

# ISSUE BRIEF: THE CASE FOR A CROSS-AGENCY PRIORITY (CAP) ON CHILD WELL-BEING



## The Challenge

The American people expect government policy to [advance the best interests of children](#). Yet, the data shows that U.S. policy lacks the high-level coordination, well-defined indicators, and evaluation mechanisms to advance children's safety, health, and development. According to a UNICEF report card of the world's wealthiest countries, the [U.S. performs lower](#) than most similarly situated countries on various child well-being indicators, including poverty, healthcare accessibility, nutrition, and education. A recent report found that the COVID-19 pandemic [undermined years of progress in child well-being](#) globally and instead exacerbated child poverty, violence, sexual abuse, and exploitation. Children, particularly in marginalized populations, suffer all these harms disproportionately due to systemic inequities and discrimination.

## The Opportunity

Cross agency priorities (CAPs) are long-term, outcome-oriented goals that cover a limited number of cross-cutting policy areas, which the government defines as requiring active [collaboration among multiple agencies](#). Under the legislation that created CAPs, agencies must also develop strategic plans to describe how their goals and objectives contribute to the CAPs and [how agencies will better coordinate to meet their priorities](#).

In November 2017, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued a [67-page report](#) recommending the creation of a cross agency priority (CAP) for child well-being, given research that it was an area of government that required increased coordination. The report, based on consultation with a wide array of experts, found that improving child well-being "requires attention to a multiplicity of interrelated factors that can contribute to child well-being and the role that families, communities, governmental and nongovernmental organizations play in caring for these children."

In a more recent [report](#), GAO reiterated its recommendation to create a CAP goal to improve child well-being "to better address the needs of children in ways that take into account the interrelatedness of federal actions, policies, that aim to improve child well-being." A CAP goal on improving child well-being would increase the efficacy of government policy for children through shared indicators, improving quality and use of data, and evaluation mechanisms.

## The Goal

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) should establish a mission-focused CAP goal on improving child well-being. Through this goal, the government can:

- Identify and/or elevate a common set of program goals, metrics and outcomes for children and youth that could be applied across federal programs and identify resources to support implementation
- Conduct a child well-being assessment of government policies, programs, and budget decisions – including an analysis of the share of federal spending on children – based on these shared goals and metrics

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- Eliminate barriers to better alignment across federal programs that serve children, youth and their families
- Issue guidance, provide Technical Assistance, disseminate best practices and implement waivers to federal awardees regarding how to legally share data across sectors and integrate funding from federal programs serving children, youth and their families.
- Design and implement modernized data reporting and analytics, including disaggregation of data by age, to generate useful information to help federal, state, and local decision-makers improve program policies and implementation
- Create forums for engaging community leaders and other outside experts, including children and youth, to devise innovative, coordinated solutions to align efforts to improve outcomes for children, youth, and families

OMB should ensure that all agencies integrate child well-being indicators, data, and evaluation mechanisms into their strategic plans, goals, and objectives including through engaging with coordinating entities such as the [Children's Interagency Coordinating Council](#).

### **The Outcome**

A CAP goal on child well-being would ensure that all government policy, including investment decisions, maximize its potential to improve all aspects of children's lives. Through better coordination and clear indicators, a CAP goal would also advance equity in government policy by bringing children to the forefront and ensuring consideration for children who face additional barriers of systemic inequities and discrimination. Helping children thrive now and in the future will advance trust in the U.S. government, both at home and abroad.