



Advocacy

Advocacy Guiding Principles

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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WHY ADVOCACY?

Wellpoint offers a comprehensive array of prevention, intervention and crisis resources to facilitate equity, learning, healing and wellness by restoring the connections that help children and families thrive. We are part of a larger network of systems that families engage with, and we know that access to better resources and early intervention efforts across systems enables child and family stability. Resources and early interventions can limit the time and intensity of families' involvement in the child welfare system or divert them from the child welfare system entirely.

Our advocacy goals are based on institutional experience regarding the challenges and supports that frequently impact the children and families in our care. The goals address root causes for involvement in public systems across Wisconsin and in the Milwaukee area. They are organized by the Five Pillars of Stability, a framework Wellpoint uses to recognize the interconnected factors that impact individual and family wellbeing.

Our goals have been informed by Wellpoint staff expertise and client experiences, as well as a combination of Milwaukee-area, statewide, and national data.

Each goal has been chosen to advance Wellpoint's commitment to support family stability, prevent and reduce the need for deep-end interventions, and restore connections for families and communities.

ADVOCACY GOALS

In order to reduce instances of child abuse and neglect, prevent unnecessary involvement with the child welfare system, and enable all children and families to thrive, Wellpoint Care Network will support and advocate for the following goals and systemic changes that strengthen the Five Pillars of Stability:

CARING CONNECTIONS

1. Kinship caregivers and like-kin caregivers receive equitable resources and support comparable to those available to unrelated foster parents to maximize opportunities for children to stay connected to family.
2. More robust and culturally responsive domestic abuse services and prevention efforts to improve access to healing, recovery, and prevention.
3. Greater collaboration between organizations working with the same families/toward the same goals to foster more trusting relationships between service providers and people receiving services.
4. Public safety efforts divert people away from incarceration and into rehabilitative interventions, help families maintain connections with already incarcerated individuals, and remove barriers to re-entry, to support family reunification, employment, and housing stability.

EDUCATION

1. All families and children have access to high quality, affordable childcare and early childhood education.
2. All childcare, early education, K-12, and post-secondary education settings implement trauma informed practices that promote social and emotional growth, mental health, and wellbeing.
3. Students have equitable access to resources that provide career pathways with family-sustaining wages and benefits.

EMPLOYMENT/ECONOMIC STABILITY

1. All workers (employed, unemployed, and underemployed) and people unable to work have income and benefits that allow them to meet their basic needs.
2. Preservation, improvement, and expansion of transit connections within and between Milwaukee and exurban ring communities support access to job markets and other resources.

HEALTH

1. Expanded access to affordable, quality health care including comprehensive mental health services.
2. Increased access to social support and health care services for new parents, including in-home care, prenatal and postpartum care and education, and referrals to additional supports.
3. Adoption of trauma informed care practices that better assist and support people involved, and an end to practices and behaviors known to cause or perpetuate harm and trauma, across the following systems: human services, health care, workforce development, law enforcement and criminal justice.

HOUSING

1. Expanded availability of affordable housing to increase family stability.
2. Increased accountability and resources ensure that landlords provide safe housing for all residents, by mitigating unsafe conditions such as lead exposure, broken appliances, and structural damage.
3. Eviction prevention programs and policies to reduce housing instability.

HOW WE WILL USE OUR ADVOCACY GOALS

By identifying and advocating for systemic changes, we aim to help create conditions that facilitate equity, healing, and wellness for children and families across Wisconsin.

The goals listed here will guide Wellpoint's future advocacy efforts at local, state, and federal levels. Advocacy efforts will take place over time, as part of an iterative process of planning, activity, evaluation, and adjustment. We will use a variety of tactics including public awareness efforts, policymaker education and lobbying, and regulatory feedback to administrative bodies.

In addition to these Five Pillar-related systemic goals, we will continue to advocate on issues specifically related to child welfare system policy and practice that is in alignment with the best interests of children and families.

This document describes the relevance of each issue to Wellpoint, a sample of relevant data and trends, and some additional factors that helped us define and set our advocacy goals.

EQUITY IN ADVOCACY

At Wellpoint, we stand against the systemic racism, oppression, and marginalization that are deeply rooted in our society. We know that many of the people in our care have experienced the trauma of discrimination, racism, and systemic inequities. As an organization and as individuals, we have committed to dismantling institutional racism in all spheres where we have influence. We put equity at the center of our work because it is key to promote healing, opportunity and hope.

We know that barriers to equal opportunity within public systems including child welfare, education, health care, and criminal justice disproportionately impact people of color, especially Black and Indigenous people, as well as members of the LGBTQ community and people with disabilities. These barriers lead to disparities in long-term wellbeing outcomes, some of which are discussed below. We will therefore look for and pursue advocacy activities with particular attention to systemic changes that eliminate disparities, advance equity, and build a society where all members can thrive.

In addition, we understand the role that these systems can play in perpetuating harm and trauma. We will stand against and seek to stop actions, methods, and practices that are known to cause psychological harm or trauma and threaten the sense of wellbeing for historically marginalized groups. As an organization that provides services within the child welfare system, we acknowledge that this must include ongoing examination and updating of our own practices.