operation

- The U.S. Congress and President Biden should amend *the Head Start Act* to provide for the seamless operation and administration of programs in the form of **prenatal-to-age five (PN-5) Head Start grants**.

## Eligibility

- The U.S. Congress and President Biden should **expand the use of categorical eligibility** to ensure that families who stand to benefit most in each community—for example, children in kinship care, children of veterans, those living on tribal reservations, and refugee children—have access to Head Start.
- The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) and the Office of Head Start (OHS) should maximize to the greatest extent the eligibility that falls under the **“public assistance” provisions of eligibility** in the Head Start Program Performance Standards §1302.12(c)(1)(ii).

## Health

- The U.S. Congress and President Biden should take action to increase the availability of qualified infant and early childhood **mental health consultants** in all communities, including rural and frontier communities.
- The U.S. Congress and President Biden should **maintain telehealth flexibilities** that were established in response to COVID-19 and explore further expansion of flexibilities based on new information made available through increased utilization during COVID-19.

## Quality Improvement and Accountability

- The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) and the Office of Head Start (OHS) should use monitoring data to identify and **disseminate information on high-performers**, including grantees with significant growth or improvement, and make such information easily accessible to Head Start practitioners.

*These examples are a small selection of the many recommendations. You can access the agenda in its entirety [here](#). For further exploration of these recommendations or for questions, please contact [Advocacy@nhsa.org](mailto:Advocacy@nhsa.org).*

## Dollar per Child Makes NHSA's Advocacy Work Possible

Making Head Start part of the COVID-19 relief response... lobbying Congress for more funding for programs... influencing public opinion through the media. Every day, in different ways, the Dollar per Child campaign enables NHSA to achieve Head Start's advocacy goals.

Contribute to keep the momentum going!

