

2022 Public Policy Platform: Florida

HISPANIC UNITY OF FLORIDA



Empowering a
New Generation
of Americans

HEALTH - ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT - EDUCATION - IMMIGRATION

HEALTH

Key HUF 2022 Legislative Priority

- **Close the access gap to affordable healthcare, with a focus on vulnerable low-income populations.** Currently, 1.1 million Floridians do not qualify for any healthcare coverage. Many families are priced out of healthcare options and are forced to rely on hospital system's emergency rooms, a costly option for both consumers and providers. Solutions must be found that 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 138% of the Federal Poverty Line.
- 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.

Key HUF 2022 Legislative Priority

- **Remove barriers to KidCare (CHIP) enrollment.** An estimated 343,000 children are eligible but not enrolled.

Recommendations:

- Increase income eligibility for KidCare premium subsidies so more families may have access to KidCare. Currently, families with income above 215% of the poverty level (\$47,214 for a household of 3) are ineligible. Most states have a higher income eligibility limit with a median level of 255% of the poverty level (\$55,998 for a three-person household).
- Remove barriers to enrollment: Prohibit "lock out" of households from KidCare if a payment is missed.

- **Narrow the gap in WIC participation.** Only 51 percent of eligible Floridians participate in the special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program. Boosting these numbers is a cost-effective means to help children thrive.

Recommendations:

- Effective messaging to the public to dispel misconceptions and clarify requirements about WIC.
- Modernize the enrollment process statewide to the maximum extent possible.
- Make shopping with WIC less burdensome.
- 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 2022 Legislative Priority

- **Create a state-based Working Floridians Tax Rebate (WFTR).** In tax year 2015, approximately two million tax filers in Florida received \$5.2 billion worth of tax credits through the Earned Income Tax Credit (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.¹

¹ <https://www.floridapolicy.org/posts/earned-income-tax-credit-crucial-for-working-families>

- **Support two-generational approach to provide multi-generational support for families.** HUF's innovative 2Gen model provides a framework of tools, resources and integrated services that builds family well-being and maximizes the potential that lies within each child and the adults in their lives so that families and communities thrive.

We seek to 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.

Recommendations:

- Support career training, skill building, and apprenticeship programs that support low income families in developing necessary skills to attain high-wage jobs.
 - Expand accessibility of housing for low-income working families with young children.
 - Take into account the impact of Florida's new minimum wage law on social service program participants by continuing to model "fiscal cliffs" accounting for minimum wage increases in accordance with the constitutionally mandated timeline.
- **Raise Florida's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefit level.** Florida has not increased the benefit in more than 25 years and are now levels less than one-fifth of the federal poverty line.
 - **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.

¹ <https://www.floridapolicy.org/posts/earned-income-tax-credit-crucial-for-working-families>

Education

Key HUF 2022 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.

- **Prioritize early childhood education.** The fiscal year (FY) 2021-22 budget signed by Governor Ron DeSantis includes almost \$1.7 billion from Federal COVID-19 relief funds for the Office of Early Learning (OEL) to deploy in a manner that aligns with federal guidance. OEL must engage with early learning stakeholders across the state to determine the plan they will submit to the Legislature and the Administration for Children and Families for use of these funds.

Florida has a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to use these considerable federal funds to build a childcare future that supports working families and broadly provides a quality learning experience for children. OEL and the Legislature, in partnership with early learning stakeholders across the state, should utilize the childcare stabilization funds earmarked for Florida to set the stage for an urgently needed transformation in childcare.

Recommendation:

- Support boosting funding for both School Readiness and the Voluntary Pre-K program to better serve more families and buoy childcare operators.
- **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 English Learners, 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 and in-state tuition 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, at both the undergraduate and graduate level.

Immigration

- **Driver's Licenses for immigrants regardless of immigration status.** Sixteen states and the District of Columbia 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.

Research by Stanford University found that hit-and-run accidents in California had decreased by about 4,000 in the first year the state's law was in effect. In addition to the decline in hit-and-run accidents, the state saw savings for California drivers of \$3.5 million in out-of-pocket expenses for property damage.

States generate revenue from driver's education, application processing fees, testing fees, vehicle registration fees, and property taxes. In the fiscal note on Nevada's legislative bill, the state Department of Motor Vehicles estimated first-year revenues of \$1.4 million, offset by first-year costs of \$713,000, which included a one-time charge of \$75,000.²

² <https://cliniclegal.org/resources/state-and-local/why-states-should-grant-drivers-license-all-residents>