

2021 Legislative Agenda

Iowa faces an unprecedented challenge from the COVID-19 pandemic. The level of challenge demands an unprecedented response. Here are specific legislative proposals that lawmakers should adopt to meet the challenge.

COVID-19 relief and recovery

The goal: Iowa manages the public health and economic crisis by promoting rapid recovery and long-term growth and opportunity.

Target aid, including federal COVID relief funds, to those most in need due to the public health and economic crises and to preserve public services.

Child care

The goal: Every working family can find and afford quality child care they need to get ahead.

Increase the child care assistance entry family eligibility level to 185 percent of the federal poverty level. Parents, stretched, need support so they can go to work or school while their children attend quality child care.

Increase provider pay to rates that reflect the actual costs of quality care by raising CCA reimbursement to the federal standard, 75th percentile of current market rate, and investing in the WAGE\$ program. These strategies will allow providers to offer more slots, offer families choice of providers and help providers themselves earn a living wage and advance in the field.

Enact tax credits and public/private partnerships only on top of — not in place of — improving child care assistance. CCA is the backbone of our state's child care system and the first, best way to assure the families struggling most to afford care can do so, no matter where they live or work.

Policymaking tied to racial equity

The goal: Our public systems break down structural barriers that have limited the prospects of families of color for generations, allowing our state the full access to everyone's skills and talents we need to prosper.

Direct the Legislative Services Agency to conduct racial equity impact analysis of proposed legislation as part of fiscal notes. By assessing the impacts of policy on different racial and ethnic groups, we hold ourselves accountable for dismantling barriers and making sure we offer every Iowan the path to opportunity.

Safety net

The goal: Every Iowa family can access material and financial supports in times of crisis to avoid hardships and stabilize their households.

Reject bureaucratic barriers that take food, health care and basic support from Iowans, including work reporting requirements and repeated eligibility verification checks. Such strategies do not promote work but set up administrative hurdles that make it harder for Iowans to stay healthy, put food on the table and support their families.

Simplify application and re-enrollment processes so eligible families can receive assistance without barriers. The state should extend flexibilities in application processes made available during COVID-19 and make information more accessible to families without computer access and those whose primary language is not English.

Health

The goal: Every Iowan can get the health services they need to get and stay healthy.

Extend Medicaid eligibility for pregnant women from 60-days postpartum to 12-months postpartum. By assuring continuity of care during an extremely vulnerable time, such a move will improve the health of new mothers – and set their children on a healthy trajectory.

Sustainably and equitably fund a Children’s Mental Health System accessible to every child regardless of zip code, race or income. Every family should know where to turn for help and have the same array of core services, including prevention and early intervention services (like the 1st Five Healthy Mental Development Initiative).

Early childhood

The goal: Our communities offer supports for our youngest children and their families that help them establish a solid foundation.

Fund a new staff position in Early Childhood Iowa to help local areas implement ECI’s equity guiding principles and assess community needs using disaggregated data. ECI is uniquely positioned to meet local needs for services for infants, toddlers and preschoolers.

Taxes

The goal: Iowa equitably raises the revenue we need to support strong public structures and services and funds a budget that reflects Iowa values.

Reject any changes to our tax system that reduce the revenue required to meet community needs or perpetuate or worsen inequality. Right now middle- and low-income Iowa families pay a higher share of their income in state and local taxes than wealthy families and we generate insufficient revenue to fund public priorities, shortchanging our future.

Common Good Iowa is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization built on a collective 50 years of experience of two respected Iowa organizations — the Child and Family Policy Center and Iowa Policy Project. Common Good Iowa informs smart policy-making to turn Iowa values into concrete solutions that advance opportunity for all Iowans.

PK-12 and higher education

The goal: Every Iowa student has access to strong public schools that set them up for success in work and life.

Increase the cost per pupil in the supplemental school aid formula by at least 3 percent. After years of funding that failed to even keep up with inflation, Iowa schools were already stretched; now they face extraordinary challenges helping students who have missed schooling and experienced family stress due to COVID catch up.

Increase funding for Statewide Voluntary Preschool to compensate for reduced enrollment during 2020-21 due to COVID-19 so no child misses out on early learning.

Reject schemes that divert state or local funds from local school districts to private schools, including “education savings grants” and similar voucher-style programs, and reduce, or at a minimum hold level, spending on the School Tuition Organization tax credit.

Increase funding for community colleges and Regents universities to buck long-term trend toward students and their families having to pay more in tuition and fees — and take on debt.

Wages and workplace protection

The goal: Every Iowan has an opportunity to thrive in the state’s economy.

Increase the minimum wage to \$15. Iowa’s minimum wage has been held at \$7.25 since January 2008. An increase to even \$12 has been estimated to benefit more than 400,000 Iowa workers, plus their family members, in turn benefitting local economies.

Expand enforcement capacity in the Department of Labor to increase worker safety, particularly for essential workers most at risk due to COVID, and crack down on wage theft. Wage theft is an estimated \$600 million problem in Iowa, driven by misclassification of workers, forced and unpaid overtime, and other illegal practices.