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COVID-19 AND CHILD IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

May 12, 2020

To: Elected Officials, Child Advocates, Philanthropists, and Other Leaders for Children

From: Wendy Lazarus, Kids Impact Initiative

Re: [Responding to COVID-19: How Child Impact Assessments Can Help Policymakers Focus on Children's Needs](#)

This memo suggests ways you can use child impact assessments to protect children and help ensure their needs are met as cities, counties, states, and the federal government put COVID-19 recovery efforts in place. It is based on the research and recommendations in [Kids Impact's](#) new action brief, "[Child Impact Assessments: A Missing Piece to Spur Progress for U.S. Children.](#)"

Why It's Crucial, Now, to Focus on the Best Interests of Children

Now is the time when COVID-19-related decisions with lasting impacts are being made by governments at every level. Congress has already authorized [\\$3.6 trillion to respond to COVID-19](#)—an amount equal to roughly 80% of federal spending in 2019—and will invest substantially more. New national programs are being put in place. And local and state governments are reorganizing to deal with the new demands at a time of greatly reduced revenues.

Leaders for kids have a short window in which to promote accountability for children. Most new funding as well as new government structures and initiatives are likely to be solidified over the next six months.

The Future Growth and Healthy Development of Children Is at Risk

Children have, for the most part, been spared the ravages of COVID-19 itself. Yet the consequences of the epidemic will impact their future for a long time. Their education is disrupted and, in some cases, terminated; more children are going hungry and facing poverty; and the long-term emotional toll is just starting to reveal itself with increasing child abuse and other forms of trauma. In addition, today's children will shoulder the costs of the exponential increase in our national debt.

Yet, in the first two months of COVID-19-related action taken by Congress and the White House, there are multiple examples of neglecting children's most basic needs. For example, due to the way the COVID-19 CARES Act direct payments to households are designed, a household with two adults receives more support than a single mother with two children. Babies born in 2020 do not qualify for a payment even though parents of newborns face substantial expenses when many have lost their jobs. Most 17- and 18-year-olds as well as college students don't qualify either. And many families with children who are U.S. citizens get no payment because of the citizenship status of their parent or parents.

Fostering a Healthy and Successful Recovery for Children

How will children fare as policymakers make their future choices? Based on the decisions so far, children will continue to be an afterthought. This trajectory can be changed if lawmakers are steered toward policies required for children's healthy development amid COVID-19 and are accountable for those policies.

Kids Impact's first report, "[Accelerating Policymaker Accountability for U.S. Kids' Well-Being](#)," sets out a number of ways to achieve greater policymaker focus on children—including creating an independent children's commissioner or children's cabinet in government, developing children's budgets, and taking into account the views of young people. All of these can be valuable tools during the nation's recovery.

Our newest [action brief](#) delves more deeply into one strategy for strengthening policymaker accountability: child impact assessments. Much like environmental impact assessments and health impact assessments, *child impact*

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assessments identify the potential effects of any proposed law, policy, program, or practice on children's well-being.

These assessments help governments do the right things for children by building consideration of their needs into the actual structure of decision-making. Child impact assessments call out direct effects that might not have been considered—like the provisions of the new CARES Act that disadvantage children—as well as indirect effects on children from decisions made in other fields, such as payments to hospitals. In this way, they also provide the accountability the public wants.

Phase I Child Impact Assessments for Responding to COVID-19

Though the pandemic means it will take time before most government entities can fully implement child impact assessments, Phase I can start now. Simple applications of child impact assessments can have an outsized influence in keeping kids' needs front and center as governments and institutions respond.

At the federal level

As Congress works on new COVID-19 response bills, here are four questions about impacts on children that policymakers ought to address in each new initiative:

- 1) What elements of these proposals directly affect the trajectory of children's lives?
- 2) What pressing needs that children and youth are experiencing now are *not* addressed in these proposals?
- 3) Do the proposals direct resources to the groups of children who face the highest hurdles to thriving at home and in school?
- 4) What percentage of the money allocated benefits children directly?

At the state, county, and city levels

Many communities already have or will create task forces to advise their governors, mayors, or county-elected officials on how to respond to COVID-19. The same four questions about impacts on children ought to be addressed by these task forces and the elected officials they advise.

Phase I of implementing child impact assessments can be done without additional staff or expense and can be carried out immediately. More comprehensive impact assessments, as laid out in "[Child Impact Assessments: A Missing Piece to Spur Progress for U.S. Children](#)," can be built into decision-making as new government structures and initiatives are created that respond to COVID-19.

Getting Started Now

Advocates and other leaders for children can start by making sure these Phase 1 questions get asked—and answered—before policies become final and by weighing in on children's behalf at every stage of the policy process. This will not only help contain the pandemic's harm to children in the short run but also lay the groundwork for greater transparency and better policymaking going forward. Our children's healthy development can't go on pause during this crisis. We know how to support what they need now.

Related Resources from Kids Impact Initiative

["Accelerating Policymaker Accountability for U.S. Kids' Well-Being"](#)

["Child Impact Assessments: A Missing Piece to Spur Progress for U.S. Children"](#)

[Executive Summary: Child Impact Assessments: A Missing Piece to Spur Progress for U.S. Children](#)

[Online Resources: Child Impact Assessments](#)

For further information, please contact info@kidsimpact.org.