





A Message from Our Director

PolicyLab stood firm in our mission in a year of uncertainty and upheaval. Centering our evidence-to-action approach, PolicyLab team members continued to conduct research and engage with policymakers and communities. We stepped into new rooms and convened new voices, we tried new communication tactics, and we amplified our research on and policy recommendations for children and families. Most importantly, our team showed up for one another and for the families we care for in our clinical, research and community settings.

I'm proud to share the results of these efforts in the following report. Read on to learn more about how we've engaged in ongoing policy conversations—which have never been more important—and explore the cutting-edge research our experts have developed. You'll also hear from some of our team members on what makes PolicyLab unique, including our programs to support the next generation of researchers and to foster community-led research. Finally, we'll share how we're positioning our research and policy work to reach far and wide.

As we wrap up our current strategic plan, we look forward to writing the next chapter at PolicyLab. I continue to be inspired every day by the experts at our center who are dedicated to supporting children's health, and I'm encouraged by our partnerships with so many of you.

We are especially thankful to the partners and grantors whose continued support allows us to bring this work to life. Thank you for being part of our community. We are eager to collaborate with you in the new year.

Meredith Matone, DrPH
PolicyLab Director

2025 AT A GLANCE



8,068
newsletter readers



70,922
views of PolicyLab's blog



8,578
social media followers



launched on Bluesky



40+ faculty and **100+**
research professionals,
22 of whom celebrated
anniversaries over 10 years

as of Dec. 1, 2025

5 refreshed portfolio snapshots





Meeting the Moment

2025 has been anything but a normal year for research, health systems, health policy and public health communications. Each month brought new challenges, from cuts to research funding and shifts in public health infrastructure to sweeping changes to public benefits programs.

Despite the rapidly evolving political landscape, PolicyLab rose to the occasion. We stayed nimble, focusing our evidence-to-action model on the issues we're uniquely positioned to protect and amplify.

One of the year's most significant health policy debates centered on proposed cuts to Medicaid, a program critical for children, families, and communities, and at the heart of PolicyLab's research. When Medicaid was under threat, we convened a group of PolicyLab researchers with diverse clinical and academic expertise to bring our voice to the importance of the program for different populations of children, as well as caregivers.



Through a [series](#) of blog posts and videos, our experts drew on the evidence to speak about how Medicaid serves kids and families across the country. Viewed over 2,600 times, the series and work of this group connected with a wide audience, including partners at the Lucille Packard Foundation and the Children's Hospital Association.

Simultaneously, our researchers continued to publish their findings in esteemed journals like *JAMA Pediatrics* and the *American Journal of Public Health*. And while distrust in public health institutions mounted, we defied the odds, growing our reach across social media and email by meeting audiences where they are with timely insights from trusted messengers.

This year reminded us why PolicyLab exists: to stand on evidence when the ground shifts, and to act when children's health and well-being are at stake.

As we look ahead to 2026, one thing is clear: PolicyLab's model and mission have never been more critical. While the future remains uncertain, we are committed to building on this year's progress, making the case for evidence-based policy and the programs and policies that help children and families thrive, strengthening partnerships, and continuing to respond with agility to whatever comes next.

Rebecka Rosenquist, MSc
Deputy Director of Policy & Strategy



Our "Let's Talk Medicaid" video series lives on our [YouTube channel](#).

GENERATING HIGH-IMPACT RESEARCH

This year, PolicyLab experts launched and advanced innovative new research, publishing more than 110 articles in high-impact journals. Highlights include:

Health Care Transitions

Community health workers supporting emerging adults with sickle cell disease

Sadie M. Butcher^{a,b}, Caren Steinway^{c,d} ✉, Brahadesh Sivakumar^e, Katherine Wu^{a,f}, Toyosi Oluwole^g, Desireé N. Williford^h, Sophia Jan^{c,d}, Symme W. Trachtenberg^b, Kim Smith-Whitley^b, Tanisha D. Belton^{a,b}

JAMA Health Forum

Original Investigation

Children's Continuous Medicaid Eligibility During COVID-19 and Health Care Access, Use, and Barriers to Care

Erica L. Eliason, PhD, MPH^{1,2}; Daniel B. Nelson, MD, MPP³; Jordan Wood, MPH⁴; Doug Strane, MPH⁴; Aditi Vasan, MD, MSHP^{4,5}

ACADEMIC PEDIATRICS

Suicide-Risk Identification Across Developmental and Behavioral Pediatric Practices: A DBPNet Study

Kate E. Wallis, MD, MPH^{1,2,3,4} ✉ · Sarah N. Wozniak-Kelly, BA^{5,6} · Jaclyn Cacia, MS, CCRC^b · Katherine K. Wu, MPH^{9,6} · Cy Nadler, PhD^{7,8}

JAMA Pediatrics

Original Investigation

Tailored Adherence Incentives for Childhood Asthma Medications: A Randomized Clinical Trial

Chén C. Kenyon, MD, MSHP^{1,2,3}; William O. Quarshie, MS⁴; Rui Xiao, PhD³; Mishaal Yazdani, BS¹; Carina M. Flaherty, BA⁵; G. Chandler Floyd, BA³; Victoria A. Miller, PhD^{3,6}; Tyra C. Bryant-Stephens, MD^{1,2,3}; Joseph J. Zorc, MD, MSCE^{3,7}; Chris Feudtner, MD, PhD, MPH^{2,3}

We also know that research articles on their own are unlikely to produce change—that's where our model comes in. We pair researchers with policy and communications professionals to get key data into the hands of decision makers and public officials. Here, we're highlighting just a few examples of how we're sharing our research to drive change.



Expanded Child Tax Credit Payments During Pregnancy Were Associated with Decreased Odds of Adverse Birth Outcomes

PolicyLab experts [found](#) that receiving monthly expanded Child Tax Credit (eCTC) payments during pregnancy resulted in lower rates of preterm birth, low birthweight, and very low birthweight across recipients compared to those who did not receive the eCTC. Across [video](#) and our [blog](#), the authors summarized their takeaways and added to the conversation on unconditional cash transfers.

Early Adolescence Mental Health Needs and Opportunities: A View From On the Ground

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

DATE POSTED: JAN 29, 2025



Barriers and Facilitators to the Implementation of Prevention and Early Intervention Mental Health Programming in Schools

In interviews with school and district staff members, our researchers [identified](#) barriers and facilitators to the delivery and sustainability of evidence-based prevention and early intervention programs for student mental health. The findings could help inform school-based efforts to bolster mental health programming. The team has shared their insights throughout this multi-year project, including their latest findings on PolicyLab's [website](#) and through [blog posts](#).

Understanding the Impact of Cash Transfers on Low-income Caregivers of Preterm Infants

HEALTH EQUITY

DATE POSTED: JAN 29, 2025

Statement of Problem

Poverty is prevalent in the United States, with nearly 1 in 6 children growing up in households with incomes below the federal poverty line. Children who experience poverty, particularly during the earliest years, are at risk of various adverse health and developmental outcomes during childhood and throughout their lives. As the connection between poverty and poor health outcomes is well-documented, there is now an urgent need to move beyond merely outlining health disparities for low-income children and toward developing interventions that improve health outcomes.

Unconditional Cash Transfers to Low-income Preterm Infants and Their Families: A Pilot Randomized Controlled Trial

The authors [established](#) that an unconditional cash transfer intervention was feasible and acceptable for participating families. In qualitative interviews, many families perceived that the cash transfers mitigated the financial and mental stress associated with having a child in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU). This project is supported by a PolicyLab [pilot grant](#) and the study was posted on and shared via our [website](#).

BUILDING COMMUNITY-ACADEMIC PARTNERSHIPS

Our commitment to supporting community-academic research partnerships remains at the core of our mission.

Now in its fourth year, our [Community Partnerships in Research Program](#) is dedicated to supporting health and well-being through community-driven research. This ensures that the people whose lived experiences can best inform these interventions are included in the research and development process at every step. We're highlighting some of the exciting progress our teams have made on these pioneering projects.

JANUARY • Kick-off Celebration



PolicyLab hosted community partners and their CHOP collaborators for a day of shared learning, networking and celebration.

JUNE • Implementing Trauma-informed Approaches to Support Community-based, Youth-serving Programs



During a Morning Speaker Series presentation, Dr. Rachel Myers from the Center for Injury Research and Prevention and the Center for Violence Prevention and Ronna Kassel, executive director of the Christian Street YMCA, shared their partnership experiences. Their team learned from YMCA staff, and co-developed and evaluated a resource tool to support staff and youth at summer camp. Their presentation highlighted the expertise of staff in delivering youth programming in trauma-informed ways.

AUGUST • Exploring the Adultification of Black Girls and Community-centered Dissemination of Research Findings



PolicyLab Faculty Scholar Dr. Daniela Brissett and We REIGN Inc. Executive Director Dr. Tawanna Jones, along with program interns and the project team, [celebrated](#) the culmination of their partnership with a mural dedication in August. The West Philadelphia mural creatively translates the team's research findings and centers Black girlhood, resilience and joy. They also [published](#) their innovative research.

OCTOBER • Developing an Interprofessional Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) Equity Champion Team and Bias Mitigation Strategies



Dr. Diana Montoya-Williams and Jenné Johns, executive director of Once Upon a Premie, co-hosted a listening session with Pennsylvania Secretary of Health Dr. Debra Bogen and Secretary of Human Services Dr. Valerie Arkoosh. Their conversation focused on the needs of Black NICU mothers and infants. Dr. Montoya-Williams' team also supported Once Upon a Premie's newest grant-funded initiative, NICU Nest Read to my Premie, a program for NICU families of preterm infants consisting of support groups, workshops, care packages and early literacy resources.

SUPPORTING MENTORSHIP AND LEARNING

At PolicyLab, we invest in researchers' growth throughout their careers. Our programs:



Inspire the next generation of researchers through mentorship, job shadowing, networking, internships and employment.



Foster growth for early-career researchers through our Affiliate Trainee program. We pair trainees with faculty mentors from PolicyLab or from Children's Hospital of Philadelphia divisions that work closely with PolicyLab.



Encourage continued learning through our Morning Speaker Series. We invite researchers, policymakers, advocates and others to share their current projects and new insights.

Below, three of our leaders share their perspectives on PolicyLab's commitment to researchers' development:



Shaun Armstrong Jenkins,
MSODL, ODC
Workforce Development Director



Cynthia Mollen, MD, MSCE
Faculty Director of PolicyLab's
Affiliate Trainee Program



Jennifer Whittaker, PhD, MUP
Research Scientist

How is PolicyLab unique in its approach to continued learning and mentorship?



We've developed the Affiliate Trainee program to ensure everyone has foundational knowledge in policy-relevant research. Our offerings complement what trainees are exposed to in other aspects of their fellowships and are designed to provide basic skills as well as tailored, individual support.



I appreciate the Morning Speaker Series for its focus on continual learning for everyone at PolicyLab. The series provides exposure to new methods, new topics and new angles for thinking about shared content areas. It also offers opportunities for networking and relationship building. Many of our speakers stay for a small group presentation, which we hope fosters deeper dialogue, partnership and mentorship.



Undergraduate and graduate students participate in PolicyLab's 2nd annual Research Day during which they engaged in skill-building sessions led by PolicyLab experts on networking and qualitative research. They heard from a panel of team members who shared their perspectives on building research careers.

How do these efforts help advance the field of research and/or support the research community?



We understand that impactful research relies on a collaborative effort informed by diverse perspectives. By connecting students in our community with public health professionals, we cultivate a unique learning experience to enhance the exceptional quality of patient care, research, and education for which CHOP and PolicyLab are celebrated.



At the end of the program, PolicyLab trainees are well-positioned to amplify their work through blog posts, expert testimony, public comments, policy briefs and more. By developing skills to translate research findings into actionable insights, trainees are poised to amplify the impact of their work.



The Morning Speaker Series exposes us to something different than our day-to-day. Sometimes the research process can be tedious. I want the Series to be a source of inspiration. By exposing ourselves to content outside of our own specialized expertise, we broaden our understanding of how to approach our work. By hearing from policymakers, government officials, local media, community organizations, and advocacy groups, we gain a better understanding of how our research findings are used—and what questions interest-holders need answered. This ensures our research remains timely, relevant and used in the real world.

You work with researchers and young scholars at different points in their journeys. Can you tell us a little bit about how you elevate their work or help them get it to the next level?



The Morning Speaker Series provides opportunities to highlight the incredible work happening within PolicyLab. For example, our Early Career Researcher Spotlight features up-and-coming scholars. The New Faculty Showcase introduces us to new portfolios of research in development. And the Pilot Grant Showcase highlights the early seeds of new work growing within the center and in partnership with community organizations. These showcases provide an opportunity for presenters to share their findings with a larger audience and hone their messaging.

What excites you about the future of these programs at PolicyLab?



We engage with students in their own environments—be it in classrooms, at school events, during in-house summits or through virtual platforms. Our aim is to offer students the chance to delve deeper into public health research, understand its impact on our communities and access resources that guide them on how they can contribute to these initiatives.



I am excited to provide more opportunities for trainees to build skills and also showcase their work—through networking, conference presentations, videos, and blogs—within CHOP and beyond.



⬆️ This spring, Bruce Lesley, president of First Focus for Children, joined us for a discussion on the current landscape of children's health policy.



⬆️ Dr. Joey Whelihan, a PolicyLab affiliate trainee, presented work during our Early Career Researcher Spotlight last winter.

Reflecting with Our Alumni:

Julia Ransom, PhD

Among PolicyLab's many talented alumni who continue advancing our mission beyond our walls is Dr. Julia Ransom, now associate research director at Research for Action (RFA). There, she leads research projects grounded in equity, cultural responsiveness, and community engagement to influence meaningful change in education systems and policy.

We had the opportunity to speak with Dr. Ransom this summer about her career journey and how her time at PolicyLab shaped her work.



Q: When did you work at PolicyLab, and what was your role?

Ransom: "I worked at PolicyLab from 2014 to 2016 as a research associate, managing a team focused on a longitudinal study on high school graduation rates for the School District of Philadelphia."

Q: How did your time at PolicyLab shape the way you think about your work today?

Ransom: "At PolicyLab, I was introduced to a more holistic view of education as a social determinant of health. That understanding still drives my work today."

Q: What lessons have you carried forward from your PolicyLab experience?

Ransom: "Through PolicyLab's evidence-to-action approach, I learned the value of making research accessible to all audiences. I also saw how shining a light on inequities through research can lead to advocacy and solutions."

"The lessons I learned at PolicyLab, about equity, accessibility and the power of research to guide policy, are ones I continue to carry forward."

Her story exemplifies how PolicyLab's influence extends beyond our own walls, as our alumni bring our mission and values into new sectors and communities across the country.

From our alumni to our convenings, PolicyLab's reach continues to grow, extending our impact through both people and partnerships.

Collaborating for Greater Impact: A Future for Health Care in Early Childhood

Our spirit of collaboration and impact was at the heart of our early childhood-focused symposium in May. Supporting the health and well-being of young children through public policy has long been a PolicyLab priority. This year, we brought together a dynamic community of stakeholders committed to that goal.

Grounded in PolicyLab's growing body of work—ranging from payment policies like continuous Medicaid coverage and dyadic care models to innovations in pediatric primary care and social systems—the [one-day event](#) convened an interdisciplinary group of more than 100 policymakers, practitioners, researchers, advocates and funders.

Sessions explored research on early childhood coverage, strategies for aligning health and social systems, Medicaid payment reform, and sustainable investments to strengthen services for children and caregivers.



A stellar lineup of expert speakers, including Anna Strong of the Arkansas Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics and Pennsylvania Secretary of Human Services Dr. Valerie Arkoosh, offered insight and a forward-looking vision for advancing policies that center the needs of young children and their families.

The event also marked the launch of our [policy brief](#) on Medicaid in early childhood, with recommendations to prioritize prevention and promote healthy development through innovative care and payment models.

True to PolicyLab's mission, our researchers continue to evaluate how systems can better align to meet the needs of our youngest children.

As we step into a new year, we look forward to continuing these conversations, deepening cross-sector partnerships, and advancing evidence-based policies to give every child the healthiest possible start.

