

2022 California Policy Agenda

As the Covid-19 global pandemic continues to exacerbate systemic barriers for all Californians, the challenges young adults face, from tuition and non-tuition related costs, unemployment, health care affordability, and rent, are rising exponentially. Despite California's increasing vaccination rate, the long-term impacts of Covid-19 and variants to come are a clear sign that we must act now on advancing equitable policy initiatives for future Californians.

The following recommendations are aimed at expanding overall economic security and access for today's young adults; improving the affordability and accessibility of higher education, strengthening economic security and basic needs resources. Most importantly, ensuring all young adults have access to vaccines, Covid-19 treatment, and generally greater access to health care. YI West's policy priorities in California for 2022 are a multi-pronged approach to promote state policy solutions that increase long-term financial stability for all young Californians.

SUMMARY

Higher Education

Advocating for equitable policies to improve access and affordability for higher education for underserved populations, including Black, Indigenous Students of Color, first-gen, and non-traditional students, by

1. Expand Cal Grant by removing GPA limitations for the lowest income California Community College students.
2. Ensuring that CalFresh and other basic needs resources are present at every California community college to serve housing and food insecure student populations and ensuring the implementation of basic needs centers are established by July 2022.
3. Advocating to ensure funding for campus capacity and affordable housing, particularly for community colleges and the populations they serve.
4. Expanding on consumer protections for federal and private student loan borrowers including advancements for the public service loan forgiveness.
5. Ensuring that higher education policies supported by YI West works towards the advancement of non-traditional students: Former foster youth, student parents, the unhoused, first-gen, and low-income student populations.

Health Care

Amidst Covid-19 concerns, advocate for a health care system that is accessible, affordable, and equitable to every Californian by

1. Ensuring young adults and adults, regardless of age or immigration status are included in Medi-Cal eligibility.
2. Expanding access to mental health counseling by ensuring that mental health resources are available at basic needs centers across California community colleges.
3. Fighting misinformation and ensure young Californians have access to Covid-19 vaccines, testing, and resources.
4. Advocate for policies that lower premiums and prescription drug costs.
5. Encourage the legislature to discuss health care as a human right and equitable possibilities outside of the current systems.

Workforce & Finances

Advocate for young Californians, particularly those who are low-income or have become vulnerable due to the Covid-19 pandemic by

1. Increasing Cal-EITC allocation and advocating for Guaranteed Income proposals for underserved populations.

Civic Engagement

Ensure voting is accessible to young voters and that voter education is provided by

1. Building on California's Voters Choice Act and advocating for new policy alternatives to make voting more accessible during a global pandemic.
2. Ensuring higher education institutions increase voter participation for young adults through civic engagement measures such as the ballot-bowl and coordinated events through state-funded voter empowerment coordinators at community colleges, UC, and state universities.

Higher Education

Prior to Covid-19, the student basic needs crisis in the United States had reached unprecedented levels. A survey conducted by The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice found that 39% of students were food insecure, 46% were housing insecure, and 17% experienced homelessness.¹ A survey by the California Student Aid Commission demonstrated that as a result of the pandemic, seven in 10 students (71%) had lost some or all of their income; nearly half (46%) had their living arrangements affected, and a quarter (24%) dropped courses during the spring college term.²

In 2021, California took a major step toward helping students meet their basic needs. By passing Assembly Bill 132, the postsecondary education trailer bill based on the Young Invincibles cosponsored Assembly Bill 775 (Berman), the state secured a \$30 million ongoing investment in the Budget Act of 2021 to support basic needs centers.

By July 1, 2022, each community college campus in California is required to establish a basic needs center and hire a basic needs coordinator, providing a single point of contact for students to access basic needs services, such as CalFresh and other programs. The basic needs coordinator will act as a broker in linking students to on- and off-campus housing, food, mental health, and other basic needs services and resources. Other requirements include developing and distributing student basic needs informational materials to students, streamlining the application and intake process, developing and implementing a plan to identify and provide outreach to students, and providing a student basic needs tab that is clearly visible and easily accessible from a drop-down menu on the home page of their campus website. We are calling on our institutional leaders to ensure all of California's community colleges work toward the July 2022 deadline and for state leaders to expand on basic needs support and CalFresh for more underserved student populations.

With the rise in beyond tuition costs, student loans, and over 43 percent of students in the state facing food and housing insecurities,³ we recommend the legislature to build on The Private Student Loan Collections Reform Act and The Student Borrower Bill of Rights to advance increased consumer protections for student borrowers, and reform the Cal Grant program to reflect the unique challenges students are facing far beyond tuition cost. In 2021, Governor Newsom vetoed AB 1456. This monumental legislation aimed at dismantling long standing structural issues that have kept too many students from receiving a Cal Grant. The initiative would have expanded college affordability for thousands of Californians. With the backing of state leaders and our partners at TICAS and CSAC, we are calling on the state government to Expand Cal Grant by removing GPA limitations for the lowest income California Community College students.

1 Hope Center Campus Based Needs Insecurity. https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/2019_RealCollege_Survey_Report.pdf

2 CSAC Covid-19 Student Survey. <https://www.csac.ca.gov/survey2020>

3 YI Student Climate Survey 2020

Health Care

The California Legislature ended a 2021 session having made great strides towards bridging the gap in health care access and equity. This past July, Governor Newsom signed the health care trailer bill, AB 133, which among other things, expanded Medi-Cal eligibility to low-income, and undocumented Californians over the age of 50. While the fight for health equity is far from over, this initiative was a worthy investment of the \$26 billion projected surplus for this past year.

We must put an end to medical exclusion of our most vulnerable community members. This is even more urgent during the coronavirus pandemic, which is disproportionately harming immigrant communities and people of color. If the state can set up temporary programs for the uninsured to access Covid-19 treatment, then we must think about health care access beyond the pandemic. Many uninsured Californians have gone years without a check-up and may have unknown chronic conditions. In a moment of reckoning with racial injustice and structural inequity, California has a clear choice. Comprehensive health insurance makes good public health sense in the face of a rapidly spreading virus. It makes us all safer and healthier. We won't be successful in our fight against the pandemic unless we ensure equitable access to care for ALL Californians. As we look ahead into the next fiscal year, YI West will be advocating for further investment into health care expansion by extending Medi-Cal eligibility to all low-income Californians ages 26 to 49. With the Legislative Analyst's Office projection of a \$31 billion surplus for 2022, now is the time to act and ensure California becomes the first in the nation to achieve universal access to affordable health care coverage.

As we continue to advocate for the Governor to finally put an end to the MediCal exclusion for undocumented families, we also welcome the conversation for an even more equitable health care system for years to come. We commend Assemblymember Ash Kalra and the state legislature for continuing the discourse for CalCare, an approach that sees health care as a human right for all Californians.

Workforce & Finances

In 2021, YI West co-sponsored Assemblymember Low's AB-65, the very first California Universal Basic Income (UBI) proposal to be heard at the state legislature. This monumental legislation subsequently led to the Governor's budget proposal for the 30 million dollar five-year investment to implement UBI pilot programs throughout the state. Last November, YI West facilitated a UBI and Guaranteed Income Panel at The State of Young California Summit. With hundreds of young adults in attendance, the panel included elected officials and advocates discussing the stream of newly created pilot programs across the state. Some pilot programs are aimed at low-income families while others aim to support transition age foster youth. We believe that UBI will allow for economic mobility and wealth creation, especially for communities of color and low-income communities. It is important now more than ever to continue the conversation and organize young Californians to think about their economic security and wellbeing.

With 71% of California's college students reporting to have lost some or all of their income during the pandemic, a proposal for a state sponsored universal basic income has become a valid discussion.⁴

⁴ CSAC. "CALIFORNIA STUDENT AID COMMISSION Covid-19 Student Survey," July 2020. CALIFORNIA STUDENT AID

Additionally, 26% of respondents from YI’s California Student Climate survey reported having had family who were experiencing significant enough financial challenges that they had to seek a way to increase their income.⁵ It’s time for Californian’s economy to provide better opportunities for working families and future generations. Innovations and technologies created today are already disrupting the workforce, and continued automation will profoundly change the way our state works in the next 30 years. During these times of economic uncertainty and hardship, a monthly universal basic income will provide Californians with a stronger level of economic security.

Civic Engagement

As a nonprofit organization dedicated to amplifying the voices and experiences of young Californians, YI West is committed to ensuring that young adults have the tools needed to engage with our democratic process. It is with this conviction that YI sponsored and helped pass the Student Civic and Voter Empowerment Act in 2020 ensuring that students have access to vote center in their college campuses, as well as that there is a full-time Voter Empowerment Coordinator in every UC, Cal State, and community college across the state.

Because these coordinators were working virtually their first year, with the reopening of most college campuses in 2022, YI is committed to surveying and consulting with the voter coordinators to help them in their transition and set them up for success. YI is committed to promoting civic engagement among young adults by increasing the accessibility of voting centers and civic education. As such, we are looking forward to continuing our work in 2022.