



2021 Public Policy Platform

Covid-19 has exposed deficiencies afflicting many segments of our society, in particular, people of color who are bearing the brunt of the pandemic-induced economic fallout. These families have sustained our economy as front-line workers, have died at greater rates than other groups, and have suffered the most financially. They were already far from economic sustainability with little resilience prior to the pandemic. All while many are forced to continue to live in the shadows and in fear due to their immigration status.

Florida must address both short-term and long-term issues affecting our families if we are to enjoy an equal and prosperous recovery, both in terms of the economy and healthcare.

HUF's 2021 Public Policy Platform reflects this reality.

Our agenda is divided in two parts:

1. Covid-19 Recovery Policies
2. Long-term Policies to Benefit all of Floridians

The policies are divided into four focus areas:

- Health
- Economic Development
- Education
- Immigration

The following are the Long-Term Policies to Benefit all Floridians.

Hispanic Unity of Florida and its Board of Directors are guided in their governance, Mission, and policy, as well as, thought, word and action by the belief that racism has no place in our society and our community. Hatred and violence against a whole people because of what you look like, where you were born, whom you love, where you worship and how you identify, have no place in our society.



2021 Public Policy Platform

Health

Key HUF 2021 Legislative Priority

- **Close the Medicaid coverage gap.** Medicaid expansion in Florida would provide coverage for 850,000 Floridians. Medicaid expansion is a quintessential issue that, if a compromise were to be found, would prove beneficial not just for immigrant families, but for all Floridians.

Recommendations:

- Florida should expand Medicaid, as per the Affordable Care Act, to low-income adults under 133% of the Federal Poverty Line.
- Support the extension of Medicaid coverage of pregnant women from 60 days post-partum to 12 months.
- Incorporate Affordable Care Act consumer protections into state law, including protecting Floridians with pre-existing conditions from future price shocks.
- Support the elimination of the five-year waiting period for pregnant women to access Medicaid via the Immigrant Children's Health Improvement Act (ICHIA).
- Support the elimination of the five-year residency in Florida rule for Legal Permanent Residents to access Medicaid.
- Support the extension of the reasonable opportunity period beyond 90 days for citizenship status verification.

Key HUF 2021 Legislative Priority

- **Remove barriers to KidCare (CHIP) enrollment.** An estimated 300,000 children are eligible but not enrolled. Remove barriers to enrollment: Prohibit "lock out" of households from KidCare if a payment is missed.



2021 Public Policy Platform

- **Narrow the gap in WIC participation.** More than 400,000 Florida households eligible for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program are not enrolled¹.

Recommendation:

- Support and encourage Florida to continue to work with WIC agencies and community-based organizations to ensure that remaining eligible Floridians can apply for WIC.
- **Reimburse community nonprofits and places of worship for benefit enrollment.** Closure of DCF offices across the state has shifted the state benefit workload to local nonprofits and places of worship and placed financial stress on them.

Recommendation:

- Establish a certified community partners program that reimburses nonprofits and places of worship for staff time spent enrolling Floridians in DCF and Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) benefit programs.
- **Require Florida's Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA) to report on Medicaid managed care quality performance measures disaggregated by race, ethnicity, primary language, sex and disability.** Experts agree that collection of this data is an essential first step for developing targeted strategies to eliminate disparities.

Economic Development

Key HUF 2021 Legislative Priority

- **Protect Sadowski Trust Fund:** Earmark dedicated funding for affordable housing. Fund and protect the Sadowski Affordable Housing Trust Fund—a dedicated source of revenue that helps pay for local and state housing programs.
- **Support two-generational approach to provide multi-generational support for families.** Develop more effective policies for families with young children in poverty by aligning targeted social services that support child development with workforce development services to increase family economic self-sufficiency.
- **Establish a state earned sick time law for all workers.** Florida has one of the highest populations without access to paid sick time, which proportionately affects hospitality and tourism workers.



2021 Public Policy Platform

Recommendation:

- Support an earned sick time law that would require all public and private employers to allow all workers, including gig employees, to accrue paid time off to seek medical care or deal with a mental or physical illness to prevent the spread of highly contagious viruses, such as COVID-19, to fellow employees and customers.
- **Create a state-based refundable Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).** In tax year 2015, approximately two million tax filers in Florida received \$5.2 billion worth of tax credits through the EITC. 30 states and the District of Columbia have already created or enacted a state based EITC program, including Washington, a state without an income tax like Florida.

Florida's tax system is upside down, meaning that those with the lowest incomes are asked to pay the highest share of their income on state and local taxes. Targeted tax rebates and credits to those with the lowest income can help alleviate this.

State EITCs are better targeted to people with low income than blanket tax exemptions, so they help to reduce the disproportionate impact of sales and excise taxes. According to data from the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, a state EITC at 30 percent of the federal credit would reduce the share of income that Floridians in the lowest income quintile pay towards taxes from 12.7 percent to 9.3 percent, a 26 percent decrease.ⁱⁱ

- **Support small businesses by partnering with Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs).** More than 37,000 businesses were denied credit by Florida's Small Business Emergency Bridge Loan Program in April 2020. CDFIs are trusted by small businesses in underserved communities and can help mitigate the current economic challenges.

Recommendation:

- Support the strengthening of state efforts to support small businesses, including through support of CDFIs, to help build the capacity of these community-based lenders to ensure that small businesses and nonprofit organizations can maintain payroll and operations.



2021 Public Policy Platform

Education

Key HUF 2021 Legislative Priority

Native Language Assessment. Bipartisan legislation has been introduced that would require Florida's Department of Education to adopt various assessments in the most predominant languages spoken by English Learners (EL) at home. Additionally, the bill would require statewide standardized assessments used in K-12 and high school equivalency exams to be offered in the students' home languages.

Recommendations:

- Support funding for online learning support for EL's and educate where the need is:
 - Digital Divide: Devices, connectivity, and digital programs.
 - Trainings for EL teachers, who have reported fewer hours of professional development with digital learning resources than mainstream teachers.

- **Prioritize early childhood education.** Florida's School Readiness program provides subsidies for childcare for low-income families; however, only 15 percent of eligible families in the state currently receive subsidies. Additionally, the COVID-19 crisis threatens the viability of Florida's childcare operations.

Recommendation:

- Advocate against any budget cuts to early childhood education programs in this legislative session.
- Support boosting funding for both School Readiness and the Voluntary Pre-K program in order to better serve more families and buoy childcare operators through the COVID-19 crisis.
- Support and advise the state and local governments to make sure that these funds are allocated where they are needed most.

- **PreK-3rd Grade Coordinated Assessment System**

- Develop comprehensive childcare provider profiles to assist families in understanding quality metrics and aid parent choice.
- Recognize learning gains in the calculation of a Voluntary Prekindergarten Education (VPK) Provider's Readiness Rate through the use of a developmentally appropriate VPK assessment administered during the VPK program year.



2021 Public Policy Platform

- Incorporate observational assessments into VPK classrooms that focus on teacher-child interactions to help determine teacher effectiveness; and
 - Implement a progress monitoring system to be delivered within the first 30 days of school for children in grades kindergarten through 2nd grade.
 - Support intervention strategies for children who based on VPK assessment results would benefit from increased supports that result in kindergarten readiness.
 - Align increased investments in Florida’s Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program for four-year-olds to state defined quality benchmarks to improve kindergarten readiness and later school success.
- **School Mental Health Counseling.** The pandemic is exacerbating the gap in Florida’s mental health resources. Suicide-related calls have increased among Florida’s youth and more Floridians are reporting anxiety or depression.

Recommendation:

- Support mental health initiatives for ELs, and all students, to mitigate the risks of stress on their social-emotional well-being.
- **State financial aid for college students who are undocumented.** Support opening eligibility to both merit- and need-based financial aid to all undocumented students who are currently eligible for in-state tuition, including DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) and Temporary Protected Status (TPS) recipients.

Immigration

- **Driver’s Licenses for immigrants regardless of immigration status.** Fourteen states and D.C. already allow immigrants who are undocumented to apply for driver’s licenses, which can help them get better jobs, make roads safer, and modestly reduce insurance premiums. Not only would the fees from new driver’s licenses generate much-needed state revenue, but when workers can get better-paying jobs, they spend more, further boosting Florida’s economy.

ⁱ <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/WICEligibles2017-Volume2.pdf>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.floridapolicy.org/posts/earned-income-tax-credit-crucial-for-working-families>