

Three Ways the Legislature Should Empower Texas Parents This Session

Help parents find services for their children with complex mental health challenges.

Many Texas parents are desperately looking for mental health services for their children — but finding closed doors and long wait lists. Demand for the YES Waiver, for example, has grown by 43% since 2021, while the number of youth served has declined by 19% during the same period.¹ In some cases, parents are even turning their own kids over to the state’s troubled foster care system in a last-ditch effort to get them the mental health support they need.



The Legislature can help by increasing funding for the YES Waiver program to serve more children, adding key children’s mental health services to Medicaid coverage, continuing the Family First Pilots, and increasing access to services eligible for federal matching funds through the Family First Act.

For more information, contact Kate Murphy, Director of Child Protection Policy, at kmurphy@txchildren.org or Muna Javaid, Senior Policy Associate for Child Protection, at mjavaid@txchildren.org.

Ensure parents have high-quality child care options.

Parents deserve child care choices — whether they want their young children to be at home with family, in a neighbor’s home-based program, a faith-based program, or an accredited preschool. Unfortunately, many Texas parents do not have these options. Because of the high cost and limited availability of high-quality child care, parents are left with an impossible choice: pay for care they can’t afford, settle for care they don’t trust, or leave the workforce altogether.

The Texas Workforce Commission’s child care scholarship program has successfully given parents more options. With approximately 80,000 families on the waitlist at any given time, the Legislature should provide funding to move families off the waitlist and into a job.² In addition, the Legislature should support grants to address child care shortages (such as evening, weekend, and infant care) and offer child care scholarships to child care workers.

For more information, contact David Feigen, Director of Early Learning Policy, at dfeigen@txchildren.org.

Give parents information on kids’ health coverage options.

Almost half of Texas children who are going without health insurance are eligible for Medicaid and CHIP health coverage but not enrolled.³ One study showed that 49% of parents surveyed simply did not know that their child was eligible for Medicaid or CHIP health coverage.⁴ In other cases, parents attempt to sign up their children for coverage but encounter delays and other problems with the outdated technology in the state’s enrollment system.

The Legislature should pass HB 321/SB 238 to address this challenge. Under the bill, when families apply for SNAP nutrition assistance for children, the state will notify parents if their children are also eligible for health coverage and offer them an opportunity to enroll. The Legislature should also support HHSC’s budget request to overhaul outdated technology in the state’s Medicaid enrollment system.

For more information, contact Alec Mendoza, Senior Policy Associate for Health, at amendoza@txchildren.org.

¹ YES Waiver Inquiry List and Enrollment data provided by HHSC from FY 2018 - FY 2023. (On file with author.)

² Child Care by the Numbers (2024). Texas Workforce Commission. Retrieved at: <https://www.twc.texas.gov/datareports/child-care-numbers>.

³ Almost Half of Uninsured TX Kids are Eligible for Medicaid or CHIP (2024). Texans Care for Children. Retrieved at: <https://txchildren.org/report-almost-half-of-uninsured-tx-kids-are-eligible-for-medicaid-or-chip/>.

⁴ A cross-sectional study of parental awareness of and reasons for lack of health insurance among minority children, and the impact on health, access to care, and unmet needs (2016). G. Flores, et al. Retrieved at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4802608/>.