



2007 Priorities for New Hampshire's Children End-of-Session Report

All of New Hampshire's children should have the opportunities they need to grow and learn. From health care, to quality education, to a thriving economy, promoting and preserving the well being of children is an essential part of maintaining New Hampshire's quality of life. It is this quality of life that provides the true New Hampshire Advantage.

The *2007 Priorities for New Hampshire's Children* reflect the consensus of over 100 New Hampshire Child Advocacy Network (NH CAN) partners and advisors, and recommends policy and budget choices that will ensure our quality of life, and maintain the New Hampshire Advantage.

All of New Hampshire's children should live in homes that support their best interests.

State laws should make it easier for parents to focus on their children's best interests. Rather than a 'one size fits all' approach to child support guidelines, protecting the 'best interests of the child' standard helps families keep the focus where it belongs: on the children. That is why flexible child support guidelines, focused on the children, was a top priority for 2007.

Senate Bill 193, which created flexible guidelines for child support in order to maximize family resources for both parties following a divorce, was supported by a broad coalition of NH CAN partners. The Senate united behind this bill with unprecedented unanimous support, the House supported it as well, the Governor signed the bill into law.

Every home should be a safe place. But the remains of banned lead paint make many NH homes a dangerous place for children- and the current lead laws don't go into effect until after children have been poisoned. Fortunately, good prevention policies can solve this crisis. That is why lead poisoning prevention was a priority for 2007.

In the fall of 2006, a diverse coalition organized to build the Lead Poisoning Prevention Collaborative, which included a number of CAN partners. Senate Bill 176 sought to prevent childhood lead poisoning by lowering acceptable blood levels to national standards, strengthening preventative measures, and establishing a commission to study the issue. The bill passed the Senate and House with support from the LPPC, and the Governor signed the bill into law.

All of New Hampshire's children should have the health care they need to grow and learn.

Healthy children do better in school and in life, and children's health coverage makes the difference between a healthy child and one with unmet needs. The 2007 federal reauthorization of the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP, or Healthy Kids in NH), provides an opportunity to ensure that all children have access to affordable, quality health insurance coverage. That is why protecting and advancing Medicaid and SCHIP was a top priority for 2007.

With support from across the state, led by a coalition of NH CAN partners, children's health coverage saw tremendous strides in 2007. The Governor's budget proposed funding to cover an additional 10,000 New Hampshire children under Healthy Kids, which was maintained in the budget throughout the session. Additionally, the US Congress is working toward a reauthorization which provides strong support for kid's coverage, and NH CAN partners have worked to ensure that a majority of New Hampshire's congressional delegation support this strong reauthorization.

Good oral health is an essential part of overall health. Untreated childhood oral disease, including tooth decay, can lead to lifelong health problems such as respiratory and heart disease. By increasing the reimbursement for these routine dental procedures under the Medicaid program, more vulnerable children will have access to important preventative care. That is why supporting an increase for Medicaid dental procedures was a priority for 2007.

The Governor's budget for 2008-09 included a modest rate increase for dental procedures, which was maintained throughout the budget process. Though there is still substantial room for improvement for children's dental health- many providers still are unable to accommodate low-income children- this rate increase was an important step toward a healthy future for children.

All of New Hampshire's children should have the opportunity to live free of poverty.

All parents want to adequately provide for their children; family assistance programs should help achieve that goal by fostering long-term self-sufficiency. We know what works: flexible state programs that focus on the real obstacles to employment. That is why monitoring 2006 changes to TANF law and educating the public and policy makers about the roots of poverty was a top priority for 2007.

Senate Bill 226 was written in partnership with members of NH CAN, and was an effort to restore flexibility and an outcome-driven focus to New Hampshire's TANF program. Thanks to hard work from the network, providers, clients, and advocates turned out for state hearings at all levels, and both the House and Senate supported the bill. SB 226 was signed into law by the Governor.

When parents work hard and play by the rules, they should be able to provide for their family's basic needs. Fair wages contribute to strong, self-sufficient families and communities. That is why raising the minimum wage was a priority for 2007.

House Bill 514 was designed to protect all low-wage workers, including those who earn tips as a substantial part of their income. NH CAN partners worked with legislators to keep this bill good for families, and rallied for the long hearings in the House and Senate. Both chambers overwhelmingly supported the wage increase to \$7.25 per hour, and Governor Lynch signed the bill into law.

All of New Hampshire's children should be prepared to join an educated workforce and thriving economy.

Quality childcare provides the foundation for future learning, and allows parents to support their families, knowing their children are well cared for. Today, many working families in NH cannot afford quality childcare and still make ends meet. That is why supporting working families' access to quality childcare was a top priority for 2007.

The Governor's budget proposal included funding to increase the childcare co-payment for families receiving state assistance, and additional funding to ensure the ongoing success of the Quality Early Learning Opportunity Initiative. The House and Senate supported both of these childcare measures, and the final budget includes these protections for working families.

When we invest in quality public education, we invest in a prosperous future for our children and our state. New Hampshire had a valuable opportunity this year to assure that future by focusing on the educational quality in public schools. That is why constitutionally defined adequacy was a priority for 2007.

This year, the legislature, with considerable input from NH CAN partners, proposed the first comprehensive definition of educational adequacy, and the bill was amended in the House to include statewide half-day public kindergarten, helping to reverse New Hampshire's legacy as the only state in the union without statewide public kindergarten. The completed definition of adequacy will become the basis for a new education funding plan. The New Hampshire education community was also instrumental in pushing back an effort to amend the state constitution to reduce the state's obligation to provide an adequate education to every child.

When every child has the opportunity to reach their full potential, we all benefit. Unfortunately, not all students receive the supports and services they need to succeed. New Hampshire students with disabilities consistently experience poor educational outcomes, often for lack of trained personnel. That is why supporting the creation of an Executive Commission to address these shortages was a priority for 2007.

With support from NH CAN partners, the House and Senate supported the creation of this important commission, though the dollars requested to fund its work were not granted. Still, the commission will begin this summer to help solve the personnel crisis in NH special education. Additionally, the House has retained a package of related special education bills that will be addressed in the coming months.