

## INTRODUCTION

As the 116th Congress enters its second session and we welcome the 2020 election cycle, Young Invincibles (YI) is eager to continue fighting for expanded economic opportunities for 18-34 year olds, both nationally and regionally. As an organization that understands the complexity of young adults' lives today, YI focuses on the intersection of a range of issue areas that impact a young adult's ability to achieve economic stability: health care, higher education, the workforce, and voting.

Affordable higher education, access to health care, increased financial security, and meaningful opportunities to participate in the political process are all tremendously important to young people across America. Each year, YI develops our policy priorities based on a combination of research and statistics, what we hear directly from young adults (including our national and regional Youth Advisory Boards), and our knowledge of policy and politics in California, Colorado, Illinois, New York, Texas, and Washington, D.C.

Below are our 2020 policy priorities in each of our issue areas.

- In **higher education**, YI will focus on (1) access, affordability, and accountability; (2) strengthening academic success and support systems; and (3) uplifting and supporting Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs).
- In **health care**, YI will focus on (1) access, affordability, and coverage; and (2) health equity and mental health parity.
- In the area of **workforce**, YI will focus on expanding career pathways and workforce equity.
- Finally, YI will work to increase **civic engagement** among young adults by supporting policies to strengthen and expand voter education and engagement among the next generation of voters.

We have always viewed our research, policy, and communications strategies through the lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion. In 2020, our policy will more explicitly reflect this commitment to our partners, allies, funders, and congressional champions.

YI is dedicated to continuous learning when it comes to building our racial literacy and cultural competency. In 2020, that means crystallizing the important and unique role that YI plays and will play in the advocacy arena and building a proactive partnership and support strategy to ensure we are showing up for other organizations focused on young people of color as effectively as possible.

Our federal strategy will provide a broad platform for our regional offices (California, Colorado, Illinois, New York, and Texas) to tailor their respective agendas to reflect their policy and political landscapes. **As much as possible, where regions believe they can support the federal agenda, they will do so.**

## HIGHER EDUCATION

In 2020, YI will continue to advocate for student-centered higher education policy changes that advance racial and economic equity to empower this generation of young adults to participate fully in our democracy and workforce of the future. These changes are not only needed, but equally overdue. They should improve access and affordability, better support the needs of today’s diverse student population, and increase equity for our country’s HBCUs and MSIs. Our higher education priorities reflect an explicit commitment to advocating on behalf of low-income students and students of color, and our commitment to equity runs through each priority area.

As in previous years, YI will focus on ways to bend the curve on the student debt burden weighing down young adults’ economic prospects and progress toward their personal and financial goals. This work requires standing up for borrowers’ rights and pushing for data transparency and accountability to ensure institutions are providing high-quality programs of study that prepare students for success beyond degree or credential completion. Where institutions are failing to meet this responsibility or public officials fail to protect the interests of students and borrowers, we will say so and advocate on behalf of young adults who have been subjected to fraudulent and predatory practices.

### *Access, Affordability, and Accountability*

As in previous years, YI will focus on ways to alleviate the student debt burden weighing down young adults’ economic prospects and progress toward their personal and financial goals. This work requires standing up for borrowers’ rights and pushing for data transparency and accountability to ensure institutions are providing high-quality programs of study that prepare students for success beyond degree or credential completion. Where institutions are failing to meet this responsibility or public officials fail to protect the interests of students and borrowers, we will say so and advocate on behalf of young adults who have been subjected to fraudulent and predatory practices.

#### Federally:

- Advocate for increased **mandatory funding of the Pell Grant**, including greater flexibility and extending eligibility to undocumented and incarcerated students, as well as other historically disenfranchised populations. We will also explore and support expanding equitable access to early postsecondary credits through **dual enrollment and dual credit programs**.
- Advocate for a **simplified, more borrower-friendly student loan repayment system** and **increased borrower protections**. This includes advocating to close the 90/10 loophole, as well as advocate for stronger student loan servicing and refinancing options.
- Advocate for a **new federal-state partnership to expand debt-free college for in-state students at public two- and four-year colleges**.
- **Maintain and strengthen current student protections**, and ensure greater accountability from higher

education institutions. This priority includes repealing the ban on the federal government creating a student-level database while instituting rigorous standards to secure data and protect student privacy.

- Monitor the implementation of the FUTURE Act, and continue efforts to further **simplify the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) by addressing the burdens and complexity of verification in receiving financial aid.**

Regionally:

- In **California**, YI will work to strengthen and expand the Cal Grant Program to make college more affordable, while advocating for consumer protections for student borrowers.
- In **Illinois**, YI will advocate for a \$100 million expansion of the need-based Monetary Award Program (MAP) Grant and student emergency grants and push back on inequitable merit program expansion. YI will advocate to remove criminal background questions from the college admissions process.
- In **New York**, YI will work to increase and expand access to the state’s Tuition Assistance Program and opportunity programs. YI will also advocate for increased data and accountability on the Excelsior Scholarship program.
- In **Texas**, YI will study and make recommendations regarding student debt, student loan borrower protections, and disparities in debt among first-generation college students and students of color. YI will also monitor the implementation of the Open Educational Resources (OER) Repository, and the impact of this resource on college affordability and student costs.

***Strengthening Academic Success and Support Systems***

Federally:

- Advocate for increased funding for comprehensive support to student-parents, including support of the **Child Care Access Means Parents In School (CCAMPIS)** program to meet student-parents’ need for affordable, high-quality, on-campus child care.
- Support **wraparound services** that provide resources to students and families as they confront academic and non-academic barriers.
- Begin research analysis on the disparate impact the criminal justice system has had on young people of color, and where YI emerges in the landscape among partners.

Regionally:

- In **California, New York, and Colorado**, YI will support expansion of SNAP for college students. Colorado will also be focused on a hunger-free campus checklist and advocate for higher education student emergency grants.
- In **Illinois**, YI will advocate for College Completion Innovation Fund grants and will support student-parent advocacy related to one-stop centers and procuring student aid.
- In **New York**, YI will continue work advocating for expansion of CUNY Accelerated Study in Associate

Programs (ASAP), a comprehensive set of academic and student support programs that have doubled graduation rates. YI will also work to increase college access and success for students experiencing homelessness.

- In **Texas**, YI will monitor the implementation of legislation that appoints student liaisons across Texas public colleges, while advocating for specific support for student parents. YI will provide recommendations to expand and strengthen initiatives that assist student parents, adult learners, and first-generation college students in postsecondary degree completion.

***Uplifting and Supporting Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Minority-Serving Institutions***

Federally:

- Build on the momentum from the FUTURE Act in 2019 by working with coalition partners to advocate for increased **MSI/HBCU school infrastructure investment** through the Capital Financing Program.
- Begin researching ways MSIs and HBCUs are addressing the **need for greater representation of faculty of color** across higher education, and the outcomes of their students.

Regionally:

- In **Illinois**, YI will work to close racial gaps in college achievement through equity-based disaggregated target setting.

**WORKFORCE**

The Great Recession wreaked havoc on young adults’ finances, causing high unemployment and low wages just as these young adults entered the workforce. Young adults are now the most educated, most diverse, and most indebted generation in America’s history. The combined effects of low wage growth and high debt burden are particularly troublesome among African Americans. Across degree attainment levels, between 2013 and 2016, Black homeownership among 25 to 34 year-olds declined from 26 to 20 percent, median wealth declined from \$1,648 to \$1,340, and the portion saving for retirement declined from 31 to 29 percent.<sup>1</sup> A new workforce policy is needed for a new generation, and workforce policy must be rooted in equity considerations to move toward an economy that works for more Americans. There is no future of work without today’s young workers.

***EXPANDING CAREER PATHWAYS***

Federally:

- Support **full reauthorization of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act**, with a specific emphasis

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<sup>1</sup> Young Invincibles, “Financial Health of Young America: Update,” 2019. Retrieved from <https://younginvincibles.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Financial-Health-of-Young-America-update.pdf>.

on Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs and apprenticeships. We will advocate to include stronger reporting requirements that identify parents, particularly single-parents, who may experience unique barriers to work.

- Begin exploratory research to identify trends, sectors, and policies where the future of work will change and transform unevenly, with direct impact on young people.

Regionally:

- In **California**, YI will work to expand awareness of CTE programs at community colleges while also supporting policies that encourage transfers from community college to a four-year institution.
- In **Texas**, YI will monitor the Tri-Agency Workforce Commission’s work-based learning, industry-aligned internship, and industry credential initiatives, and provide recommendations on outreach and recruitment efforts that target young adults.

## **HEALTH CARE**

Our government will continue to be divided in 2020, which means full legislative repeal of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) is highly unlikely. While defensive tactics to protect current coverage and benefit levels are critical to ensuring young adults and young parents have adequate access to coverage, we believe divided government, upcoming national elections and a Democratic-controlled House presents an opportunity to advocate for policies that expand access and improve coverage for the remaining uninsured young adults and young families.

Over the next year, YI will work with young adults to reshape a vision for America’s health system that reflects and promotes the interests of young people – ideally, universal coverage that builds on the foundation of the ACA and Medicaid. In 2020 specifically, YI will continue to work to protect – and where possible expand – access to comprehensive health care coverage for young people to get us closer to that long-term goal. Part of our responsibility is to develop and share consumer education content to increase awareness on the impact of issues that traditionally have not been on young people’s radar, such as surprise medical billing and drug costs.

### ***Access, Affordability, and Coverage***

Federally:

- Advocate for **lowered premium and out of pocket costs** for young adults through increased federal subsidy support and strengthened consumer protections.
- Advocate for **expanded access and equity in health coverage** for all young people, including young parents and families.
- Provide **consumer education and support enrollment efforts in key states** so that young adults and young families know about their options to enroll in coverage for themselves and their children.
- Develop and share content to increase young adult engagement on **restrictive measures that prevent expansion and access to Medicaid**, including work requirements.

Regionally:

- In **California**, YI is committed to reaching universal coverage by covering young undocumented Californians through Medi-Cal, creating state subsidies to increase affordability in the ACA market, advocating for lowering the costs of prescription drugs, and providing young adults with health literacy education, Medi-Cal resources and a platform to empower California’s future leaders in advocating for universal health care in the state.
- In **Colorado**, YI will build on the success of the ACA and advocate for the implementation of a strong state public option that will increase access and affordability for young Coloradans.
- In **New York**, YI will support of attaining universal coverage by expanding coverage to young undocumented New Yorkers, increasing access and affordability in the ACA market, ending surprise medical billing, and supporting other efforts to reduce medical debt among young adults.
- In **Texas**, YI will focus on (1) increasing health coverage access, including expansion policies that lower the uninsured rate of the Texas young adult population, and (2) protecting and expanding access to services young adults use the most, like women’s health care services and maternity coverage.

***Health Equity and Mental Health Parity***

Federally:

- Advocate for policies that consider the potential **impact on people of color and others who may experience barriers to optimal access or coverage.**
- Maintain and strengthen consumer protections, oppose trans exclusions in minimum essential coverage, and support increasing access to equitable, culturally competent mental and behavioral **health coverage for LGBTQ young adults.**
- Begin exploratory research and partnership development on the need for **increased access to psychiatric and mental health care services** on college campuses.

Regionally:

- In **California**, YI will advocate to ensure that health care coverage for all young adults includes access to primary and preventive services.
- In **Colorado**, YI will advocate for a “Healthy Minds Campus” designation for institutions that take positive steps towards addressing mental health on college campuses.
- In **Illinois**, YI will advocate for robust appropriations funding for campus-based mental health legislation.
- In **Texas**, YI will advocate for initiatives that expand access to mental health resources for post-secondary students, including suicide prevention initiatives. YI will also advocate for programs and policies that increase food and housing security across Texas college campuses.

## CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Young Invincibles is committed to amplifying the voices of young adults by expanding opportunities to participate in the political process. As we enter our second decade working on increasing student voter participation, we believe that championing federal and state legislation to improve voting access on college campuses is a key path forward.

To that end, YI will continue to work support external partners and allies in efforts to repair and update the Voting Rights Act, and pass automatic voter registration, online voter registration, promotion of on-campus voter engagement, and early in-person voting efforts.