

Key Initiatives for Children in the Governor's 2019-21 Budget

One of the clearest themes of Governor Evers' 2019-21 budget bill is the importance of making Wisconsin stronger by investing in children, families and communities. Giving children the opportunity to thrive is not just a rhetorical device, it is a major focus of the bill's spending priorities.

This document summarizes some of the important investments in the Governor's budget that would make a big difference for children and families. Many of these items could help increase racial and ethnic equity across Wisconsin if they are implemented keeping equity in mind.

Health

- **Making health care more accessible and affordable for low-wage workers and their families** – The Governor recommends [expanding BadgerCare eligibility](#) to serve roughly 80,000 more adults. This expansion, which would lift the income eligibility ceiling for a single individual from \$12,490 per year to \$17,236 per year, would yield a net savings for state taxpayers of about \$160 million per year by qualifying our state for a large increase in federal funding. The change would help children because parents who enroll in BadgerCare are more likely to sign up their children and because it would relieve financial stress experienced by low-income parents struggling now to afford private insurance.
- **Creating a Healthy Women, Healthy Babies initiative** – The budget contains a new investment of \$28 million to [support maternal and infant health](#), specifically aimed at addressing racial disparities in infant and maternal health. This initiative includes funding to expand eligibility for postpartum health care to one year after a birth, establishes a Medicaid pilot to pay for doula services in several counties, and creates an Infant Mortality Prevention Program.
- **Reducing the risk of lead poisoning** – The budget includes several measures to protect children's health and brain development by funding lead abatement and increasing availability of treatment services for children who have been exposed to lead. The lead initiatives include funding for abatement services for eligible families, and expanding eligibility for treatment by decreasing the blood-lead level necessary to receive services under the Birth to 3 program.

Education

- **Substantially increasing school aids** – The Governor's budget [boosts state support for public schools](#) by about \$1.4 billion over the next two years. The increased aid includes \$611 million more for special education services, \$64 million more to reimburse public schools for mental health and school safety services, and \$44 million more for bilingual and bicultural services.
- **Enabling schools to spend more of the revenue they receive** – Current state law puts a cap on how much a school district can increase its spending from local property tax revenue and the state's general school aids, which means that state aid increases often have to be used for property tax relief rather than addressing education spending needs. The budget bill relaxes the

spending caps, which would give local school boards more discretion to use revenue increases where they decide the funding is needed most.

- **Improving access to quality, affordable early education** – To help address the shortage of child care providers participating in the Wisconsin Shares child care subsidy program, the bill provides an additional \$23 million per year to increase reimbursement rates so all providers are paid at least the median rate in the county. The bill also increases funding for child care quality improvement activities by \$1 million per year, with an emphasis on improvements in Milwaukee County.

Workforce Support

- **Providing tax relief for low-income households** – State actions over the last 8 years have increased taxes on many low-income Wisconsin households, while cutting taxes for everyone else. The Evers' budget would help reverse that inequity by increasing the state Earned Income Tax Credit for families with one or two children. It would also increase the income ceiling on eligibility for the Homestead tax credit (to \$30,000/yr.) to partially offset past reductions in the credit from inflation, and it would prospectively make annual adjustments for inflation in the credit amounts and income ceiling.
- **Reversing negative changes to Wisconsin Works (W-2) and other public assistance programs** – The Governor proposes to undo a number of changes that have hurt disadvantaged Wisconsin children and families by limiting access to public assistance. For example, the budget bill would once again set the lifetime limit for receiving W-2 benefits at 60 months, instead of the current 48-month limit; would remove the 24-month participation limit for community services jobs and transitional placement programs; and would extend the benefits for a caretaker of an infant to 12 weeks.

Juvenile Justice/Child Welfare

- **Returning 17-year-olds to the juvenile justice system** – The bill returns most 17-year-olds to the juvenile justice system, and it increases funding for counties to enable them to provide additional services and facilities for the youth who will be returned to the responsibility of local juvenile justice agencies.
- **Increasing Children and Family Aids and the Tribal Family Services funding** – The budget proposes a number of increases in state support for local programs related to child welfare, including an additional \$15 million per year for Children and Family Aids and about \$1 million more over two years for the state's support for Tribal Family Services.

Kids Forward has a vision of a Wisconsin where every child thrives, notably children and families of color and those furthest from opportunity. This list captures only a portion of the investments in children, families and communities that Governor Evers has proposed that will help us move forward towards that vision.

If you are interested in additional information about the Governor's budget proposal, please go to the [Wisconsin Budget Project](#) website for summaries of education, health care, immigrant communities, and other issues.