

TOGETHER, INVINCIBLE:

A Bold Agenda for Young Adults

Forward:

2022 brought a mix of encouragement and disappointment for young adults in America. The Biden Administration entered office in 2021 with an ambitious set of goals. Despite some genuine triumphs, progress toward a more prosperous and equitable future for young people seems to be at a halt.

Many Administration priorities with empowering potential for young adults did not survive the 2021-2022 legislative cycle. Crucial pandemic-era supports were allowed to atrophy or expire. Wages remain too low for too many. Years of hard work, consistent advocacy, and effective storytelling on the part of the nation's young adults culminated in the Administration's 2022 cancellation of up to \$20,000 in federal student debt for borrowers in the greatest need. This historic victory, though, remains incomplete and under legal threat. The razor-thin balance of power that emerged in the wake of the 2022 midterms, however, means that the policymaking environment provides some opportunities to pursue transformational change. YI will continue to fight for expanded economic opportunities for 18-34 year-olds, both nationally and regionally.

Our work will reflect our values of community, collaboration, equity, bold ideas, and young adult power.

As an organization that understands the complexity of young adults' lives today, YI elevates their voices on core issues that determine their economic empowerment: health care, higher education, finance, workforce, and civic engagement. Each year, YI develops policy priorities based on a wide-ranging consultative process that involves national polling, listening directly to young adults, engaging our national and regional Youth Advisory Boards and Young Advocates Program participants, and organizational knowledge of policy and politics in our regional offices in California, Colorado, Illinois, New York, Texas, and nationally.



Our federal strategy will provide a broad platform for our regional offices to tailor their agendas in a way that reflects their state’s individual policy and political landscapes. The values and priorities of young adults in different regions must always be expressed in a local context, guided by community stakeholders, and where regional initiatives can complement and support the federal agenda, they will do so.

Below are our 2023 policy priorities for each of our core issue areas.

In Health Care:

1. Prioritizing affordable and equitable access to health care coverage;
2. Fighting for reproductive and maternal health care; and
3. Ensuring young people have the tools and information needed to get vaccinated against Covid-19 and other viral illnesses.

In Higher Education:

1. Increasing the affordability of and equitable access and completion to postsecondary education for racialized, low-income, and first-gen students;
2. Strengthening systems, policies, and practices that support academic success and completion and closing the opportunity gap; and
3. Expanding mental health resources at colleges and universities.

In Workforce & Finance:

1. Expanding and improving equitable career pathways for young adults, especially for racialized, low-income young adults;
2. Widening and deepening access to vital supports for basic human needs through employers;
3. Fighting for all work to pay a living wage; and
4. Protecting and expanding young adults’ ability to unionize and engage in collective bargaining;

Health Care

Health care enrollment in the United States is at a historic high thanks to the expanded Affordable Care Act (ACA) premium subsidies from the American Rescue Plan.¹ The recently-enacted Inflation Reduction Act ensures these subsidies continue through 2025. Nonetheless, there’s more to do to ensure that more Americans can access these monthly premium savings and that actual usage of health insurance is affordable.

¹ <https://www.kff.org/policy-watch/as-aca-marketplace-enrollment-reaches-record-high-fewer-are-buying-individual-market-coverage-elsewhere/>



This is especially critical for meeting the needs of young adults with chronic conditions who need routine access to medical care, specifically for mental health services.

Alarming, a third of young adults under the age of 30 are struggling with mental health issues such as depression and anxiety.² Yet, the out-of-pocket costs for a mental health provider often make routine care unaffordable and the lack of mental health professionals makes timely care inaccessible.

The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated not only the critical need for federal investment in mental health resources, but also brought to light the discrepancies across the board in health care for racialized groups. For the 118th Congress, YI will be prioritizing our health advocacy and support efforts on policies that center equitable access to health coverage for racialized groups. This is especially significant as we focus on the experiences of people of color who face poorer health outcomes due to implicit biases in medicine and poorer access to reproductive and maternal care.

Specifically, YI will:

Prioritize Affordable and Equitable Access to Health Care Coverage

- Defend the free coverage of preventative services guaranteed under ACA and advocate for recent improvements made to the ACA to remain in place, such as the recently implemented “Family Glitch” rule that is estimated to improve affordability for one million Americans.³ YI will play an active role in defending the ACA and the Family Glitch rule publicly against legal, congressional, and administrative challenges.
- Advocate for policies that limit the cost-sharing involved with access to mental health services under ACA marketplace plans and employer-based plans.
- Introduce legislation to ensure that young adults studying to work in behavioral health fields, including psychology and social work, are eligible for scholarships under the National Health Service Corps (NHSC).
- Support legislation that centers equitable investments to improve access in historically marginalized communities, such as the [Pursuing Equity in Mental Health Act](#) by Sen. Bob Menendez (D-NJ) and Rep. Watson Coleman (D-NJ). This legislation addresses disparities in access, care, and study of mental health issues among people of color by authorizing \$805 million in grants to support research, increasing culturally competent providers, and awareness

² <https://www.kff.org/other/press-release/new-kff-cnn-survey-on-mental-health-finds-young-adults-in-crisis-more-than-a-third-say-their-mental-health-keeps-them-from-doing-normal-activities/>

³ <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2022/10/11/statement-hhs-secretary-xavier-becerra-administration-action-resolve-family-glitch-lower-health-care-costs.html>

programs.

- Support passage of Sen. Sherrod Brown’s and Rep. Jahana Hayes’ [resolution declaring racism a public health crisis](#) as a means to ensure that legislators work within an equity-centered framework. YI believes that Congress should commit to establishing a nationwide strategy to address health disparities and inequity, addressing social determinants of health, and dismantling systemic practices and policies in health systems that perpetuate racism.
- Support the reintroduction of the [Easy Enrollment in Health Care Act](#) by Sen. Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) and Rep. Ami Bera (D-CA) in the 118th Congress. This legislation expands on the work already implemented in some states to provide automatic eligibility determinations and enrollment options based on people’s annual tax returns. While great advances have been made in lowering the uninsured rate, racialized groups lead in being uninsured despite being eligible for the most affordable coverage options including Medicaid. For example, Latinos account for 40% of the seven million people who are uninsured yet eligible for Medicaid or CHIP.⁴ While we applaud the recent investments to increase outreach to racialized communities during open enrollment season, more could be done by Congress to streamline access to enrollment and knowledge among marginalized communities about their eligibility for affordable health plans.
- Advocate for a federal solution to provide additional subsidies in non-expanded Medicaid states that would help cover those that fall in the Medicaid expansion gap.
- Advocate for stronger investments by the federal government in health literacy, particularly among young adults. Education in health literacy is key not only to helping young adults understand their options for affordable health care, but to them choosing plans that lessen the possibility of incurring medical debt, which is the number one reason for bankruptcy filings in the U.S.
- Direct consumer education and advocacy efforts towards alleviating and preventing medical debt for young adults. This means advocating for the current Administration to crack down on marketplace junk plans that fail to meet ACA standards of coverage, but that were expanded during the previous administration. We will also advocate for the Administration to create more comprehensive plan comparison tools during open enrollment, and to put forth new regulations that ensure young adults receive financial assistance options when they need them after emergency care at hospitals.
- Support passage of the [HEAL for Immigrant Families Act](#) by Sen. Cory Booker (D-NJ) and Rep. Pramila Jayapal (D-WA), which removes the five-year wait that lawfully present immigrants face before being eligible to access Medicaid and CHIP; it also expands ACA marketplace eligibility to all undocumented residents, and expands ACA and Medicaid programs to DACA recipients.

⁴ <https://www.kff.org/uninsured/issue-brief/a-closer-look-at-the-remaining-uninsured-population-eligible-for-medicaid-and-chip/>

Fight for Reproductive and Maternal Health Care

- Advocate for Congress to codify a person's right to bodily autonomy and their right to choose whether to continue or terminate a pregnancy. Specifically, YI supports the passage of the [Women's Health Protection Act](#), which codifies *Roe v. Wade* and restricts government intervention in the ability for medical professionals to provide abortion services.
- Support congressional and administrative policies that support affordable and protected access to abortion care, especially for people seeking services across state lines. This also includes protecting and expanding access to telehealth abortion care and mailed abortion medication.
- Advocate for expanded, protected, and timely access to contraception. This includes ensuring that health insurance plans honor the ACA coverage requirements for contraceptives. YI will also support legislative measures to statutorily protect an individual's right to access and a health care provider's right to provide contraception and related information.
- Advocate for policies that prioritize the experiences of African American women and people of color in relation to the delivery of maternal health care. This includes legislation that expands Medicaid to include coverage for doula and midwifery care; extends postpartum eligibility for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) to twenty-four months from the current one-year limit; and invests in a diverse maternal workforce that is culturally competent to the medical care of a diverse population. YI is happy to support individual as well as all-encompassing measures to support improving maternal health outcomes like the [Black Maternal Momnibus Act](#) led by Rep. Lauren Underwood (D-OH) and Sen. Cory Booker (D-NJ).





Ensure Young People Have the Tools and Information Needed to Get Vaccinated Against Covid-19 and other Viral Illnesses.

- YI will advocate for Congress and the Administration to fund vaccination and testing programs that are easily accessible to young adults and communities most affected by respiratory viruses. This means ensuring that the commercialization of vaccines, tests, and treatment does not hinder access for low-income and uninsured populations. YI will take an active role in advocating for equitable federal investments in viral threat containment and treatment.

Higher Education, Workforce Development, & Finance

We are in a time of renaissance – renewing what it means to advocate for change, moving as one band, one sound. We have learned that unless we come together as one, what we all seek – liberation, cannot happen without unity. Our identities make us great – our innovative ideas, niche interests, and passionate voices improve the world. Yet, we are witnessing attempts to ameliorate platforms, policies, and practices that allow each of us to simply live. To live a life of wholeness, a life of gratitude, a life of fulfillment. Instead, in the last two years, we have witnessed [an uptick](#) in depression and anxiety. We have witnessed [a downturn](#) in college enrollment. We have witnessed a [Great Resignation](#), as young adults across workforce sectors told employers ‘no more.’

In this time, we have also witnessed the fruits of hope. We have witnessed the power of young adults to lead a nation toward true equity and prosperity. We have witnessed young adults share in the consequences of inequitable policies and fight back for what is just. We are in a time of renaissance. Young adults of today deserve an opportunity to enjoy life freely. Young adults deserve substantive and comprehensive investments in our workforce and access to higher education, necessary for a prosperous future. Young adults deserve nothing less than jobs that pay sustainable wages, stable access to basic needs, and opportunities for rewarding and remunerative careers. If that means that young adults have to run for office, organize, and educate one another – they are doing it and doing it well.

With the guidance and expertise of our [Young Advocates](#), we are excited to present our higher education and workforce, and finance policy priorities for 2023. We stand behind our young adults and their ability to lead us to a brighter future. Though we are a mighty organization, we cannot do it all, and we appreciate the collaboration between partners that support us and our young adults in this fight.

We are ready for the good trouble ahead.

Fight to increase the affordability of and equitable access and completion to postsecondary education for racialized, low-income, and first-gen students;

- Support federal legislation intended to provide funding to eliminate tuition and required fees for all students at community colleges and two-year tribal colleges and universities; working- and middle-class students at four-year public institutions of higher education (IHEs) and tribal colleges and universities; and eligible students at private, nonprofit minority-serving institutions (MSIs). Additionally, legislation must extend eligibility for federal student aid to certain non-citizen students.
- Support federal legislation intended to permanently reauthorize the Federal Pell Grant program by providing funding to increase the maximum award for each eligible student, increasing the duration limit for the use of Pell Grants, and allowing students to use their awards to cover living and non-tuition expenses. Additionally, legislation must extend eligibility for federal student aid to certain non-citizen students.
- Support federal legislation intended to reauthorize the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA) and address additional issues related to higher education. Specifically, increasing the maximum federal Pell Grant award, providing incentives for states to fund public institutions of higher education (IHEs), increasing and making permanent funding for minority-serving institutions, emphasizing an increase in funding for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Predominately Black Institutions (PBIs). In addition to expanding the availability of financial aid to postsecondary students and extending eligibility for federal student aid to certain non-citizen students.
- Defend President Biden’s Broad Student Debt Cancellation plan and advocate for the immediate cancellation of student debt. Also, ensure that any administrative burdens on borrowers are removed; any policies related to student loan forgiveness or repayments include justice-impacted and non-citizen students (e.g., [Fresh Start](#)) and that any debt forgiveness is not considered taxable income.
- Support federal legislation that advocates for interagency communication to support students completing the FAFSA and continue to monitor the implementation of the [FUTURE Act](#), which enables students to consent to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and the U.S. Department of Education to share tax return data.
- Support federal legislation or initiatives requiring institutions to grant students the right to reenroll in their associate or baccalaureate degree programs after withdrawing or stopping if the student was in good academic standing with the university ([See California’s AB 1796](#)). In addition to providing funding to support institutions with financial assistance, support services, and outreach

programs for students who left campus without completing their associate and baccalaureate degree program, beginning with students closest to graduation ([See Colorado's Finish What You Started Initiative](#)).

- Advocate for upholding the original intent of affirmative action in college admissions. In addition to providing institutions with guidance and technical assistance to ensure students historically marginalized and excluded from higher education have equitable access and are equipped with the resources to counter arguments that base equitable accessibility solely on academic merit and socioeconomic status ([See ACLU](#)).

Fight to strengthen systems, policies, and practices that support academic success and completion and close the opportunity gap

- Support federal legislation to expand the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) for students, simplify the eligibility for postsecondary students and make the [temporary COVID-19 protections](#) in place permanent. Also, advocating for an executive order that permanently prohibits the reduction of local control over how long unemployed Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs) could receive SNAP food benefits.
- Support federal legislation mandating all institutions of higher education receiving Title IV aid to disclose their academic credit policies, including existing articulation agreements, credit evaluation processes, and any specific courses pre-approved for full transfer credit publicly.
- Support federal legislation mandating institutions of higher education receiving Title IV aid to suspend debt collection practices of withholding transcripts from former students for failure to pay past- or presently-due tuition and not charge the student a higher fee for obtaining a transcript or provide less favorable treatment because a student owes a debt ([See NY's A6938A](#)).
- Advocate for legislation establishing a federal-state partnership that provides federal match grants to distribute funding to institutions to develop Basic Needs centers and guidance on the services that Basic Needs centers must give directly or through resource material, with emphasis on tackling food and housing insecurity. Ensure any legislation includes provisions with the recommendations in [California's Meeting Basic Needs report](#).

Fight to expand mental health resources at colleges and universities

- Advocate for introducing legislation to establish dedicated new funding and a framework and goals for higher education institutions to meet students' demand for campus mental health services. ([See Illinois' Mental Health Early Action on Campus Act](#)). In addition to ensuring established mental health programs are inclusive and enhance existing campus resources, using

[Colorado's Healthy Minds Campus Checklist](#) as guidance. Institutions that meet the requirements established will earn a federal designation and eligibility for additional funding.

- Advocate for introducing legislation that mandates all institutions of higher education receiving Title IV aid must administer a climate survey to all students, collect data regarding police contact with students, and track and report incidents of hate speech on campus.

In Workforce & Finance, specifically, YI will:

Expand and improve equitable career pathways for young adults, especially racialized and low-income young adults

- Support federal legislation intended to develop robust, infrastructure-focused, federally-backed workforce programs. This includes: providing training and employment for dislocated, unemployed, and underemployed workers; supporting youth employment; establishing workforce information systems improvements; creating or expanding pre-apprenticeship, apprenticeship, and journeyman programs in addition to developing quality guardrails to ensure employment opportunities following completion of programs.
- Support federal legislation intended to expand Pell grant eligibility for students enrolled in job training programming, and ensure job training programs are aligned with high-skill, high-wage, or in-demand industry sectors at accredited, non-profit institutions of higher education.
- Support federal legislation intended to provide reparations for descendants of American Freedmen and to examine the role of the federal and state governments in supporting the institution of slavery, forms of discrimination in public and private sectors against freed enslaved African Americans and their descendants, and lingering negative effects of slavery on living African Americans and society.
- Support federal legislation intended to fully fund the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) programs by at minimum \$80 billion over six years; expand summer and year-round jobs programs for youth; strengthen the quality of the Jobs Corps program; codify partnerships between employers and community colleges to provide high-quality job training, and provide funding for innovative approaches to workforce development.

Widen and deepen access to vital support for basic human needs through employers

- Advocate for introducing federal legislation to extend the current [ARPA Expansion of EITC for Childless Workers](#). In addition to including provisions to remove the family statuses associated with EITC credits; increase the income threshold so that lower and middle-income families continue to collect benefits; reintroduce monthly disbursement options, and expand the age eligibility of the EITC to 18-65, so more low-wage childless workers can access the credit.
- Advocate for introducing federal legislation that prevents states from imposing onerous and unnecessary earnings requirements for the [Child Tax Credit](#), increases the amount provided to parents, makes these tax credits fully refundable, and extends the benefit to children 18 years of age.
- Support federal legislation establishing a child care and development assistance program that allocates funding for states to provide services to infants, toddlers, and children with disabilities. Also, ensure the legislation provides funds and establishes grants for states to create preschool programs for low- to moderate-income children between the ages of three and five years; and requires and provides funds for the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to assist the Head Start agencies with ensuring their teachers and staff are paid a living wage.
- Support federal legislation that prohibits employment practices that discriminate against making reasonable accommodations for qualified employees affected by a pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions.
- Support federal legislation that requires employers to provide employees with family and medical leave insurance, a monthly benefit payment of two-thirds of the young adult worker's regular pay, and establish resources to administer the program.

Fight for all work to pay a living wage

- Support legislation to raise the minimum wage such that every young adult worker in America is paid fairly for their time. This raised wage can and should be indexed to the consumer price index (CPI) to keep inflation from eroding that wage's real value.
- Advocate for introducing federal legislation supporting federal-state partnerships to offer equitable, accessible, and portable retirement benefits and savings options for workers.
- Advocate for introducing federal legislation intended to protect and expand Social Security retirement benefits and to ensure benefits will be there for today's young adults when they retire. Ensure that costs associated with such

expansions are borne by those who can best afford them, not by middle- and low-income families.

Protect and expand young adults' ability to unionize and engage in collective bargaining

- Support federal legislation for young adults to unionize and bargain with employers without intimidation or retaliation. Also, ensure that Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) legislation is updated with provisions that protect employees' right to unionize and stricter penalties for employers violating FLSA. Finally, legislation must adjust the tax code to make anti-union expenses not tax-deductible for employers to further discourage employers from interfering in union organizing.

