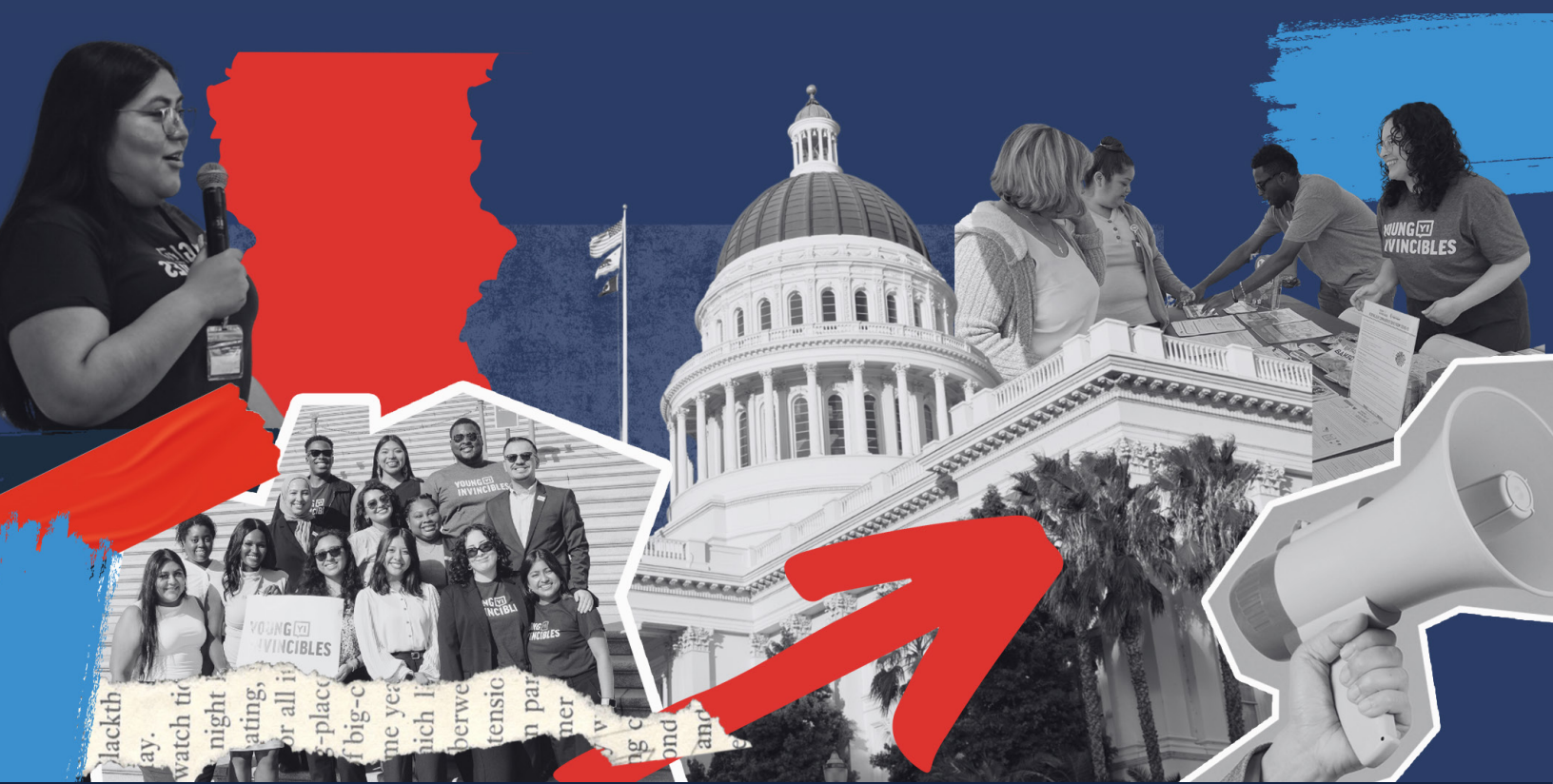


California Policy Agenda



A message from our 2024 YI West Youth Advisory Board

Young Californians are navigating significant structural barriers as they transition into adulthood. Despite California’s position as an economic powerhouse, young adults face persistent challenges in accessing affordable healthcare, mental health services, higher education, and equitable career opportunities. Through listening sessions with young people across the state, we uncovered vital issues rooted in the gaps within these essential systems. These barriers

not only hinder individual growth but also perpetuate broader inequalities, particularly for marginalized and lower-income communities. The issues facing young adults today—complex healthcare access, the diminishing value of higher education, barriers to career advancement, and mental health struggles—mirror the mission of Young Invincibles, a nonprofit dedicated to empowering young people in areas critical to their future.



By centering young adult voices, our agenda reflects the values of equity, empowerment, and collaboration at the intersection of healthcare, education, and career development.

At YI, we place a strong emphasis on prioritizing policies that address the root causes of our focus issues at a systemic scale. As we move into a new administration, amidst uncertainty for the future, we remain committed to fighting for all of California’s young adults. We will continue to support our partners in the Health4All coalition to provide equitable and affordable access to health care for Californians. We will advocate for young adults’ access to mental health care.

In higher education, we will continue to be a strong advocate for expanding protections for students against the harmful impact of institutional debt, work toward increasing funding for Cal Grant, and continue the fight on mitigating the student housing crisis. In workforce and finance, we will continue to fight for increased access to CalFresh, expand outreach for apprenticeship programs, and advocate for more comprehensive data to better understand workforce outcomes for young Californians.

Although the moment we are moving into is uncertain, one thing remains clear: YI West is here to uplift the voices of young adults and will be a resource for young people to tap into our collective power to ensure our **voices are heard and our rights are protected.**

In community,
YI West Youth Advisory Board



Higher Education:

We will advocate for a higher education system that is accessible, one that has strong student protections, and is responsible to the needs of all students. We will fight for this by...

- 1. Expanding protections for students with institutional debt and curbing harmful debt collection practices.** In California, student borrowers hold an overall \$144 billion in debt. In addition to the traditional understanding of student loan debt, a shadow student remains largely unaddressed. This shadow debt, or institutional debt, is debt owed by students directly to their higher education institutions. Current debt collection practices harm students by barring them from re-enrollment, withholding degrees, and garnishing tax credits. Institutional debt borrowers in California, majority of whom are low-income students, hold \$390 million in debt to California public colleges.
- 2. Ensuring ongoing funding for the Office of Cradle to Career Data System.** California's P20 data system, first established in 2019, is set to be one of the most inclusive data systems in the nation. The expected rollout of the data system between 2024 and 2025 will include higher education tools, private college data, and workforce data. A fully funded Office of Cradle-to-Career is critical to the timely rollout of tools and data that the state's millions of K-12 and higher education students and families can utilize to inform educational decisions and career outcomes.
- 3. Working to ensure the funding of the Cal Grant Reform Act.** California's students are increasingly facing greater cost barriers to attending college.¹ Over 40 percent of undergraduate students work while enrolled in college.² Additionally, many students in California's public colleges face basic needs insecurity and a housing crisis. Expanding the state's financial aid for two-year and four-year institutions is a key step toward reducing the burden of cost of college. Under Cal Grant Reform, an estimated additional 150,000 students will be brought into the folds of state financial aid.³
- 4. Expanding access to CalFresh for College Students.** According to the California Policy Lab, a majority of eligible college students do not have CalFresh.⁴ Beyond application barriers, the annual recertification timeline for students poses a hurdle to consistent access to CalFresh. As it stands, students often experience disruption to CalFresh benefits because of the recertification frequency. We will advocate for a change in the recertification timeline from an annual basis to once every two years.

Health Care:

We will support policies that enshrine protections for young adults, undocumented individuals, and ensure that our health care system is accessible for all Californians by...

- 1. Expanding access to mental health care for young adults.** Many young adults find themselves without mental health care. In California, they face cost and accessibility barriers to mental health. The Covid-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the need for mental health services, with 54 percent of young adults experiencing depression and 82 percent noting that mental health issues are a "very serious problem".⁵ Access to mental health support is often costly and not fully covered under health insurance.

1 <https://ticas.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Bearing-the-Burdens-of-College-Costs.pdf>

2 <https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/workinglearners/>

3 https://www.csac.ca.gov/sites/main/files/file-attachments/cal_grant_equity_framework_memo.pdf

4 <https://capolicylab.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/CalFresh-eligibility-and-participation-among-college-students.pdf>

5 <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2022-09-30/young-adults-california-alarming-rates-of-anxiety-depression-suicidal-thinking-survey-finds>

2. **Fighting for the priorities of the #Health4All movement to maintain access to key health care policy wins.** As we move into a more difficult budget cycle in California and a changing health care policy climate across the nation, we will fight to ensure that access to health care for all Californians is maintained.

Workforce & Finance:

We will fight to expand access to tax credits, increase the takeup of apprenticeships, and fight for the financial wellbeing of all young adults in California by...

1. **Improving outreach for California's apprenticeship programs to expand economic opportunity for all Californians.** In 2018, governor Gavin Newsom released his ambitious plan to increase apprenticeships in California to 500,000 by the year 2029.⁶ To accomplish this goal, the state has allotted hundreds of millions of dollars, including a historic \$240 million investment in 2023.⁷ Apprenticeships offer an alternative pathway to higher wages and economic security.⁸ Expanding statewide outreach on apprenticeships can assist the state in reaching its 500,000 apprentice goal, of which there are roughly 90,000 as of 2023.
2. **Increasing the CalEITC minimum to \$300 and funding for free tax filing programs.** The California Earned Income Tax Credit or CalEITC is an annual tax credit provided for tax filers that fall within an income cap of \$30,000. Single tax filers without dependent children can only receive a maximum of \$255 in any given year - an amount that does not begin to cover a portion of monthly rent in the majority of cities across the state. Additionally, single tax filers without dependents who do qualify for the CalEITC are excluded from the federal EITC because they do not have children - this results in some filers receiving as little as \$1 and up to \$255 per year. Increasing the minimum credit will help all Californians, and roughly 1 million young adults that are eligible for the credit.⁹

Contact us for more on our work:

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6 <https://www.dir.ca.gov/DAS/e-News/2022/Action-Plan-in-Place-for-Reaching-California-Apprenticeship-Goals.html>

7 <https://www.gov.ca.gov/2023/11/13/governor-newsom-proclaims-national-apprenticeship-week/#:-:text=That's%20why%20this%20year%20alone,to%20upskill%2C%20reskill%20and%20thrive.>

8 <https://calmatters.org/education/higher-education/college-beat/2023/06/california-apprenticeships/#:-:text=Registered%20apprenticeships%20provide%20options%20for,programs%20in%20the%20building%20trades%2C>

9 <https://calbudgetcenter.org/resources/expanding-the-calaitc-can-support-young-adults-in-making-ends-meet/>