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**RESEARCH FROM THE FRAMEWORKS INSTITUTE AND
LEADING FOR KIDS IDENTIFIES CULTURAL MINDSETS THAT KEEP
KIDS FROM BEING A POLICY PRIORITY**

Children are not seen in most social policies; limited recognition of the role of social systems in shaping their lives negatively affects their well-being

WASHINGTON, D.C. and REDWOOD CITY, Calif. (Jun. 9, 2021) — The FrameWorks Institute and Leading for Kids today released the first of three reports detailing findings from their multi-phased research project, *Building a New Narrative About Our Kids*. The report finds that people don't see children in most social policy issues and have difficulty recognizing the role that systems, especially government, play in helping children thrive. These obstacles keep kids out of our public policy discussions.

Funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Children's Hospital Association, the larger project aims to develop a new narrative to change how we think and talk about kids, with the goal of increasing the salience of children's issues and building our collective responsibility to better address them.

The current report, *Why Aren't Kids a Policy Priority? The Cultural Mindsets That Keep Kids Off the Public Agenda*, focuses on how the mindsets Americans have about kids limit the effectiveness of advocacy messaging. Findings show two significant challenges that keep children's issues from being a public priority:

First, most social policy issues are not seen as children's issues. When Americans think about children, they focus on the spaces where children receive care—home and school. As a result, when people think about anything other than education or family policy, children simply are not in the picture.

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Second, Americans generally assume that individual choices rather than social systems and context shape children’s lives and outcomes. In turn, they reason that government can’t and shouldn’t do too much. This foundational way of understanding the world shapes how people think about children, leading to the assumption that government shouldn’t overstep its role and do more for children.

Findings in the report released today raise a number of questions that the team will answer as the project continues:

- Should advocates frame their messages by talking about kids in the context of their families and caregivers, or focus more directly on kids themselves?
- How can advocates counter racialized perceptions of deservingness—the idea that some families and kids don’t deserve our collective support?
- How can advocates stretch people’s understanding of “kids’ issues” to include the full range of policies that affect them—not just those that center on home and school?
- How can we talk about the relationship between government and kids to get around the idea that government should stay out of families’ lives?

Over the next several months, additional reports will be released: an analysis of the way kids’ issues are currently being framed by advocacy organizations and an analysis of the current and historical framing of children’s issues in the media.

Moving forward, the project will test potential new ways of talking about kids with a broad audience to identify framing that is most likely to encourage the public to raise the priority of children’s issues, and to recognize our collective responsibility for all children.

“There is no such thing as an unframed story. The frames in the stories we hear influence how we think about social issues, the opinions we have, and the actions we are—and are not—willing to take,” said Nat Kendall-Taylor, CEO of the FrameWorks Institute. “Telling a new story about kids isn’t just about changing the way we talk about kids—it’s about telling a different story about the broader systems that affect all of us and shape our lives.”

“I am incredibly optimistic that this research will provide all of us who work to make kids’ lives better with the tools that will make our work more effective in the future,” said David Alexander, founder and president of Leading for Kids. “We are grateful for the support of our funders and for the partnership of the many children’s advocates, social scientists, and communications experts on this project. Together, this will be a major step toward creating a country where all decisions are made with the best interests of kids in mind.”

Download a copy of the report: [*Why Aren’t Kids a Policy Priority? The Cultural Mindsets and Attitudes that Keep Kids Off the Public Agenda.*](#)

About FrameWorks Institute

The [FrameWorks Institute](#) is a nonprofit that helps mission-driven organizations build public will for progressive change. Since 1999, our work has helped to change the conversation on issues like child and adolescent development, climate change, health equity, public education, and structural racism – and sparked a more strategic approach to communications across the

nonprofit sector. We use rigorous social science methods to develop communications techniques that build more accurate understandings, more productive attitudes, and more progressive policy preferences. We work with researchers, advocates, and practitioners to use this research to reposition social issues, change mindsets, and shift narratives. [@FrameWorksInst](#)

About Leading for Kids

Founded in 2018, [Leading for Kids](#) is committed to improving the health and well-being of children by creating a movement to change how we talk about kids, how we can invest wisely and productively in their futures, and how our decision makers can better protect their rights and reflect their voices. [@LeadingforKids](#).

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