It starts with the children...

When nations, states and localities seek to compare themselves to one another, measures of child well-being are often used as a form of shorthand to identify those best positioned for the future. How we nurture, protect and educate children says much about our character, human capital and the outlook for our economic prosperity.

Children and youth do best when they are healthy, engaged in school and living in safe and caring environments. By lending a hand to parents, extended families, schools and neighborhoods, we can multiply their efforts to ensure that every child develops into his or her full potential as an adult. Doing so, in turn, sets the foundation for a community in which everyone can thrive.

United Way invites everyone to contribute to this work, but policymakers have special roles to play in promoting child well-being. They can knock down barriers that limit access to opportunity and set revenue and spending priorities to increase the odds of good health, quality education, competitive employment, adequate housing and a safe and stable neighborhood for every Georgian.
Every United Way around the country is encouraged by United Way Worldwide to engage in public policy and advocacy on non-partisan issues in ways that further each United Way’s mission and help the people they serve.

United Way has a board-level public policy and advocacy committee that recommends an annual agenda.

The 2017 Public Policy Agenda

Today, many of the 2.5 million children living in Georgia live in communities of low child well-being – where multiple factors in their environment prevent children from reaching their full potential as adults.

Thriving communities start with thriving children, and that’s why United Way’s new focus is on child well-being.

Our public policy and advocacy agenda for 2017 is therefore focused on policy issues that are aligned with the identified drivers and barriers to advancing child well-being.
There are a multitude of factors that influence child well-being – from the percent of babies born at healthy birth weights to high school graduation rates to the percent of financially stable families.

For each of these factors, there is a series of actions that we can take to help move the needle in a positive direction. When we consider all these potential solutions — evidence-based strategies, innovative programs, policies, volunteerism and others — they fall into three categories:

- **Strong Foundations**
  - Strategies that prevent problems from occurring in the first place. These activities and programs strengthen core skills, sustain what’s working and increase overall family stability.

- **Opportunities for Success**
  - Strategies that help children and families to heal, rebuild and create new opportunities for success.

- **Nurturing Communities**
  - Strategies that address community-wide issues to ensure that each child, regardless of zip code, has a fair shot at growing up in a healthy, nurturing community.

United Way’s 2017 Public Policy and Advocacy agenda is built to support each of those three pillars.
When we promote policies that strengthen core skills, sustain what’s working and increase overall family stability, we can prevent problems from occurring in the first place. In 2017, we urge the Governor and our state and local lawmakers to:

- Improve the odds of student achievement by making health care, vision care, dental and behavioral health care, along with opportunities to participate in quality rated out-of-school-time programs, available in or through schools.

- Help early education and K-12 students to feel safe and to thrive at school by investing in strategies that improve school climate through positive behavior intervention support systems.

- Put the cost of completing a post-secondary credential within the financial reach of all Georgians to spur opportunities for enterprise and jobs at competitive wages.

- Increase the number of children who can be served by Childcare & Parent Service programs (CAPS) and encourage parents to choose quality rated early care and learning options for young children through tax incentives and subsidized reimbursements to providers.

- Close the insurance coverage gap among children, parents, caregivers and other adults. Improve access to care by strengthening provider reimbursement rates, expanding the scope of practice of allied health providers and the wider use of telemedicine.
When we promote policies that help children and families heal, rebuild and create new opportunities for success, we make the community a better place for everyone. In 2017, we urge the Governor and state and local lawmakers to:

- End policies that automatically disqualify Georgians who have an arrest or criminal record from employment, occupational licensing, housing, higher education and public benefits when there is no compelling public safety reason to do so.
- Stop private probation practices that jail or assess predatory fees upon Georgians who are unable to pay fines for traffic offenses and other minor misdemeanors.
- Keep youth out of juvenile justice detention by making funds available for Children in Need of Services (CHINS) and expanding the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative to more counties.
- Make supportive housing available for Georgians within the scope of the state’s settlement with the U.S. Department of Justice who have serious and persistent mental health disorders and are being released from a correctional facility or hospital.
When we promote policies that address community-wide issues, we ensure that each child, regardless of zip code, has a fair shot at growing up in a healthy, nurturing community. In 2017, we urge the Governor and state and local lawmakers to:

- Promote adequate, safe and affordable housing that allows residents the opportunity to participate in the larger community.
- Make supportive housing available for Georgians with serious and persistent mental health disorders.
- Implement local regional transit solutions that harness public and private transportation resources to empower Georgians of all ages, incomes and abilities to travel to work, to school, to medical care and to civic activities on a safe, reliable and affordable basis.
- Ease the transition for citizens returning to the community from correctional settings by expediting ID cards, benefit enrollment and completion certificates. Incentivize employers to hire and landlords to lease to returning citizens.
- Give local government and law enforcement the tools, training and resources they need to effectively serve and protect individuals with mental health disorders who they encounter or detain.
Our United Way is one of the largest in the nation with more than $100 million in annual revenue. We invest in more than 200 programs in 13 counties through the United Way Impact Fund and participate in collaborative networks and Opportunity Zones with caring community partners to address challenges facing families and individuals.

We work collaboratively with our sister United Ways across the state on public policy issues.

VISION
Greater Atlanta is a community where all individuals and families thrive.

MISSION
Engage and bring together people and resources to drive sustainable improvements in the well-being of children, families and individuals in the community.

GOALS
Inspired by local residents as an organized effort to help people devastated by a severe ice and snowstorm in 1905, United Way continues to mobilize our community to make lasting improvements on our greatest social challenges. Contributions to the United Way Impact Fund are invested in strong local programs and initiatives that help accomplish these goals:

- Babies are born healthy
- Children enter school ready to learn and graduate prepared for careers
- Young people avoid risky behaviors
- Families are self-sufficient
- People have access to primary health care
- Homeless people are housed within one year