



**September 27, 2021**

**experience negative health outcomes, but also raise children who will start their lives already at a disadvantage**

**The U.S. Census Bureau recently reported the poverty rate dropped from 11.8 percent in 2019 to 9.1 percent in 2020, reflecting the impact of the aid included in COVID relief bills.<sup>iii</sup> These actions lifted 85 million people out of poverty, demonstrating that anti-poverty policies can have a profound and nearly real-time impact on American families**

**We have also seen the impact of policies that have not supported families during the pandemic. The lack of a national paid leave policy meant that vulnerable, yet essential workers faced the impossible choice of staying home and losing pay or going to work sick.<sup>iv</sup> Their inability to take time off when sick, especially with COVID-19, not only threatens public health, but also**

challenged national efforts to combat COVID-19, which has, in turn, impacted routine vaccination rates. Supporting hospitals in developing capacity and strengthening the workforce pipeline, along with investments to increase vaccine confidence and strengthen vaccine programs for children, are critical.

To this end, Nemours Children's urges inclusion of the following policies in the final reconciliation package:

**Funding for hospital infrastructure to increase capacity and update hospitals and other medical facilities**

**Funding for the Children's Hospital Graduate Medical Education Program to support the pediatric workforce pipeline**

**Funding to strengthen vaccine confidence, strengthen routinely recommended vaccine programs, and improve vaccination rates**

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As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, children have experienced distress from changes in their routines, breaks in the continuity of learning and healthcare, missed life events, and an overall loss of security and safety.<sup>xi</sup> Mental health-related emergency room (ER) visits have increased nationally by nearly 25% for children age 5-11 and by over 30% for those 12-17 years.<sup>xii</sup> Nemours Children's Hospital, Delaware, the only pediatric Level 1 Trauma Center in the state, expects to end 2021 with more than a 35 percent annual increase in the number of ER visits for children primarily reporting suicidality and intentional harm compared to 2020.

Nemours Children's urges inclusion of the following policies in the final reconciliation package:

**Funding for community-based infrastructure for awards to qualified teaching health centers, behavioral healthcare centers and pediatric mental healthcare providers. We urge inclusion of children's hospitals and pediatricians among the eligible recipients for these critical funds.**

**Funding to reduce community violence and trauma, in addition to support for the National Child Traumatic Stress Network.**

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Early care and education (ECE) settings, such as child care centers, Head Start, pre-kindergarten, and family child care homes, can support children's healthy development, providing children with food and nutrition supports and building socio-emotional skills.<sup>ix</sup> Substantial evidence has demonstrated that enrollment in quality early childhood programs is associated with higher academic achievement, reduced risky behaviors, better mental and physical health, and can also reduce achievement gaps between low- and higher-income children.<sup>vi, vii, ix</sup>

Access to high-quality child care is also an economic issue. One-third of the U.S. workforce, or an estimated 50 million workers, has a child under 14 in their household.<sup>xiii</sup> Child care programs



**day. There is now an opportunity to ensure our children are able to access these important programs**

**Nemours Children's urges inclusion of the following policies in the final reconciliation package**

**Enabling more schools to be eligible for the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), which allows schools to provide free and reduced price meals to all students and allowing states to implement CEP statewide**  
**Allowing states to conduct Medicaid direct certification**  
**Extending Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) nationwide for students who receive free or reduced price meals**

**The foundation for lifelong health begins with the health of the mother and is reinforced during critical developmental periods, especially early childhood and adolescence. The Build Back Better budget reconciliation package offers a pivotal opportunity to strengthen investments in our nation's children and ultimately put them on a healthy trajectory. We urge you to include the above provisions that will meaningfully impact children's long term health, well-being and economic security. If you have questions, please reach out to Daniela Gratale, Director of the Office of Child Health Policy and Advocacy, at 202-425-5805 or [daniela.gratale@nemours.org](mailto:daniela.gratale@nemours.org). Thank you for your attention to critical issues impacting children and families. Nemours Children's stands ready to assist you in advancing a shared goal of creating the healthiest generations of children.**

**Sincerely,**

**Kara Odom Walker, MD, MPH, MSHS  
Chief Population Health Officer  
Executive Vice President  
Nemours Children's Health**

