



The Kid Angle

Kid-focused news from First Focus on Children

Kids have gone from crossroads to crisis November 16, 2023

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As the COVID-19 pandemic waned, the U.S. had an opportunity to permanently elevate the way we treat kids. Creative solutions to the lockdown's economic and other challenges [lifted millions of children out of poverty](#), kept children insured, and stabilized the country's long-faltering child care system.

For a hot second, it looked like we might — possibly, maybe — think about giving children the same rights and privileges we give seniors, wealthy Americans, middle-class taxpayers and all of the country's other voters. Alas.

We have allowed children to go from that crossroads to a crisis.

By allowing the expiration of funding for food, education, child care, [health care](#), rent and the [overwhelming expenses associated with raising a child](#), Congress exercised benign neglect. By specifically singling out children for the deepest cuts in those very same areas — [by deliberately targeting them in current appropriations bills](#) — lawmakers might be guilty of actual abuse.

Here are some of the facts:

- [Infant mortality, already higher than in other wealthy nations, has increased for the first time in two decades](#): The overall U.S. infant mortality rate rose by 3% from 2021 to 2022. Infant deaths due to maternal complications shot up by 8%, [indicating a lack of appropriate care for pregnant women and new mothers](#). As is often the case, these rates were higher for babies and moms of color.

Meanwhile, lawmakers propose deep cuts to food subsidies for newborns and their moms: The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) already [reaches only half of the babies and moms who are eligible](#). Without full funding (\$7.7 billion), the program will have to waitlist 600,000 toddlers and pre-schoolers. In addition, current funding proposals slash the fruit and vegetable benefit by [56% for children](#).

- **Deaths among children and teens increased by 20% between 2019 and 2021, the largest increase in 50 years:** These figures follow a [previous study](#) that found U.S. children had a 70% greater chance of dying in childhood than kids born in other wealthy countries. **Notable:** The mental health crisis ravaging our kids has helped make [suicide the second leading cause of childhood death](#). Firearms are the first. **Sidenote:** [Global vaccination rates for children have fallen to 2008 levels](#), with long-forgotten diseases including [measles](#) and [polio surging](#) in the United States for the first time in decades.

Meanwhile, at least [2 million children have lost Medicaid coverage this year](#) — many of whom are actually still eligible – and experts predict this figure will soon rise to 3 million: The figures likely are a significant undercount. And the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), which covers children whose families make too much to qualify for Medicaid but not enough to afford private insurance, [remains the only federal health insurance program that regularly expires](#). [These two programs cover more than half of all U.S. children](#).

- **U.S. students are struggling through learning loss, increased inequity, [prioritization of adults over children](#), a mental health crisis and a movement to eradicate public education.**

Meanwhile, lawmakers propose a [29% cut in Department of Education](#) funding and an [80% cut in the program that ensures schools with high proportions of low-income students](#) receive the resources they need.

- **The crisis in early childhood care and education [forces roughly 100,000 Americans \(mostly moms\) to stay home from work each month](#), costing the U.S. economy \$122 billion each year.**

Meanwhile, lawmakers would extract \$750 million in cuts from Head Start, which would cost [80,000 children and their families access](#) to the vital early learning and wrap-around services provided by the program. Analysts and advocates, including First Focus on Children, estimate that the U.S. child care system needs a \$16 billion infusion just to keep from failing. The United States already [invests fewer public dollars in early childhood education and care relative to Gross Domestic Product \(GDP\) than almost all other developed nations](#), ranking 35th out of 37 countries tracked by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

- **Children are bearing the brunt of the world’s political dysfunction in the [Middle East](#), [Sudan](#), [Ukraine](#), and elsewhere.**

Meanwhile, political infighting in the U.S. has delayed [more than \\$1 billion in funding for the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief \(PEPFAR\)](#) and [allowed its 10% set aside for orphans and vulnerable children to expire](#).

At a bare minimum, lawmakers must use the current government funding negotiations to stabilize our early learning system with a \$16 billion infusion and to deliver the benefits of the Child Tax Credit to the nation’s poorest children.

Our children are experiencing a crisis. We need to treat it like one.



Photo by [Markus Spiske](#) on [Unsplash](#)

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