

INTERNAL

This background brief describes what is meant by “Cross-Agency Priority on Children” and is intended as an internal document for sharing knowledge and honing recommendations.

Create a Cross-Agency Priority (CAP) on Children

THE CHALLENGE

Americans expect government policy to [advance the best interests of children](#). Yet, the data show that U.S. policy lacks the high-level coordination, well-defined indicators, and evaluations mechanisms to advance children’s safety, health, and development. A recent report by UNICEF found that the COVID-19 pandemic has [undermined years of progress in child well-being](#) globally and exacerbated child poverty, violence, exploitation, and learning loss. Compounding the hardships caused by the pandemic, climate change is exposing most of the world’s children to greater hazards, shocks, and stresses that put their health and safety at risk.¹ Globally, an estimated 1 billion children – nearly half of the world’s children – “live in countries that are at an ‘extremely high-risk’ from the impacts of climate change.”² Children in marginalized populations, including girls, children with disabilities, and children from other historically disenfranchised groups, suffer all these harms disproportionately due to systemic inequities and discrimination.

Current US efforts to address the needs of children are fragmented at best. What is needed is a robust approach that supports young people (children and youth) across all sectors from early childhood, through adolescence, and into their youth.

THE OPPORTUNITY

In November 2017, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued a [67-page report](#) exploring conditions for children in the United States recommending the creation of a cross-agency priority (CAP) for child well-being, given research that it was an area where the U.S. government 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.” While focused on children domestically, the findings also apply to U.S. actions for children internationally.

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 and policies that aim to improve child well-being.” A CAP goal on improving child well-being would increase the efficacy of U.S. government policy for children across all U.S. government agencies through shared indicators, data, and evaluation mechanisms and would result in better outcomes for children in this country and internationally. Because the CAP goal would apply to all federal agencies, including State and USAID, the impact would extend to children overseas in the context of U.S. diplomacy and foreign assistance.

¹ The Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis:: Introducing the Children’s Climate Risk Index. New York: United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), 2021. <https://www.unicef.org/media/105376/file/UNICEF-climate-crisis-child-rights-crisis.pdf>. Page 5.

² Ibid. Page 6.

THE GOAL

The White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) establishes a mission-focused CAP goal on improving child well-being. This goal will:

- Create measurable improvements in child well-being through their life stages by improving coordination and creating shared definitions and indicators
- Elevate and mainstream the consideration of child well-being through their life stages in government policy to ensure that young people, including those traditionally marginalized based on disability, gender, race, or other areas, are not left behind.
- Increase trust in federal government programs by making available to the public information on the U.S. government action steps and progress in improving child well-being and also youth well-being globally.

THE STRATEGIES

Strategies to implement a CAP goal on improving child well-being and also youth well-being globally should include:

- Developing a unified definition of child well-being through their life stages, based on a common set of age specific indicators to be applied across federal policies and programs.
- Designing and implementing modernized data reporting and analytics to generate useful information to help federal – and where applicable state and local – decision-makers improve policies, policy implementation, programs, and funding allocations.
- Conducting a child well-being assessment and requiring child impact statements for government policies, programs, and budgets based on shared indicators of child well-being.
- Creating forums to engage community leaders and other outside experts including children and youth directly to design innovation, coordinate solutions, and align efforts to improve outcomes for children, youth, and families globally.

THE OUTCOME

A CAP goal on child well-being at home and abroad would ensure that all U.S. government policy across all agencies maximizes its potential to improve all aspects of children's lives through their growth stages, domestically and internationally. Through improved coordination and clear indicators, a CAP goal would also advance equity in government policy by bringing children and youth to the forefront and ensuring consideration for marginalized young people who face barriers of systemic inequities and discrimination. Helping children and youth, domestically and internationally, to thrive now and in the future will advance a multitude of goals that are in the U.S. national interest.

THE TEAM

The White House Office of Management and Budget would create the CAP and provide instructions to all agencies, including the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, Education, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Interior, Labor, Justice, State, Transportation, and Treasury, as well as the Agency for International Development and the Council of Economic Advisors.

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