



RHODE ISLAND

Children's Cabinet

Strategic Plan 2026-2030

Letter from RI Children's Cabinet Chair Secretary Richard R. Charest

Children and family services are essential to both the well-being of our communities and the strength of our state economy. When we support children and their families, we are directly investing in our future workforce, local communities, and long-term economic growth in Rhode Island.

High-quality childcare, early education, health services, and family supports provide a strong return on investment. Every dollar spent today helps reduce future costs in areas like education, health care, public benefits, and the justice system. These services also strengthen the workforce right now by helping parents maintain stable employment and increase their earning potential.

By ensuring children are healthy, supported, and ready to learn, we help them succeed in school, graduate, and ultimately contribute to a skilled and productive workforce. This leads to higher incomes, stronger businesses, and a more resilient state economy. Conversely, when we neglect these supports, opportunities shrink, gaps widen, and economic growth suffers.

Family services such as parenting support, mental health care, and affordable childcare also strengthen home stability. Families with the resources they need are better able to balance work and caregiving responsibilities—something businesses rely on for consistent and reliable employees.

In short, our economic future starts with our youngest Rhode Islanders. Children and family services are not just a social priority—they are a smart economic investment. As Chair of the RI Children's Cabinet and Secretary of the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, I am committed to advancing the well-being of children, youth, and families today to ensure a strong and thriving Rhode Island tomorrow.



Secretary Richard Charest
Chair, RI Children's Cabinet
Rhode Island Executive Office of Health and Human Services

Rhode Island Children's Cabinet Members (2025)

Richard Charest, R.Ph., MBA

Secretary of the Executive Office of Health & Human Services, Children's Cabinet Chair

Brian Daniels, MBA

Director of the Office of Management and Budget

Ashley Deckert, MA, MSW

Director of the Department of Children, Youth & Families

Shannon W. Gilkey, Ed.D.

Commissioner of Post-Secondary Education

Angélica Infante-Green, M.Ed.

Commissioner of Elementary & Secondary Education

Richard Leclerc, MSW

Director of Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities & Hospitals

Jerome Larkin, MD

Director of the Department of Health

Katelyn Medeiros, Esq.

Child Advocate

Kimberly Merolla-Brito, MSW

Director of the Department of Human Services

Kristin Sousa

Director of Medicaid

Matthew Weldon, MSW

Director of the Department of Labor & Training

**Meredith McKenna/
Nicole Chiello, M.Ed.**

Governor's Designee/Children's Cabinet Coordinator

Children's Cabinet: Mission, Vision, and Goals

Mission

We, the leaders and agencies serving children and families in Rhode Island, come together to **ensure that our children and youth have opportunities for safe, healthy and bright futures**. By **providing the overarching leadership and holistic approach** necessary to improve the well-being of our children and youth, we set our State on a path toward a more stable and successful future.

Vision

All Rhode Island children have an opportunity for safe, healthy and bright futures.

Goals



External Stakeholders
(Rhode Island Children and Youth)



Organizational Capacity & Effectiveness
(People, Culture, Infrastructure, Systems, Processes)



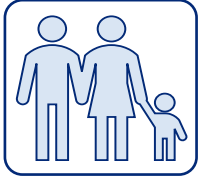
Financial
(Sustainability and Efficiency)

Goal 1:
Provide interagency coordination and leadership that drives improvement in the well-being of Rhode Island's children and youth.

Goal 2:
Strengthen the Children's Cabinet's capacity to execute on its Mission.

Goal 3:
Align and maximize available funding to advance interagency priorities.

Goal 1: Objectives, Strategic Initiatives, and Success Measures



**Goal 1:
Provide
interagency
coordination
and
leadership
that drives
improvement
in the well-
being of
Rhode Island's
children and
youth**

Objectives

**[O1] Maximize
collective
impact**

**[O2] Improve
outcomes for RI's
children and
youth**

Strategic Initiatives

[S1] Ensure priorities are selected with consideration for serving *all* RI children and youth (ages 0-24), advancing the goals of RI 2030, and incorporating priorities across health, education, and workforce
[S2] Clearly define scope within the context of other interagency forums and coordinate as needed
[S3] Restructure meeting purpose, structure, and process around selected focus areas and work issues across multiple meetings
[S4] Strengthen interagency data-sharing, coordination, and collaboration
[S5] Work across agencies to understand, address, and communicate federal policy changes

[S1] Establish a data-driven framework and process for selecting focus areas
[S2] Select a limited number of high-impact priority and/or population focus areas
[S3] Develop a process for executing selected initiatives within focus areas

Success Measures

[SM1] Establishment of focus area selection criteria that ensure the Children's Cabinet considers its objectives and the work of other interagency forums as it selects priority focus areas
[SM2] Implementation of new meeting structure and process
[SM3] Member agency satisfaction with meetings, data sharing, and overall coordination and collaboration

[SM1] Completion and documentation of framework and process for selecting focus areas
[SM2] Selection of high-impact focus areas and targeted outcomes measures
[SM3] Meet or exceed targeted outcomes for each focus area [measures TBD]

Goal 2: Objectives, Strategic Initiatives, and Success Measures



**Goal 2:
Strengthen the
Children's
Cabinet's
capacity to
execute on its
Mission**

Objectives

[O1] Build a staffing structure that drives effective execution



Strategic Initiatives

[S1] Establish an interagency staff team with appointees from member agencies who are responsible for coordinating within their agency to advance work on selected focus areas
[S2] Establish a structure to manage workstreams with clear roles, accountability, and project tracking
[S3] Leverage ad hoc committees with the appropriate subject matter experts as needed to advance progress on key initiatives



Success Measures

[SM1] All member agencies have appointed a staff person to the interagency staff team, as applicable
[SM2] Establishment of interagency staff team project management structure and processes
[SM3] Member agency satisfaction with structure, role clarity, and accountability

[O2] Strengthen data-driven decision making



[S1] Select outcome measures aligned with Children's Cabinet goals and focus areas that leverage existing measure sets and are evidence-based
[S2] Establish a reporting structure and process – report on Cabinet progress at least annually
[S3] Use shared data to execute on initiatives and improve outcomes



[SM1] Establishment of annual report on selected outcome measures
[SM2] Member agency satisfaction with data reporting, data quality and use of shared data in decision making

[O3] Enhance community engagement



[S1] Enhance the Children's Cabinet's ability to gather and utilize community input
[S2] Improve the community's ability to access and contribute to hybrid meetings
[S3] Update the website regularly to ensure access to timely and useful information



[SM1] Average # of non-Cabinet member participants in Cabinet meetings
[SM2] Member agency and external stakeholder satisfaction with enhancements [i.e., meeting structure, input gathering, website]

Goal 3: Objectives, Strategic Initiatives, and Success Measures



Goal 3:
Align and maximize available funding to advance interagency priorities

Objectives

[O1] Maximize efficient deployment of resources

[O2] Align on budgetary risks and state budget strategy

Strategic Initiatives

[S1] Inventory programs and investments associated with selected focus areas
[S2] Analyze service gaps and overlaps and use evidence-based approach to deploy resources effectively
[S3] Prioritize evidence-based investments that maximize impact/ROI

[S1] Establish an annual process aligned with the state budget calendar to coordinate on budget and authority related requests that advance interagency priorities
[S2] Collaborate on key federal and state budget risks and strategies

Success Measures

[SM1] Complete inventory of programs and investments associated with selected focus area
[SM2] Member agency satisfaction with resource prioritization and utilization

[SM1] Implementation of annual process aligned with state budget calendar
[SM2] Member agency satisfaction with coordination, collaboration, and alignment on agency budget requests and shared risks and strategies



Appendix

Developing the Children's Cabinet Strategic Plan

Developing the Children's Cabinet Strategic Plan

The Children's Cabinet engaged in a comprehensive process to ensure that the 2026-2030 strategic plan reflects the needs of Rhode Island children and youth and the priorities set forth for our State.

This appendix provides an overview of the findings from the baseline research and stakeholder engagement that informed this plan.

Baseline Information	Review of the Children's Cabinet's statute, RI 2030 Plan and previous strategic plans
National Scan	Review of Children's Cabinet strategic plans from other states
Environmental Scan	Research on external constraints – including political, economic, and legal/regulatory factors
Children's Cabinet Interviews	Ten interviews conducted with 25 representatives from Children's Cabinet agencies
Focus Groups	3 provider and 3 family focus groups (in English and Spanish) - 16 providers and 8 families
Input Sessions	RI Early Learning Advisory Council input session Public input session – including 45 participants

Rhode Island Children's Cabinet Statute

§ 42-72.5-1. Establishment

There is established within the executive branch of state government a children's cabinet. The cabinet shall include, but not be limited to: the director of the department of administration; the secretary of the executive office of health and human services; the director of the department of children, youth and families; the director of the department of behavioral healthcare, developmental disabilities and hospitals; the director of the department of health; the commissioner of postsecondary education; the commissioner of elementary and secondary education; the director of the department of human services; the director of the department of labor and training; the child advocate; and the governor or the governor's designee. The governor shall designate one of the members of the cabinet to be chairperson.

§ 42-72.5-2. Policy and goals

The children's cabinet shall:

- (1) Meet at least monthly to address all issues, especially those that cross departmental lines, and relate to children's needs and services;
- (2) Review, amend, and propose all interagency agreements necessary to provide coordinated services to children;
- (3) Produce an annual comprehensive children's budget, to be submitted with other budget documents to the general assembly;
- (4) Produce, by December 1, 2015, a comprehensive, five-year (5) statewide plan and proposed budget for an integrated state child service system. This plan shall be submitted to the governor, the speaker of the house of representatives, and the president of the senate, and updated annually thereafter;
- (5) [Deleted by P.L. 2015, ch. 141, art. 5, § 21.]
- (6) Develop a strategic plan to coordinate and share data to foster interagency communication, increase efficiency of service delivery, and simultaneously protect children's legitimate expectations of privacy and rights to confidentiality. This shall include data-sharing with research partners, pursuant to data-sharing agreements, that maintains data integrity and protects the security and confidentiality of these records. Any such data-sharing agreements shall comply with all privacy and security requirements of federal and state law and regulation governing the use of such data. Any universal student identifier now in use by the state or developed in the future shall not involve a student's social security number.

§ 42-72.5-3. Cooperation required

The executive office of health and human services shall provide staff support to the children's cabinet in preparing the integrated state child service system plan as required by this chapter. All departments represented on the children's cabinet shall cooperate with the executive office of health and human services to facilitate the purposes of this chapter.

RI 2030 Plan: Aligned Priorities and Goals

The RI 2030 Plan includes a range of priorities and goals that are aligned with the Children's Cabinet's mission. Selecting priorities aligned with RI 2030 goals is one of the Cabinet's key initiatives.

Aligned RI 2030 Priority	Aligned RI 2030 Goal Area	Key Goals <i>(not exhaustive)</i>
Strengthening K-12 Education	K-12 Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reach or exceed Massachusetts' educational outcomes by 2030 Universally screen all students academically, socially, and emotionally, and align resources to those needs Collaborate with the early learning sector to ensure coordination and alignment in order to improve transitions and ensure all students enter kindergarten on a path to reading proficiently Ensure that all students graduate high school with a game plan for accessible and sustainable success through higher education or preparation to enter the workforce
Building a Rhode to Prosperity	Workforce Development and Postsecondary Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase the percentage of Rhode Islanders with postsecondary degrees and credentials Create 5,000 new state-funded work-based-learning opportunities by 2030
Creating a Healthier Rhode Island	Physical Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce current e-cigarette use in youth from 16.5 percent (2023 YRBS) to 10.1 percent by 2030 Increase the use of dental services among children by promoting school-based services
	Goals for Behavioral Health and Individuals with Disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce the rate of suicide by 10 percent Continue initiatives that prevent and reduce opioid overdose and fatalities Improve systems of care coordination for children with special needs and their families
	Children and Families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure a continuum of care to meet the needs of children and adolescents Invest in preventive health and behavioral health initiatives to ensure children are on track for child and adolescent well visits, vaccinations, lead screenings, and behavioral health screenings Ensure that providers of key children's services can hire and retain staff and address the need for services by enhancing wages and providing professional development opportunities Expand Rhode Island's nationally top-ranked Pre-K program through a mixed delivery system that strengthens the entire 'birth through age five' system, inclusive of Head Start, Family Child Care, and center-based care
	State Healthcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empower individuals to navigate the healthcare system, understand medical information, and utilize tools like telehealth and self-monitoring to make informed decisions and take control of their health

Learnings from National Scan

State	Children's Cabinet	Strategic Plan	Profile / Key Features
Maine	Yes: Established in 1996; revived in 2019 to coordinate work across early childhood, K–12, and youth-serving systems	Yes: Children's cabinet strategic plan as of 2023, organized around two core goals for populations entering kindergarten and entering adulthood	Chaired by Health & Human Services; two strategic plans (kindergarten readiness & youth transition); strong focus on early care, prevention, workforce, behavioral health
Connecticut	Yes: Launched in 2023; responsible for collaborating on a multi-agency approach toward positive outcomes related to the well-being of children and young people	No: No children's cabinet strategic plan released; the cabinet has a limited online presence	Governor's Kids Cabinet; advisory panel for multi-agency collaboration; strong early childhood and parent advisory bodies
Massachusetts	No: No Children's Cabinet; however, there is a bill currently being considered to establish one	No children's cabinet	Bill in committee to establish cabinet; would be co-chaired by health & education secretaries; mandate for integrated, holistic policies and annual reporting
Vermont	No: No Children's Cabinet; however, the state has a robust structure for early childhood planning and coordination led by a public-private partnership entity	No children's cabinet A 2020–2025 early childhood action plan is available	Early Childhood Advisory Council; public-private partnership; 2020–2025 action plan; strong regional and family engagement
Georgia	Yes: Established in 2019 through an Executive Order	Yes: Children's cabinet strategic plan as of 2025; outlines high level goals to improve outcomes for children and families	30 members including First Lady; meets twice a year; plan focuses on family engagement, prevention, best practices, and 2Gen capacity building
Kansas	Yes: Established in 1999 by the state legislature	Yes: Children's cabinet strategic plan as of 2024; focus on early childhood	Advises governor/legislature; convenes Early Childhood Recommendations Panel, plan with pillars for ecosystem, workforce, and family experiences

Learnings from National Scan

Key themes from national scan of Children's Cabinet strategic plans

1. Early Childhood Education & Care: Expand access and improve quality; Strengthen workforce recruitment and retention

2. Family & Community Engagement: Involve families in program design and evaluation, foster resilience, connection, and belonging

3. Health & Well-Being: Ensure access to comprehensive physical and mental health supports, address basic needs for families facing adversity

4. Prevention & Early Intervention: Focus on upstream, proactive interventions; Support families before crises occur

5. Racial Equity & Inclusion: Embed equity in practices and culture and reduce racial and ethnic disparities

6. Workforce Development: Professional development and financial sustainability for early childhood workforce, Build supportive organizational culture

Learnings from Environmental Scan

External constraints - political, economic, and legal/regulatory factors (national)

This environmental scan was conducted during summer 2025 as an input to the strategic planning process. The federal landscape continues to evolve rapidly – the constraints highlighted illustrate the kinds of changes to policy, funding, and program eligibility that are continuing to occur at the federal level.

Medicaid & CHIP Cuts (OBBBA)

- \$1 trillion in federal cuts; stricter eligibility and work requirements
- Nearly 12 million people projected to lose coverage
- Schools face layoffs of health staff and reduced mental/behavioral health services due to loss of Medicaid funding

Federal School Vouchers

- New federal tax credit fully reimburses donors for private school scholarships
- Could divert funding from public schools and increase inequities

Child Care Workforce

- Federal student loans prohibited for childcare professionals earning below median high school graduate salary
- Limits access to training and worsens workforce shortages

Child Tax Credit Changes

- Increased to \$2,200/child, but stricter eligibility
- 2.7 million children to lose eligibility due to parents' immigration status
- 28% of children miss out on full credit due to low parental income

Mental Health Funding Cuts in Schools

- Early termination of \$1B in federal grants for youth mental health
- Anticipated layoffs of school mental health professionals; RI is part of a lawsuit challenging these cuts

Program Eligibility Changes under PRWORA

- HHS policy changes to eligibility for “federal public benefit” programs and reclassification of some programs may alter program eligibility based on immigration status

Department of Education Workforce Reductions

- Executive Order calls for closure of the Department of Education
- Trump administration has pursued a 50% workforce reduction
- Threatens oversight of student loans, Pell grants, disability support, and civil rights enforcement

Other Federal Spending Cuts

- Trump administration proposed cuts to CDC, Child Care & Development Block Grant, and Head Start
- Further developments expected throughout the appropriations process taking place in Fall 2025

Learnings from Children's Cabinet and Community Engagement

Learnings from the Children's Cabinet and community engagement process are summarized in the following slides.

Children's Cabinet and community engagement	Children's Cabinet Interviews	Ten interviews conducted with 25 representatives from Children's Cabinet agencies
	Focus Groups	3 provider and 3 family focus groups (in English and Spanish) - 16 providers and 8 families
	Input Sessions	RI Early Learning Advisory Council input session Public input session – including 45 participants

*Synthesis of
learnings*

Children's Cabinet SWOT Analysis
(Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats)

System Strengths and Challenges

Children's Cabinet Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths

The Children's Cabinet has **unique potential to drive interagency collaboration and visibility** across systems serving children and youth.

- Leadership-level **convening power**
- Public **transparency** and a visible **venue**
- System-wide **awareness** and **dissemination of information**
- Demonstrated ability to **drive coordination** when focused
- Statutory **foundation** and **cross-sector perspective**

Weaknesses

The Children's Cabinet **lacks a problem-solving orientation** and is limited by substantial **capacity constraints, limited public engagement**, and a historic focus on early childhood.

- Update-driven meeting format is **not oriented to problem-solving**
- **Limited staff resources** to drive coordination and follow-through
- **Limited accountability, metrics, and tracking**
- **Meeting overload** and difficulty sourcing presenters
- **Public engagement** is limited and there is **low public awareness** of the Children's Cabinet
- Historic emphasis on early childhood **excludes other priority populations**

Children's Cabinet Opportunities and Threats

Opportunities

*The Children's Cabinet could improve its effectiveness and maximize its impact by **refining its focus**, building its execution and reporting **infrastructure**, enhancing **public engagement**, and engaging in **strategic budgeting**.*

- Identify and focus on a **limited number of high-impact priorities** aligned with the Children's Cabinet mission and scope
- Prioritize and focus on **at-risk populations**
- **Coordinate workforce strategies** to address cross-sector challenges
- Establish a **staff structure** to drive execution
- Institutionalize **shared metrics and reporting**
- Enhance **public engagement**
- **Engage in cross-agency strategic budgeting**
- Coordinate readiness for **federal policy and budget changes** and communicate clearly

Threats

***Funding uncertainty, volatility at the federal level, workforce challenges, interagency coordination, and competing priorities** could slow progress without deliberate planning and coordination.*

- State and federal **budget pressures** and funding uncertainty
- Federal **policy and regulatory changes**
- **Cross-sector workforce** challenges
- **Complex roles** across agencies and lack of clarity about the distinct purpose of different interagency forums
- **Limited bandwidth**, competing priorities

System Strengths and Challenges

Providers, families, and other community members also highlighted a range of strengths, challenges, and ideas for improving state services for children and families.

	Description	Examples
What's working well	People valued the array of services available to children and families through state programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Access to mental and behavioral health services once connected• Mobile crisis response and wraparound supports• SNAP eligibility and benefits• Employment case management and training pathways• Cross-agency collaboration in early childhood care and education
Concerns and room for improvement	Participants highlighted challenges accessing services and navigating the system	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Access and waitlist barriers• Visibility and navigation of information gaps• District variability and service gaps• Transportation barriers• Stigma and fear around help-seeking• Family burnout and mistrust
What could help	Efforts to improve outreach and system navigation and build capacity could improve family and provider experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Proactive, in-person outreach• Universal navigation hub and asset map• Expand after-school and summer care• Strengthen workforce supports and address workforce shortages across key roles• Normalize supportive services

Additional Resources

For additional information related to the development of this strategic plan, see Children's Cabinet public meeting materials from the July, September, and October 2025 Children's Cabinet meetings.

- Strategic Planning Framework and Process – [July 2025 Children's Cabinet Meeting](#)
- Key Findings and Goal Setting – [September 2025 Children's Cabinet Meeting](#)
- Review and Refine – [October 2025 Children's Cabinet Meeting](#)