Below is a summary of the implications from the “Forward with Hope” report, with a snapshot of actions that we believe advocates, researchers, policymakers, allies, and other community members could take based on the findings of the study. See the full text for further discussion.

**Adverse Childhood/Community Experiences (ACEs) & Social Determinants/Drivers of Health (SDOHs)**

- Messaging and education on ACEs and toxic stress has been successful. ACEs can be a foundation for shared understanding: use community ACEs and/or SDOHs to direct understanding to the systems or structural level.
- Policymakers need clear, actionable solutions that are prevention focused.
- Policymakers understand the lasting impacts of childhood adversity – this may be an effective tool in motivating action on prevention.
- Resilience is important, but it is key to acknowledge that people should not have to be resilient.

**Prevention**

- Policymakers most often defined child maltreatment’s contributing factors as poverty, stress, and generational cycles. They may be most responsive to interventions that target these factors.
- In order to encourage policymakers into systems-level thinking instead of individual and family-level blame, conversations and materials can explicitly name factors on this level.
- Policymakers believed prevention was important and possible, but many needed guidance identifying mechanisms for primary prevention, instead of secondary or tertiary.
- More coordinated, consistent messaging and clear policy recommendations are needed on what exactly can be done upstream to ensure the best outcomes.
Role of Government & Role of Self

- All policymakers in this study believed they personally had a role to play in child maltreatment prevention, and that government had a role to play. Policymakers of all backgrounds can be engaged in conversations on this topic.

- Policymakers often associated government’s role with child welfare system interventions. There is an opportunity to provide policymakers with attainable strategies for upstream, primary prevention, to help build increased understanding of additional roles for policymakers and government in prevention.

Sources of Information

- Information must come from trusted sources, or it will likely not be considered.

- Once policymakers lose trust in an information source, they likely will not return to that source. Information shared must be accurate and unbiased to maintain trust.

- Policymakers largely relied on people for information, underscoring the importance of developing authentic and trusting relationships with policymakers and their staff.

- Policymakers seek information from a variety of sources – information shared needs to be concise, easy to digest, and contain a blend of stories and data.

- Social media is typically considered by policymakers to be an unhelpful information source that is not trusted. Social media may be useful in building grassroots advocacy, but not as useful in sharing information with policymakers.

- Mass emails can be counterproductive, especially for policymakers that are not already identified champions on an issue. Exercise caution in using this approach.
Paid Family & Medical Leave

- Advocates can continue using family-friendly workplace messaging in discussions of paid leave, as this messaging has broken through and frames conversations on the benefits.
- Advocates can educate policymakers on effective mechanisms for comprehensive paid leave policies, such as the insurance model, to increase understanding and decrease resistance.
- Story sharing may be a particularly effective strategy in paid leave advocacy.
- The many benefits of paid leave, especially for businesses, can be highlighted in messaging and advocacy to help find common ground.
- The child maltreatment prevention mechanisms of enabling safer care arrangements, allowing time for bonding, and providing an outlet to minimize the stress experienced by families may be helpful frames to use in communicating about paid leave.
- Messaging and education efforts need to communicate about mechanisms for paid leave that would provide balance and not be perceived as overly burdensome for businesses.
- Advocates can help move paid leave forward by:
  - Keeping the conversation about the importance of paid leave going publicly.
  - Building local momentum by working to support counties and municipalities in passing paid leave policies.
  - Working with the business community and Chambers of Commerce to identify and address their concerns with policy proposals.
  - Exploring avenues for securing expanded access to paid leave for those employed in state (and potentially other) government roles.
Home Visiting & Parenting Education (HVPE)

Education is needed to develop more widespread familiarity and understanding of HVPE, and to distinguish HVPE from child welfare interventions.

Program/model outreach and site visits may be effective forms of policymaker education.

Education efforts and messaging can highlight the mechanisms for prevention that encourage understanding of how all families need help sometimes.

Cultural fit and relevance are important considerations for programs and the overall HVPE system – emphasizing the importance of a HVPE system with a variety of models, as not all programs are a good fit for all families.

Advocacy/education can address concerns about interventions in homes by focusing on the trusting relationship developed between home visitors and families, as well as the voluntary nature of such programs.

Advocates can address concerns about program quality by highlighting the abundant research demonstrating positive outcomes and referencing policies such as the bipartisan, federal MIECHV Program that emphasize evidence and evaluation.

Consistent terminology for these types of programs is needed – given the concerns expressed, an umbrella term that captures the relationship-based nature of these programs may be helpful, such as ‘family support programs,’ as well as aligned messaging.

Advocates can help overcome hesitations about perceived competing priorities for families’ needs by framing HVPE as one component of a more comprehensive approach to prevention.

Advocates can help move HVPE forward by:

- Educating policymakers about HVPE programs to increase awareness and support.
- Focusing efforts on a clarified ask, advocating for increased funding for programs as an investment instead of a mandate.
- Exploring the feasibility of incorporating parenting education into the state’s high school curriculum.

Hope

Incorporating hopeful messages into advocacy is helpful in encouraging action.

Advocates can tap into the particularly powerful shared hope for children and their futures in how they communicate with policymakers, to find common ground and frame conversations in a positive way.

Messaging for prevention and ACEs that is strengths-based, and centers promise for the future and the idea that outcomes are changeable may resonate best.

Messaging and education efforts can incorporate discussions about Positive Childhood Experiences and Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences (HOPE) in conversations to provide concrete examples of reasons to be hopeful.

For more information on the Policymaker Perspectives on Child Maltreatment Prevention in NC study, contact Melea Rose-Waters, Policy Director, at mrosewaters@preventchildabusenc.org. You can find the full report here and a webinar from May 2022 discussing the high-level themes here.