

2019–2022 STRATEGIC PLAN

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VISION

All children, teens and their families will have access to evidence-informed, sustainable programs and policies that address their unique needs and allow them to be their healthiest selves.

At PolicyLab, our care for children and families drives our research, informing practice and policy to improve child health. Our innovative model pairs researchers with communications and policy professionals to get research into the hands of decision-makers and advocates.

We are inspired by today's children and teens who are more perceptive, resilient and motivated to better the world than ever before. In the midst of these strengths, youth and their families continue to face significant challenges to being their healthiest selves. For example, after years of decline, we recently saw an uptick in the children's uninsurance rate. Many youth and their families continue to face racial, socio-economic and geographic disparities in their health outcomes. And today, more than 20% of youth in the United States have experienced a mental health disorder during childhood or adolescence.

Since 2008, PolicyLab's mission has been to achieve optimal child health and well-being by informing program and policy changes through interdisciplinary research. PolicyLab, based at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, is a unique academic research center grounded in clinical care and driving impact. We have grown to include more than 30 faculty and 60 staff who are experts in medicine, public health, social work, psychology,

law, biostatistics, health services research, population health, policy and communications. PolicyLab's interdisciplinary work is organized into five strategic research portfolios:

- *Adolescent Health & Well-being;*
- *Behavioral Health;*
- *Health Care Coverage, Access & Quality;*
- *Health Equity; and*
- *Intergenerational Family Services*

At PolicyLab, we research, develop and implement evidence-based solutions that are responsive to community needs and relevant to child health policy priorities. Our research and evidence-informed policy recommendations have gone on to shape city-level interventions for youth and families, statewide program design in the fields of home visiting and child welfare, federal appropriations requests, and much more. To ensure we are having the greatest impact on the lives of youth and families, this strategic plan will guide our priorities and engagement with partners for the 2020–2023 fiscal years.

VALUES THAT DRIVE OUR WORK

Every youth should have access to high-quality physical and behavioral health care.

Every youth should have the opportunity to live in a safe and nourishing community that fosters healthy lifestyles for families.

Every youth should receive patient-centered and family-centered care.

THREE-YEAR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES



HIGH-IMPACT RESEARCH

Create an environment that allows the next generation of child health researchers to successfully conduct high-impact research that helps policymakers, health systems and advocates make better-informed decisions on how to address children's and families' needs.

WHAT WE'RE DOING:

We are working to ensure our talented researchers can meaningfully collaborate with community members and experts from many disciplines to push forward innovative projects. We are also providing our teams with a variety of training opportunities that will give them the diverse skill sets they need to conduct impactful, meaningful, policy-relevant research.

HOW WE CAN WORK TOGETHER:

- *Identify research questions that are responsive to community needs and relevant to policy priorities*
- *Develop trainings that prepare our researchers to best align research with stakeholder and community needs*
- *Collaborate on research that better engages multidisciplinary partners around shared, meaningful priorities*



MEANINGFUL POLICY CHANGE

Increase PolicyLab's capacity to create meaningful policy change on behalf of youth and families.

WHAT WE'RE DOING:

We seek to identify and communicate policy priorities that reflect our values for youth and family health and are grounded in our research and patient care. At the same time, we are pursuing strong collaborations with key stakeholders in ways that can influence and contribute to accomplishing our policy goals.

HOW WE CAN WORK TOGETHER:

- *Align goals and strategies to create greater policy impact*
- *Finance projects that measurably impact or sustain evidence-informed programs and policies focused on children's health*
- *Ensure the translation of research is clear and impactful to policymakers*



STRONG PARTNERSHIPS

Establish and maintain strong engagement with important partners throughout the community.

WHAT WE'RE DOING:

If we are to achieve a collective vision of equitable and optimal youth health outcomes, we must partner with important stakeholders across our own institution and within the community. We hope to take part in more community collaborations focused on bettering child health, target our communications in ways that provide key updates to partners, and organize more opportunities to bring together physicians, researchers, community organizations and policymakers to have meaningful, actionable conversations about the needs of youth and their families.

HOW WE CAN WORK TOGETHER:

- *Identify thought leaders in the community who can inform our work*
- *Develop co-branded policy briefs or other products that increase visibility of our collaborative projects and priorities*
- *Convene a child health practice and policy forum that raises awareness about shared work and outlines emerging and innovative policy and program solutions*

Strategic Plan Final Report

Although we could not have anticipated the events of the last three years, PolicyLab's work was nevertheless guided by this strategic plan and adapted to meet unforeseen issues during this period. We are proud to report on our accomplishments between 2019-2022 and their alignment with our mission, vision and the priorities of this strategic plan.

Broadly across those priorities, we were able to enhance the research supports provided to our faculty and research staff members and supported them in addressing challenges to the execution of research and interventions brought on by the pandemic. We were nimble with our policy priorities and able to quickly activate our experts to help decision-makers address the most pressing health-related issues COVID-19 caused or exacerbated for children and families. PolicyLab substantially grew its network of partners, supporters and policymakers who turned to us for evidence-based guidance. Finally, over the last three years, we renewed our focus on the professional development and diverse makeup of our team members, aiming to maintain an equitable working environment for all.

When we first released this strategic plan, we started with three priorities. Unexpectedly, supporting communities impacted by COVID-19 became a priority for PolicyLab throughout much of 2020-2022, as it created a workstream of research, caused us to modify research protocols, and led to the development of evidence-based guidance documents to support policymakers and education leaders. Given the values that drive our work and the research expertise we have at PolicyLab, we were compelled to pivot in this way.

Additionally, about one year into our plan, we formally added a fourth strategic plan priority and a new position on our Leadership Team in response to the necessary increased attention to issues of systemic racism in this country. The priority, "foster a more inclusive, equitable working environment," focuses on the hiring, retention, and advancement of all of our team members—work now overseen by PolicyLab's Workforce Development Manager. While not reflected in the published 2019-2022 PolicyLab Strategic Plan, this report will include discussion of progress made under this added priority.

What follows is one example under each of our four strategic plan priorities, illustrating the significant progress our center has made towards our goals over the last three years. While this list is not exhaustive of all that we accomplished since 2019, it tells a story of PolicyLab's impact during this time period. For more details on accomplishments related to specific strategic plan goals, view PolicyLab's annual Impact Reports ([2021](#), [2022](#)).

HIGH-IMPACT RESEARCH

Create an environment that allows the next generation of child health researchers to be successful

Example: PolicyLab's Pilot Grant Program

PolicyLab has a long-standing commitment to supporting our talented early career researchers in building their academic portfolios. However, the internal process that led to this strategic plan made clear that our faculty and staff wanted a more formal way to jumpstart innovative projects and foster creativity in research through the center. Therefore, the PolicyLab Leadership Team decided to dedicate resources to a [***pilot grant program***](#) that offers funding for health policy-oriented research studies likely to attract external support for larger-scale projects.

Developed with consultation from several PolicyLab faculty members and operated in partnership with the Center for Pediatric Clinical Effectiveness, our pilot grants help investigators across CHOP answer cutting-edge child health questions and develop or inform ongoing clinical programs. Awards for up to \$20,000 are given for one-year projects.

Several of these projects have evolved into larger initiatives or have influenced ongoing work happening at CHOP. One such project is the pilot grant "[***Making Time for Time Out: Evaluating a Discipline Education Module for Caregivers of Young Children***](#)." This grant allowed the team behind PriCARE—a six-session parenting intervention hosted within pediatric primary care that teaches caregivers techniques to support social and emotional growth of their children—to assess a new Positive Discipline Module that could provide some beneficial additional training on positive discipline techniques to caregivers already in the program. Through their piloting of this intervention, they learned that using a modular approach and offering an array of different parenting modules may be beneficial in meeting the unique parenting needs of CHOP families with young children. They are currently exploring creating additional modules designed to support families facing different parenting challenges.

Since 2019, we have awarded more than \$200,000 for 11 pilot grants on topics such as:

- identifying disparities in [***chlamydia screening***](#) for teen girls,
- understanding the impacts of [***sanctuary immigration policies***](#) on Latinx populations,
- exploring perceptions of the [***Philadelphia Beverage Tax***](#) among parents who have low incomes,
- illustrating the experiences in [***telemedicine for children with suspected autism spectrum disorder***](#), and
- examining impacts of [***neighborhood greening***](#) interventions on child maltreatment.

MEANINGFUL POLICY CHANGE

Increase PolicyLab's capacity to create meaningful policy change

Example: Data-driven impact on COVID-19 policies at the federal, state and local levels

While not expressly stated within the goals of this strategic plan, which was written in 2019, supporting families and communities through COVID-19 became a longitudinal policy priority for PolicyLab once the pandemic began. We're proud to share that our research and expertise influenced policy at all levels of government and within child-serving institutions looking for evidence-based guidance.

The policy and communications teams came together to support several PolicyLab researchers in engaging in COVID-related policy work throughout the pandemic. The ability to pivot nimbly towards pressing, timely issues is one of the many benefits of PolicyLab's unique model.

Federal Level

In spring 2020, a team of researchers at PolicyLab, in collaboration with infectious disease and data visualization experts at CHOP and colleagues at the University of Pennsylvania, launched [***COVID-Lab: Mapping COVID-19 in Your Community***](#), a model that tracked and projected COVID-19 transmission across more than 800 counties in the U.S. At launch, the model offered the only publicly available data in the country that forecasted risk in small geographic areas. Later on in the project, the model also provided four-week state-level forecasts for hospital admissions and census.

Through weekly updates, COVID-Lab became a critical tool for federal, state, and local leaders, including the White House Coronavirus Task Force, which used the model throughout 2020 to brief governors and mayors across the country on mitigation measures. The model also served as an instrumental tool for national reporters from media outlets such as the New York Times, CNN and the Washington Post who called on PolicyLab experts to provide the latest on COVID-19 case trends.

PolicyLab remained rooted in the data of COVID-Lab to help leaders make evidence-informed decisions based on their local context to protect communities. The research team also published two studies in high-impact journals on the [***methodology behind the COVID-Lab modeling project***](#) and a study on the [***impact of county-level mask mandates***](#). They continue to work on writing peer-reviewed articles related to this work.

State Level

When Pennsylvania's Department of Health (DOH) reached out to PolicyLab in April 2020 asking us to get involved in the COVID-19 Health Equity Response Team, it was the perfect opportunity to activate our portfolio structure and get members of our Health Equity Portfolio engaged in pandemic response activities.

Portfolio members remained engaged with PA DOH throughout the pandemic, helping to develop recommendations for addressing health disparities related to COVID-19. In addition to contributing evidence and clinical expertise to a number of subcommittees, PolicyLab facilitated a subcommittee on economically challenged individuals, low-wage workers, and un- and underinsured populations. The subcommittee provided recommendations to PA DOH and other state leadership, and PolicyLab drafted a specific recommendation that COVID-19 data collection include metrics on preferred language.

In November 2020, PolicyLab published a [***white paper***](#) sharing results of a survey that was conducted through this process among Pennsylvania stakeholders working with immigrant and emerging English proficient populations. The white paper findings were summarized in a [***blog post***](#) in English, Spanish, and French, as well as a [***policy brief***](#) that was shared widely with local, state, and national stakeholders who serve immigrant, refugee and emerging English proficient populations.

Local Level

In addition to providing county-level COVID-19 forecasts throughout the height of the pandemic, many PolicyLab experts were involved in developing guidance for local officials based on their research, public health, and/or clinical expertise. For example, an interdisciplinary group of PolicyLab team members crafted multiple sets of guidance for K-12 education settings at important moments during the pandemic. The [***latest set of guidance***](#), issued in January 2022, anticipated the moment when schools would be able to enact mask-optional policies and put forth evidence-based recommendations for how to make that transition. Multiple leaders of Philadelphia area school districts cited the guidance as foundational to the mitigation measures they put in place.

Additionally, a team of child care experts at PolicyLab developed guidance throughout the pandemic for early care and education settings and the caregivers that utilize them. The [***January 2022 guidance***](#) was some of the only of its kind available at the time when all school-aged children had been offered vaccines, but the younger population was still unvaccinated and experiencing a surge in other seasonal viruses. PolicyLab shared these recommendations directly with child care centers in and around Philadelphia, many of whom shared how useful the evidence-based guidance was for their decision-making.

Finally, leaders within CHOP also turned to PolicyLab at points throughout the pandemic for guidance and expertise as the institution determined its own mitigation efforts and how to support its community.

Establish and maintain strong engagement with key stakeholders

Example: PolicyLab Forum 2022

In an effort to reconvene in-person with long-standing partners and engage new potential collaborators in our work moving forward, PolicyLab hosted ***PolicyLab Forum 2022***, “Bridging New Partnerships, Creating Change,” on May 9-10 at Philadelphia’s Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts. Our second flagship event, following the inaugural forum in 2018 celebrating our 10th anniversary, PolicyLab Forum 2022 brought together nearly 250 child health experts from 16 states and Washington, D.C.—representing policymakers, program developers, public health professionals, providers, child health advocates, and researchers—for action-oriented discussions on how we can address the most pressing issues facing children and families.

As a research center, it was also essential to us that the conversations held throughout the forum were grounded in evidence. Therefore, we partnered with AcademyHealth, a leading national organization dedicated to advancing evidence to inform health care policy and practice, to develop the agenda and recruit participants. We ensured a researcher was either speaking on or organizing each panel, and we displayed information around the venue about our experts’ work and opportunities to collaborate.

We started the day-and-a-half event with a focus on recovery from COVID-19 and strengthening intersections with the education sector to support the health of children and teens. This allowed us to engage new school-related partners we made through our efforts to provide COVID-19 guidance to school communities during the pandemic, recruiting them to speak on panels and attend to contribute to the conversations. It also gave us a unique opportunity to release to an engaged group of invested experts a white paper our Behavioral Health Portfolio collaboratively wrote that describes innovative strategies implemented by states and municipalities in support of comprehensive behavioral health services in schools. Promoting the resource to potential new partners in attendance and using the white paper as a follow-up tool after the event allowed us to propel forward conversations around a continually developing body of work at PolicyLab that can engage existing and new collaborators.

The agenda for the second part of the forum focused more on PolicyLab’s bread-and-butter issues, such as caregiver health and addressing social needs in pediatric settings, allowing us to reconnect with partners we’ve held on these long-standing issues and explore together what is needed to advance these issues in the new world order. For example, we held side conversations at the forum with outside experts on children’s health insurance coverage, which helped inform a PolicyLab blog post advocating for ***permanency for the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP)*** [published in Health Affairs’ Forefront](#).

Ultimately, the successful event brought together a diverse group of partners dedicated to improving child and family health and well-being for solutions-oriented discussions that are continuing and informing the next phases of our work.

Initially planned for December 2020, we postponed the event until we felt safe to host it in-person, as we believed it was critical to have face time with our allies and partners to chart a path forward from the immediate public health emergency of the pandemic. We believed this aligned with our strategic plan priority of establishing and maintaining strong engagement with those people and organizations necessary to achieving our mission.

Foster a more inclusive, equitable working environment

Example: Creation of Workforce Development Manager role on Leadership Team

Like so many of our partners, the overdue, welcomed societal refocus on issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion over the last couple of years inspired us at PolicyLab to look at these issues not only through the work we do, but how we operate as a center.

While we have had a health equity research portfolio for many years, we thought it fell short of creating internal accountability mechanisms to ensure we were growing a diverse workforce that has meaningful engagement with the community. Therefore, in 2020, we established a fourth priority under our 2019-2022 strategic plan to be conscious and deliberate about how we, as a center and community, embody the equity principals that our researchers strive to support in the populations they serve.

Building and maintaining an inclusive, equitable workplace will always be a work in progress, and we are proud with the advancements we have made towards this priority to date.

We have a lot more work to do, but over the last two years we:

- **Added a new position on the PolicyLab Leadership Team dedicated to the development and support of our workforce with an eye towards ensuring our hiring and retention practices are grounded in our values of equity and inclusion.** *The Workforce Development Manager is responsible for building out and maintaining our student recruitment program; continuing to manage and innovate the Professional Development Series for center staff; supporting hiring managers on job postings and overseeing onboarding; and serving as Ombudsperson for the anonymous elevation of workforce issues.*
- **Established a tracking system to hold ourselves accountable to equitable hiring practices and retention efforts.** *This new system collects better metrics on individuals' job codes, pay rate and promotion opportunities so that we can more comprehensively monitor parity across PolicyLab.*
- **Expanded our reach of sharing job postings.** *To reach a greater diversity of individuals with job opportunities at PolicyLab, the Workforce Development Manager has focused on building stronger relationships with organizations/institutions that represent people from minority groups for promoting postings—augmenting support already provided by CHOP's recruitment team.*
- **Developed a structured interview process available to all hiring managers.** *The Workforce Development Manager established a structured interview process available to all individuals hiring new team members at PolicyLab that allows interviewers to rank candidates equitably on issues important to the hiring manager.*

CONCLUSION

This report highlights our strongest examples of significant progress towards our four strategic plan priorities between 2019-2022. For more details on accomplishments related to specific strategic plan goals, view PolicyLab's annual Impact Reports ([2021](#), [2022](#)).

If you want to learn more about these or other examples of progress PolicyLab has made towards its mission, or have an idea for how we can collaborate to improve the health and well-being of children and families, reach out to PolicyLab@chop.edu.



Collaboration drives our work. We partner with practitioners, families, communities and policymakers because we know we cannot achieve improved child health outcomes alone.

Will you join us in the pursuit of this vision?

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The mission of PolicyLab at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) is to achieve optimal child health and well-being by informing program and policy changes through interdisciplinary research. PolicyLab is a Center of Emphasis within the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia Research Institute, one of the largest pediatric research institutes in the country.

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