The Kentucky Coalition for Healthy Children (KCHC) is a group of thirty-seven diverse organizations working together to improve the health of children and youth in the Commonwealth.

We are witnessing the devastating impact that a growing number of unprecedented traumas and societal challenges are making on child and youth mental health. A unified effort is required to address them and to support children and their families. The cost of not acting now will be felt significantly at both individual and societal levels. The KCHC calls on the Kentucky General Assembly to take action on the following measures in the 2023 session to address pressing concerns in this area, including mental health provider shortages, suicide prevention, and policies to protect children from experiences that can cause trauma and impact their mental health.

WORKFORCE POLICIES

Funding for a nurse in every Kentucky school all day, every day
School nurses are key to the health, safety and welfare of students and school staff. They provide preventive screenings, first aid, manage medications, make referrals to appropriate healthcare providers, identify chronic health conditions, and they are also a critical resource to address children’s mental health. They are trusted adults whom students can trust confide and can detect mental health problems and intervene in issues that exacerbate them (e.g., bullying, anger management, violence). At a time of significant children’s mental health provider shortages around the Commonwealth, school nurses are a valuable resource for children’s physical and mental health that every school in Kentucky needs to have.

Gathering data to address mental health provider shortages
Require professional licensure boards to gather data from their licensees in order to have an accurate count of available mental health providers across the Commonwealth. Establish a children's mental health care task force to assess issues of workforce and capacity for mental health professionals to treat Kentucky's children and youth and propose changes to improve access to children’s mental health services.

SUICIDE PREVENTION POLICIES

The 2021 Kentucky Injury Prevention (KIP) results show an increase in reported suicide attempts among 6th, 8th, and 12th grade students, with 6th graders reporting the most significant increase. Two policies to address this issue are sustained funding for 988 and suicide prevention training on research based programs.
Current KCHC Steering Committee Member Organizations: Advocacy Action Network, Aetna Better Health of Kentucky, Alliance for a Healthier Generation, American Academy of Pediatrics KY Chapter, American Heart Association, Anthem Medicaid, Bounce Coalition, Cairn Guidance Inc., Cumberland Family Medical Center Inc., Kentucky Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental & Intellectual Disabilities, Feeding Kentucky, Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky, GLESEN–Bluegrass, Gordon Food Service, Humana, Kentucky Association for School Social Work, Kentucky Association of School Administrators, Kentucky Council on Problem Gambling, Kentucky Department for Medicaid Services, Kentucky Department for Public Health, Kentucky Family Thrive, Kentucky Department of Education, Kentucky Health Departments Association, Kentucky Nurses Association, Kentucky Primary Care Association, Kentucky Public Health Association, Kentucky Voices for Health, Kentucky Youth Advocates, KY Parent Teacher Association—16th District, Pritchard Committee for Academic Excellence, Seven Counties Services, Spalding University, St. Elizabeth Healthcare, United Healthcare, University of Kentucky College of Health Sciences, University of Louisville School of Public Health & Information Studies

POLICIES TO PROTECT CHILDREN

Ban corporal punishment in schools
Kentucky should pass legislation to ban corporal punishment in our schools, joining the many states that have already done so. The KY General Assembly has already passed legislation to make schools trauma-informed and a safe place for kids to thrive. Evidence shows that corporal punishment is linked to negative outcomes including physical and mental ill-health, impaired cognitive and socio-emotional development, increased aggressiveness, and poor educational outcomes.

Reduce Child and Youth Vaping
More youth are vaping and at a younger age. Vaping is directly linked to mental health. It can lead to nicotine addiction along with other serious health issues. Kentucky should act to improve control over access to vaping and tobacco products so children and youth can’t acquire them. Tobacco Retail Licensing (TRL) is a policy for stores to obtain a special license, distinct from a tax license or business license, so that they have specific performance standards and requirements put in place as conditions of maintaining the license. These include not selling vaping and tobacco products to kids; failure to comply can lead to a monetary penalty or license suspension or revocation.

Ban conversion therapy as a threat to the well-being of LGBTQ+ youth
Conversion therapy is the practice of harmful interventions that seek to “cure” or suppress the sexual orientation and/or gender identity of a person. It has been proven to significantly increase rates of suicidality and other self-harming behaviors, decrease sense of self-esteem, as well as negatively impact school attendance and academic performance. The American Academy of Pediatrics, the country’s leading authority on pediatric healthcare, along with the American Medical Association and the American Psychological Association and others urge ending conversion therapy because of the harm it causes youth. Proposed legislation would authorize professional licensure boards to take action against licensees who practice conversion “therapy”.

Sustained funding for 988
Educate policymakers about the need for a sustainable funding mechanism for the 9-8-8 suicide prevention/mental health crisis line.

Prevention training on research-based programs
Schools should be required to provide suicide prevention training twice a year to school staff, with initial training at the start of the school year and after winter break.