



Strengthening Families and Communities in L.A. County Through Public Policy Change

Adopted June 10, 2010 as part of First 5 LA's Strategic Plan (FY 2010 – 2015)

INTRODUCTION

To achieve lasting improvements in the lives of children, families and communities in Los Angeles County, First 5 LA must proactively seek public policy change. First 5 LA will use its unique role as an advocacy organization to build support for public policies that benefit children prenatal through age 5 and their families throughout Los Angeles County. Through collaboration with local experts, grantees, funding partners and the leadership of Commissioners, First 5 LA will contribute to positive societal change on behalf of children and families. This work will help build the foundation for sustainable improvements in outcomes for families and communities.

In 2010, First 5 LA began implementation of its new five-year strategic plan. This plan, “Strengthening Families and Communities in L.A. County,” focuses the Commission’s work on four goals:

- Children are born healthy
- Children maintain a healthy weight
- Children are safe from abuse and neglect
- Children are ready for kindergarten

To pursue these goals, the Commission will utilize a two-pronged approach, engaging in both place-based and countywide efforts to strengthen families and communities. Public policy is one of the Plan’s countywide strategies. First 5 LA has identified 10 public policy goals it will pursue over the next five years, and they are described in this brochure. To forward these goals, First 5 LA will bring a variety of tools: public policy development, issue education, advocacy, public policy grantmaking and collaboration. We hope to partner with others dedicated to improving the lives of children in these important efforts.



PROMOTE COMPREHENSIVE, AFFORDABLE HEALTH INSURANCE FOR ALL

Despite the strides made toward universal coverage for children, 50,000 children under 5 remain without health insurance in L.A. County. First 5 LA will advocate for comprehensive, affordable, coverage and quality care for all children and families. Priorities include improved coverage and reimbursement rates for key family health services including prenatal care, mental health, home visitation and substance abuse screenings and treatment.

INCREASE ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD OPTIONS AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Childhood obesity is a national epidemic with detrimental health consequences, as well as serious economic costs. Healthy eating and physical activity go hand in hand in an environmental approach to promote healthy pregnancies, healthy childhood weight and early learning. First 5 LA will encourage expanded federal food programs with higher nutritional standards and better nutrition in child care settings. At the community level, First 5 LA will advocate for increased green space, safe places for toddlers to play and more availability of fresh fruits and vegetables in low-income neighborhoods.



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PROMOTE REDUCTIONS IN DRUG, ALCOHOL AND TOBACCO USE BY PARENTS/CAREGIVERS

Abuse of drugs and alcohol has very damaging effects on fetuses, including reduced birthweight and learning delays, and are among the top causes of child abuse and neglect. To address this critical risk factor, First 5 LA will advocate for early screening and expanded treatment programs. Tobacco use during pregnancy is known to reduce birthweight and is suspected of causing learning disorders. Evidence suggests similar dangers with secondhand smoke exposure among pregnant and nursing women. First 5 LA will support policies to reduce tobacco use and secondhand smoke exposure to lower these risks.

EXPAND ACCESS TO, AND IMPROVE QUALITY OF, EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS

For children to be ready for kindergarten, they must have access to quality early care and education programs. Participating in a quality early care program can also help prevent child abuse and neglect. Yet some communities, mostly low income, still lack sufficient access to quality, affordable early care programs, putting low-income children at high risk for future failed school experiences. First 5 LA will support efforts to increase funding for infant/toddler care; preschool facility development; and improved standards, monitoring programs and incentives for increased quality in early care and education settings.

EXPAND VOLUNTARY HOME VISITING

Home visitation is a strategy known for its effectiveness in reducing child abuse and neglect. But it is also a successful way of delivering family support, risk assessment and service linkage. Individualized home visits to new mothers by nurses, *promotores* or other community health workers can be a powerful tool for providing parental guidance and supports needed for healthy pregnancies, breastfeeding and literacy. First 5 LA will advocate for increased federal and state funding as well as private insurance coverage for home visits.

SUPPORT INTEGRATION AND SHARING OF DATA

Agencies serving children and families need accurate, timely data in order to create high quality, responsive programs. Poor data and inefficient data sharing between agencies and organizations can lead to poor quality programs and create bureaucratic hurdles that prevent children and families from getting the services they need. First 5 LA will advocate for improvement in the quality, usefulness and integration of data collected about children in L.A. County and sharing of data among the programs, projects and services that support them.

STRENGTHEN THE PRENATAL TO 5 WORKFORCE

The prenatal to 5 workforce includes health providers and health educators; mental health staff, substance abuse counselors and the many professional and paraprofessionals involved in delivering early care and education. First 5 LA will advocate for improved training, practice and countywide competency standards for the prenatal to 5 workforce.



FIRST 5 LA STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS



Children are born healthy



Children maintain a healthy weight



Children are safe from abuse and neglect



Children are ready for kindergarten



A lack of accurate data can create bureaucratic hurdles that prevent children and families from getting the services they need.

INCREASE SUPPORTS FOR BREASTFEEDING

Breastfeeding is a natural preventive intervention with far-reaching benefits for both mother and child. Breastfeeding enhances child and parent bonding which is shown to help reduce instances of child abuse and neglect. There is early evidence that it can help in reducing childhood obesity. First 5 LA will advocate for increasing the number of designated Baby-Friendly Hospitals in L.A. County and for increased federal investments and private health insurance coverage for breastfeeding supports and incentives.

EXPAND EARLY IDENTIFICATION AND INTERVENTION

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, one out of every six children is diagnosed with a developmental disorder and/or behavioral problem in the United States. Undetected developmental disorders can lead to learning and behavioral problems as well as social difficulties and serious medical conditions. Identifying developmental problems in children at a very young age and providing the necessary referrals and services helps keep children safe from abuse and neglect, and supports all children in being ready for kindergarten. First 5 LA will advocate for universal screening and effective referrals for children through 36 months of age to ensure early identification of developmental and/or behavioral concerns.

PROMOTE FAMILY STRENGTHENING PRINCIPLES AND PREVENTION PRACTICES IN THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

First 5 LA will continue to advocate for full integration of a “Family Strengthening Approach” throughout county services, particularly child welfare programs. This approach, championed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy in Washington D.C., builds upon “protective factors” in families, such as parental resilience, social connections, knowledge of parenting and child development, concrete supports in times of need and supporting social and emotional development of children. Prevention practices that the County has already adopted to reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect can be expanded to better address challenges like domestic violence. This may include coordination of services and case plans. First 5 LA will advocate for full funding and necessary federal waiver extensions for key child abuse prevention and treatment programs. First 5 LA will promote improved access for at-risk children in high quality care and education settings. In addition, First 5 LA will promote increased coordination of prevention and intervention services between child welfare agencies.



Champions For Our Children

ABOUT FIRST 5 LA

First 5 LA is a unique child-advocacy organization created by California voters to invest tobacco tax revenues in programs for improving the lives of children in Los Angeles County, from prenatal through age 5. First 5 LA champions health, education and safety causes concerning young children and families. For additional information about First 5 LA, the agenda and our programs, visit www.first5la.org.