

Rebuilding Opportunity

The Coalition of Behavioral Science Organizations*

We call upon leaders of every sector of society to join together to advance the policies and programs needed to enhance opportunities in every neighborhood in the nation.

Over the past fifty years, the health and well-being of a significant portion of Americans have declined, and the prospect of systematically oppressed children escaping from poverty has nearly disappeared. No progress has been made in reducing structural racism -- a major cause of concentrated disadvantage. Concentrated disadvantage refers to neighborhoods with high percentages of residents of low socioeconomic status.

These neighborhoods are the focus of our efforts because they are where the well-being of families, including child development, is most compromised.^{1,2}

A Wealth of Evidence

Evidence-based interventions have been developed and tested to improve the well-being of children and families.^{3,4} These evidence-based interventions are summarized in recent reports of the National Academy of Science, Engineering, and Medicine⁵ and in a brief written by a task force of the Coalition of Behavioral Science Organizations.⁶

Three types of interventions show great promise for improving conditions in neighborhoods of concentrated disadvantage. First, **family-focused preventive interventions for diverse families** have proven benefits in helping families reduce conflict, support children's development, and prevent psychological and behavioral problems.⁵ Additionally, **school-based programs** can improve social, behavioral, and academic outcomes for children.⁵ Although not all the evidence for the benefit of these interventions comes from work in the most disadvantaged neighborhoods, there is enough evidence from research in these settings to justify making them more widely available and extensively evaluated. Finally, the third type of intervention, synergistic with the others, involves **community development efforts to redress historical and intentional disinvestment in neighborhoods of concentrated disadvantage**. These efforts include initiatives to improve housing, multi-sector efforts to increase employment, leadership engagement, school supports, and safety initiatives. Although further research is needed to evaluate and refine these strategies, sufficient evidence exists to support expanding their use.⁷

Community Engagement and Policy Recommendations

We cannot reduce the impact of prevalence of neighborhoods of concentrated disadvantage without both community-driven and policy-level approaches. The involvement and engagement of community members AND a policy agenda are needed to comprehensively address the entire panoply of conditions that intertwine to hamper the well-being of far too many people. We propose to develop community partnerships to identify neighborhood-level needs and collaboratively set action plans to organize and advocate for local and national policies.

Five types of policies must be enacted:

1. **Increase the economic wellbeing of families.** A report from the National Academy of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, describes seven policies that have proven benefit in improving family economic well-being.⁷

2. **Implement reforms in the policing and the criminal justice system, such that harm to neighborhood residents is eliminated and safety, trust, and cooperation are increased.** A summary of needed police practices was recently provided by the National Prevention Science Coalition.⁸
3. **Increase the use of evidence-based practices in neighborhoods of concentrated disadvantage.** Tested and effective family, school, and community development programs are available.⁵ Federal policy is needed to support their widespread adoption.
4. **Create a program of extramural research at the National Institutes of Health focused on experimental evaluation of comprehensive strategies for neighborhood development and participatory-action research.** Such a program will identify increasingly effective strategies and ways of widely implementing those strategies.
5. **Create legislation that requires any organization seeking to support communities of concentrated disadvantage to partner with community groups and support participatory action and workforce development.** Meeting communities where they are, ensuring protection from disinvestment, and identifying their needs while monitoring their wellbeing is fundamental to reducing disadvantage. Moreover, a program that empowers group members to advocate on their own behalf and that collaborates with grassroots groups will enhance community health.

Support This Effort

If your organization agrees, support this effort by:

- **Emailing Andrew Bonner (acbonner@ufl.edu) to establish communication.**
- **Permitting us to list your organization as endorsing the following statement:**
"We believe that a long-term nationwide effort to reduce concentrated disadvantage and increase opportunity in America's neighborhoods is vital to the future of the nation. We urge action at the federal level and at the local level that focuses on reducing poverty, inequality, and discrimination and increasing the implementation of policies and programs that help families thrive."
- **Permitting us to post your logo and a link to your website in our materials.**
- **Selecting a liaison within your organization to focus on this effort.**

If you personally agree, support this effort by:

- **Click [here](#) to log your endorsement.**
- **Permitting us to list your name and affiliation in our materials.** The following statement will accompany your endorsement: *"Personal endorsements do not reflect the views of affiliate organizations."*

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1. Biglan A, Elnfer K, Garbacz SA, et al. A Strategic Plan for Strengthening America's Families: A Brief from the Coalition of Behavioral Science Organizations. *Clinical Child & Family Psychology Review*. 2020.
 2. Acevedo-Garcia D, Noelke C, McArdle N, et al. *The Geography of Child Opportunity: Why Neighborhoods Matter for Equity*. diversitydatakids.org; Brandeis: The Heller School for Social Policy and Management; 2020.
 3. Biglan A. *The nurture effect: How the science of human behavior can improve our lives and our world*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger; 2015.
 4. Shonkoff JP, Phillips DA. *From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press; 2000.
 5. National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, Medicine. *Fostering healthy mental, emotional, and behavioral development in children and youth: A national agenda*. Washington, DC: National Academy of Sciences; 2019; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, & Medicine. (2019a). *A Roadmap to Reducing Child Poverty*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1722625246>; National Academies of Sciences Engineering, Medicine. *A Roadmap to Reducing Child Poverty*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press; 2019.
 6. Biglan A, Elnfer K, Garbacz SA, et al. A Strategic Plan for Strengthening America's Families: A Brief from the Coalition of Behavioral Science Organizations. *Clinical Child & Family Psychology Review*. 2020.
 7. Lin, E.S., Flanagan, S.K., Varga, S.M., Zaff, J.F. and Margolius, M. (2020), The Impact of Comprehensive Community Initiatives on Population-Level Child, Youth, and Family Outcomes: A Systematic Review. *Am J Community Psychol*, 65: 479-503. doi:10.1002/ajcp.12398
 8. Greene, M. B. (2020, June 27). *Police reform without accountability will fail*. The Hill. <https://thehill.com/opinion/criminal-justice/504823-police-reform-without-accountability-will-fail>

* Members of the Coalition: Association for Behavior Analysis International, Association for Contextual Behavioral Science, Association for Positive Behavior Support, the Evolution Institute, the National Prevention Science Coalition, and Society of Behavioral Medicine.