

# **BCDI-OHIO POLICY AGENDA**

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**BCDI Ohio's mission is to improve and advance the quality of life for Ohio's children and their families.**

**Through a connection of strong collaborations with community stakeholders and organizations, BCDI Ohio will supportively influence policy and increase limited resources that will improve and advance the quality of life for Ohio's children and families.**

# BCDI-Ohio's Policy Agenda

BCDI- Ohio has a proven mission to improve and advance the quality of life for Ohio's children and families through education and advocacy. We envision a society that ensures a successful future for all children.

This policy agenda outlines a clear set of priorities designed to address the persistent disparities and expand opportunities and access for Ohio's children and families. By aligning policy, practice, and community vision, we can create systems and solutions to ensure that our communities have the resources and support they need to thrive.

Our agenda is also deeply rooted in community voice. All quotes included throughout this document come directly from the 2023–2024 statewide listening sessions facilitated by Light & Faith Consulting LLC in partnership with BCDI-Ohio. These reflections represent the lived experiences of children, caregivers, and community members, and they ground each policy goal and strategy in the realities of those most impacted.

## **What We Mean By Policy:**

Policy is a tool that we can use to drive structural changes that support equitable outcomes for children and families in our communities and beyond.

For Ohio's children, families, and communities, policy is an important piece of shaping access to systems that support economic mobility, healthy housing, safe communities, health, and education.

BCDI-Ohio believes that policy must be reimaged with and for all Families and that it should:

- Center the voices and lived experiences of Ohio's children, their caregivers, and key community stakeholders
- Be grounded in connection and relationship.
- Lead to concrete change.

This agenda reflects both the urgency of the challenges and the strength of the solutions identified by communities across Ohio. It serves as a guide for policymakers, advocates, and partners to work collectively toward systems that honor lived experience and deliver measurable outcomes. With clear priorities and a shared commitment to action, BCDI-Ohio affirms that lasting change is possible when policy is shaped by those most impacted and implemented with accountability.

# Policy Pathways (Our Work)

Our approach to policy is grounded in collaboration and connection. We translate community priorities into action by building coalitions and designing programming and supports that meet the needs of children and families across the state. Below is an overview of the coalitions we convene, the initiatives we advance, and the programs that we lead to strengthen systems and improve outcomes in Ohio.

- **BCDI-Ohio Coalition:** BCDI-Ohio is building a statewide coalition to unite parents, community leaders, educators, health professionals, and policymakers in advancing opportunity and access for children and families. Together, we will amplify community voice, influence policy, and create solutions connected to lived experience to drive lasting systems change across Ohio.
- **PN-3 Coalition:** The Ohio PN-3 Coalition brings together families, professionals, and community leaders who care deeply about young children and those raising them. The PN3 coalition is focused on three subcommittees: Early Care and Education, Maternal Health, and Early Childhood Mental Health. Led in collaboration with Groundwork Ohio, we're working to ensure that all young children have a strong start in life, supported by practical solutions, trusted professionals, and policies that put families first.
- **Early Childhood Education Hub:** The ECE hub is the destination for comprehensive support and resources tailored to the needs of our diverse communities. Our family-centered approach ensures that every child and caregiver receives unique, competent tools and programming.

These coalitions and initiatives demonstrate BCDI-Ohio's commitment to advancing policies and programs that reflect the realities of children, families, and communities. By grounding our work in lived experience and shared leadership, we are building stronger systems, closing gaps in access, and driving long-term improvements in outcomes across the state.

# Key Areas Of Focus

This agenda outlines the key areas of focus where policy change can improve outcomes for Ohio's children, families, and communities. Each area of focus is informed by community voice, experience, and data. The focus areas highlight where action is most needed to address existing disparities, barriers, and challenges.

Our priorities reflect the realities expressed by families, caregivers, educators, and community leaders across the state. Participants in the 2023–2024 listening sessions consistently emphasized the need for policies that are responsive to daily life, policies that create pathways for stability, opportunity, and long-term well-being. The issues raised were not isolated but interconnected, demonstrating how housing, health, education, and care are linked in shaping outcomes for children.

This agenda is designed to bridge those connections and provide a framework for systems-level change. By aligning policy solutions with community insights, we aim to ensure that Ohio's children have the resources and opportunities they need at every stage of development. This includes access to safe and nurturing early learning environments, coordinated supports for families, and equitable education and health systems that reduce barriers rather than create them.

The following focus areas represent the priorities identified through our listening sessions and research:

- **Affordable, High-Quality Child Care:** Ensuring families have access to reliable, affordable, and high-quality early learning opportunities that support children's development and parents' ability to work.
- **Workforce Investment and Development in Early Childhood Education:** Strengthening the early childhood workforce through training, fair compensation, and professional growth opportunities that sustain a diverse and skilled field.
- **Inclusive Health Systems and Holistic Family Supports:** Expanding access to health care and community-based supports that address the full range of child and family needs, including mental health and maternal health.
- **Opportunity and Access in Education Systems and Policy Reform:** Improving equity in education by addressing systemic disparities in early intervention, special education, and school funding to ensure all children succeed.
- **Access to Healthy Housing and Communities:** Promoting safe housing, stable neighborhoods, and community resources that allow children and families to thrive in healthy environments.

Under each focus area, you will find a clear **policy goal, background context, and key themes from listening sessions**, including direct quotes from participants. Each section also presents policy solutions and outlines BCDI-Ohio's strategy for advancing and sustaining this work in partnership with communities across the state.

Together, these priorities form the foundation of BCDI-Ohio's policy agenda. They are concrete areas where immediate and long-term action is needed to create measurable improvements in the lives of children and families. By centering community voice and committing to collective action, we can ensure lasting change for Ohio's children and communities.

# Focus One: Affordable, High- Quality Child Care

**Policy Goal:** Build and support the supply of quality, affordable child care, especially in under-resourced communities.

**Policy Context:** Ohio is currently at **145% for Publicly Funded Childcare or PFCC** (Ohio Administrative Code, Rule 5180:2-16-02, 2025), which is one of the lowest rates in the United States. **Ohio is currently LAST (51st) out of 50 states and D.C. for Eligibility for Child Care subsidy by household income.** (National Women's Law Center, 2024) Families need support so that they can return to the workforce. Access to high-quality childcare not only supports the learning and development of children but also supports the economic mobility of caregivers within our state through caregivers' abilities to make the transition to the Ohio workforce.

## What We Heard From Our Listening Sessions:

"It's been a nightmare trying to get my 3-year-old into preschool and my newborn into daycare without going broke."

"..not just in [city], but everywhere in the country. I don't know anybody that's not having a hard time paying for just childcare."

"But in our area, we are the only child care center that takes subsidy other than the local Head Start, and there are so many families out there that need it."

## Policy Solutions:

BCDI-Ohio outlines the following recommendation(s) for policymakers, legislators, and community members:

- **Increase the Publicly Funded Childcare (PFCC) eligibility threshold:** Raising the PFCC income eligibility threshold from the current level to at least 200% of the Federal poverty level (FPL)
- **Invest in nontraditional hour child care programs:** Many caregivers work evenings, weekends, or variable shifts, but Ohio's current system rarely meets these needs. Expanding access to safe, licensed nontraditional hour care ensures that all working families can secure stable child care.

## BCDI-Ohio's Strategy:

BCDI-Ohio will focus on these key strategies to drive progress:

- Advocating for legislation and policy that increases the PFCC reimbursement rate to reflect the true cost of providing high-quality care and services.
- Engaging community organizations, partners and members' voices to inform childcare legislation and budget priorities.

## Focus Two:

# Workforce Investment & Development in Early Childhood Education

**Policy Goal:** Invest in early education and care by supporting a diverse workforce, ensuring culturally responsive curricula and practices through ongoing training, and advocating for fair wages and compensation.

**Policy Context:** Workforce development is a critical part of strengthening the early childhood systems in Ohio. The quality of care that children and families receive is directly linked to the stability, training, and compensation of the early childhood workforce. BCDI-Ohio is committed to advancing policies and practices that center the voices of early childhood professionals and advocates for professional development pathways that are accessible and responsive to all.

### What We Heard From Our Listening Sessions:

"We've got to find some sustainable funding, because even the well-to-do families are hurting right now, and that's all over this state."

"The pay here is way lower than [central Ohio city], the same job that I did, I was teaching, I get offered way less here [northeast city] than in [central Ohio]."

### Policy Solutions:

BCDI-Ohio outlines the following recommendation(s) for policymakers, legislators, and community members:

- Support small and community-based providers: Allocate grants and other concrete supports to help minority-owned, rural, community-based, and family childcare home providers strengthen their capacity to support children and families.

### BCDI-Ohio's Strategy:

BCDI-Ohio will focus on these key strategies to drive progress:

-Coordinating the Early Childhood Service Hub to provide resources and support for providers, assuring that they have the tools, professional development, and connections needed to deliver high-quality services and care.

- Provide professional development on trauma-informed care through a BCDI-Ohio platform that is responsive to the needs of providers, children, and families.

# Focus Three:

## Inclusive Health Systems and Holistic Family Supports

**Policy Goal:** Support and promote infant vitality and family well-being by advancing coordinated systems of care that address a child's full range of needs.

**Policy Context:** Ohio's health systems remain inequitable, with Black and Brown families facing greater disparities and limited access to essential supports. National research on maternal health reflects these realities, noting that "differences in health insurance coverage and access to care play a role in driving worse maternal and infant health outcomes for people of color." (Hill, Artiga, & Ranji, 2022)

### What We Heard From Our Listening Sessions:

"That we go home with our baby. Together, if at all possible."

"I'm with my doula and [clinician name]. They were the ones who made me feel secure."

"We need more people in the medical field that look like us, that care about us. Because it seems like they don't care about us at all and it would, it seemed like they would just want to let my baby perish away right there."

### Policy Solutions:

BCDI-Ohio outlines the following recommendation(s) for policymakers, legislators, and community members:

- **Doula coverage statewide and Medicaid Reimbursement:** Doulas play a critical role in improving birth outcomes, reducing maternal stress, and fostering trust between families and providers. Ensuring consistent Medicaid coverage will allow more families to benefit from these life-saving supports.
- **Continuous Medicaid eligibility for young children:** Extending continuous eligibility reduces the risk of coverage gaps that interrupt care during critical developmental years. This helps families maintain stability in preventive care, screenings, and early interventions.
- **Expand maternity care access and eliminate maternity care deserts:** Too many families live in counties without accessible maternity care, forcing long travel times and delayed treatment. Expanding care ensures that all birthing people have timely, safe, and culturally responsive services close to home.
- **Expand pediatric care access and eliminate pediatric care deserts:** Children thrive when they have consistent access to pediatric providers who monitor growth, development, and health needs. Eliminating pediatric care deserts ensures every child has a trusted provider within reach.
- **Strengthen perinatal and parental mental health care:** Supporting parents' mental health is essential to infant vitality and family well-being. Expanding access to culturally responsive, affordable mental health services helps reduce stress, prevent crisis, and nurture strong family foundations.

### BCDI-Ohio's Strategy:

BCDI-Ohio will focus on these key strategies to drive progress:

- Co-lead Ohio's PN-3 coalition and continue to lead in resources, health care quality, and access by expanding community-driven solutions, strengthening provider networks, and ensuring access to needed services for all of Ohio's children and families.

-Utilizing the "Good For Me" curriculum and spreading resources and advocacy around healthy eating and physical activity to children and families within our communities.

-Coordinating the Early Childhood Service Hub to provide resources and support for providers, assuring that they have the tools, professional development, and connections needed to deliver high-quality services and care.

- Provide professional development on trauma-informed care through a BCDI-Ohio platform that is responsive to the needs of providers, children, and families.

# Focus Four: Opportunity and Access In Education Systems and Policy Reform

**Policy Goal:** Promote advocacy and policy transformation to eliminate racial disparities and build inclusive systems by ensuring that all children in Ohio have equitable access to early intervention and special education services, receiving timely and appropriate support without bias or delay.

**Policy Context:** Ohio's education landscape is marked by deep racial and geographic disparities that reflect long-standing inequities in funding, access, and opportunity. These disparities are especially evident in early intervention and special education, where children of color and those in under-resourced communities often face delays in screening, referral, and service delivery. "Early Intervention provides critical support to young children experiencing developmental delays or disabilities, ensuring they have access to resources and services during their most formative years." (Groundwork Ohio, 2025) Strengthening access to these services statewide is essential to closing opportunity gaps early, reducing bias in referral practices, and supporting children's success throughout their education.

At the same time, families continue to navigate complex systems with little input in decision-making. BCDI-Ohio's goal is to shift power and resources toward sustainable, community-driven supports and inclusive systems that prioritize timely, unbiased, and culturally responsive care for every child and family.

## What We Heard From Our Listening Sessions:

"...That's why we have to advocate for policy. That's gonna create change. That's gonna positively impact our families, our country, our community..."

"It took me over a year to get my son tested for autism."

## Policy Solutions:

BCDI-Ohio outlines the following recommendation(s) for policymakers, legislators, and community members:

- **Expand access to Developmental Screenings in Underserved Areas:** Fund screening units, telehealth services, and partnerships with community organizations to ensure that every child receives screening on time, especially in rural and under-resourced areas.
- **Strengthen Inclusive Education Policies:** Expand early intervention and special education supports that ensure children receive timely services without bias, delay, or unnecessary exclusion.
- **Elevate Community-Led Advocacy:** Create structures for parents, caregivers, and community leaders to inform education policy decisions at local and state levels.

## BCDI-Ohio's Strategy:

BCDI-Ohio will focus on these key strategies to drive progress:

-Strengthen accountability measures to ensure that state and local education policies meet the different needs of all children and families.

- Provide training and resources to equip families and community members with the knowledge and tools to understand, navigate, and influence policy and decisions.

# Focus Five: Access to Healthy Housing and Communities

## Policy Goal:

- Ensure that hazardous living conditions and barriers are removed to contribute to healthy, quality housing and safe communities for all of Ohio's children and families to support their overall health and well-being.
- Ensure that Ohio's children, families, and communities are protected from the disproportionate impacts of climate change and that they have access to clean air, water, healthy environments, and communities with the resources and support that they need to thrive.

## Policy Context:

BCDI-Ohio recognizes that healthy housing and safe environments are essential to the well-being and development of children. Across Ohio, many families, particularly in communities that have faced systemic disinvestment, continue to experience hazardous living conditions, from poor-quality housing to unsafe water and air. These challenges are compounded by the impacts of climate change, which deepen existing inequities. Children in under-resourced communities are disproportionately exposed to these risks, affecting their health, learning, and overall development.

## What We Heard From Our Listening Sessions:

"As far as environmental, and of course, lead. Lead Poisoning is definitely high."

"The quality of housing is improving, but it's not improving for everybody."

## Policy Solutions:

BCDI-Ohio outlines the following recommendation(s) for policymakers, legislators, and community members:

- Increase Health Education, Awareness, and Screenings: Expand screenings for risks such as lead, water contamination, and air quality, with transparent community reporting.
- Improve Access to Healthy Housing and Communities: Support and invest in initiatives that promote healthy housing and communities while ensuring that every child and family can breathe clean air and drink clean water.

## BCDI-Ohio's Strategy:

BCDI-Ohio will focus on these key strategies to drive progress:

- BCDI-Ohio continues to support initiatives that expand access to lead screening for children in at-risk communities. It is our priority to connect families to local health resources, providing them with the tools and support they need to mitigate environmental risks to their children's health.

# Opportunities For Impact

The state of Ohio is at a critical point where community momentum, legislative shifts, and public awareness are uniting. By aligning these policy priorities with the lived experiences and voices of all stakeholders and community members, we can translate policies and practices that remove barriers, expand opportunities, and create accessible solutions for all of Ohio's families and communities.

Equally important, this alignment ensures accountability. The strategies outlined here are not abstract recommendations but direct responses to what children, caregivers, and community leaders have named as urgent. Embedding community voices into policy design not only strengthens the legitimacy of these priorities but also builds the trust necessary for long-term systems change.

This work is only possible through collaboration. BCDI-Ohio partners with families, community leaders, early childhood providers, health professionals, educators, advocates, and policymakers across the state. Together, these partnerships ensure that solutions are informed by those most directly impacted, supported by trusted messengers, and advanced through collective action. By bringing partners across sectors to the table, we can build stronger systems that reflect the needs and strengths of Ohio's communities.

Looking ahead, the priority is to sustain momentum and ensure that these strategies lead to measurable results. By committing to policies and practices shaped by community input and grounded in evidence, Ohio can strengthen its systems and deliver consistent, lasting benefits for children, families, and communities across the state.

## **Driving Change Together:**

Opportunities for impact exist at every level, and progress depends on collective responsibility:

- Families and caregivers can continue to share their lived experiences and advocate for policies that reflect daily realities.
- Providers and educators can bring forward insights from practice, ensuring that solutions are workable and responsive to the needs of children.
- Community leaders can amplify voices, build connections, and ensure diverse representation in decision-making spaces.
- Policymakers can advance legislation that reflects community priorities, removes systemic barriers, and invests in long-term solutions.

## **Accountability and Measurement:**

BCDI-Ohio is committed to tracking outcomes, reporting progress, and ensuring transparency in how these strategies are carried out. Benchmarks and data will be shared with stakeholders so that adjustments can be made when necessary, ensuring that the work remains responsive and effective.

## **The Urgency of Now:**

The choices made today will shape outcomes for generations of Ohio's children. This is the moment to act boldly, in partnership, and with an unwavering commitment to building systems of justice, opportunity, and lasting well-being for every community in Ohio.

# We Can Do This Together

BCDI- Ohio invites Ohio's policymakers, community leaders, and advocates to align with these priorities and advance policies that reflect the needs and voices of the children, families and communities that we serve.

You can support BCDI- Ohio in our mission to advance the quality of life for Ohio's children and families by:

**-Engaging with BCDI-Ohio's Listening Session throughout the State of Ohio:** In an effort to capture the voices of families, communities, and providers, listening sessions are being held across the state of Ohio to identify shared priorities, uncover barriers, and ensure that the voices of our communities are shaping policy decisions and solutions. We invite you to engage with our organization, invite community members, and help build a collective voice.

**- Supporting BCDI-Ohio's Community Programming:** Our community programming is active in many regions across the state. We prioritize meeting people where they are and addressing the local priorities of our communities. Your support and connection with us will help to expand our impact. There are many ways to get involved. Partner with us to bring programs to your area, volunteer at events, connect us with local leaders, and help share our resources with(in) your networks. Through working together, we can ensure that our communities have access to the resources, education, and policy efforts that they need to be successful.

**-Join Our Coalition:** Joining us means standing alongside families, providers, and our community members who are committed to building stronger systems and support for our children and families. Join us in our efforts and movement-building.

**-Becoming a Member of BCDI-Ohio:** Becoming a member of BCDI-Ohio helps to connect you directly to our mission, efforts, and statewide network of families, advocates, providers, and community leaders. Your continued support helps to strengthen our work and ensures that we can continue to deliver support to our communities within our State.

**-Check Out Our Report:** For a deeper look into what we heard across Ohio, we invite you to review our full Listening Report, **"Every Voice Belongs At The Table"**. The report highlights themes and includes direct reflections from children, caregivers, and community members, offering a clear picture of the realities shaping these policy priorities. Exploring the full report provides an opportunity to hear directly from the community voices that continue to guide and ground this work.

## Quick Ways to Stay Connected:

- Sign up for our email updates to stay informed about upcoming sessions and events
- Follow BCDI-Ohio on social media for resources, stories, and opportunities to engage
- Share our materials with your networks to help amplify community voices

## We Need You:

- Every voice adds to the collective call for stronger systems in Ohio.
- By participating, you help ensure that policies are shaped by real community needs and lived experiences.

## Take the Next Step:

- Learn how you can deepen your involvement with BCDI-Ohio through membership, partnership, or coalition work.

# Appendix

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**A first class system of early childhood education  
is the hallmark of a caring and civilized society.**

**~Andy Hargreaves**



## JOIN BCDI-OHIO TODAY!

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