
Children's Budget 2015 brings bad news: fewer investments in kids

[Population Health Sciences](#)

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This is a guest blog from Bruce Lesley, the President of [First Focus](#), a bipartisan advocacy organization dedicated to making children and families the priority in federal policy and budget decisions. This blog post was written to accompany the release of First Focus' [Children's Budget 2015](#), a brief that offers a detailed guide to federal spending on children and serves as an a resource for those seeking to improve the lives of America's youth. PolicyLab recently collaborated with First Focus on another report, [The Effect of the Great Recession on Child Well-Being](#), which examines four domains – health, food security, housing stability, and maltreatment – and reviews the relationship of each to the well-being of children during the Great Recession.

The federal government makes more than 200 distinct investments in children. These include traditional children's initiatives like education and child abuse and neglect prevention. They also include other investments that improve the lives of kids, like Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly Food Stamps).

Every year, First Focus publishes a *Children's Budget* offering a detailed guide to federal spending on children and an invaluable resource for those seeking to improve the lives of America's youth.

This year's [Children's Budget 2015](#) brings more bad and unfortunate news for children. The share of federal spending dedicated to our nation's children has now fallen to just 7.89 percent, which is down from a high of 8.50 percent in 2010. Consequently, the federal share of discretionary spending dedicated to children has dropped by 7.2 percent over the last five years.

In addition, on an inflation-adjusted basis, federal discretionary spending on children has dropped by 11.6 percent between 2010 and 2015. Discretionary funded dedicated to children's health, education, child welfare, training, safety, and nutrition are all down even without adjusting for inflation.

In reviewing the Urban Institute's data, [Anna Bernasek of Newsweek notes](#) that if this trend continues, "the federal government soon will be spending more on interest payments on the debt than on children."

Few would think these facts reflect the values and priorities of the American people. That is reflected in the fact that, by a 69-25 percent margin, a Battleground Poll in May by the Tarrance Group and Lake Research finds that Americans do not believe the next generation will be better off economically than the current generation. As Chris Cillizza of the Washington Post notes, "The numbers from the Battleground Poll echo other data that has come out over the past few years that suggests a deep pessimism within the electorate about what sort of country they are leaving their children."

We are failing to make the investments in children they need to fulfill their promise. As the Kids' Share report concludes:

Without adequately funded education, nutrition, housing, early education and care, and other basic supports, the foundation of children's well-being is at risk. When children grow up without adequate supports, they are less able to support themselves and to contribute to economic growth as adults. . .

. A continuous decline in federal support for children over the next decade bodes poorly for their future or the future of the nation.

These assertions paint a bleak picture for our children if we as advocates don't do something. While we saw increased spending as a result of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, the 2011 Budget Control Act introduced sequestration that involved serious cuts to important domestic programs. The fiscal year 2016 discretionary spending levels, because of a lack of relief from sequestration, are the lowest in a decade. Federal investments in our children and our future are going in the wrong direction.

[Download your copy of Children's Budget 2015.](#)

Bruce Lesley
