

Pediatrician in federal post: Kids' health a top priority

November 4, 2018

Trisha Koriath, Staff Writer

Article type: [AAP National Conference & Exhibition](#)

Editor's note: *The 2018 AAP National Conference & Exhibition will take place from Nov. 2-6 in Orlando.*

Children face the lowest life expectancy and quality of life in 100 years, a troubling reality that the nation with the highest health care spending has not fixed, Assistant Secretary for Health Admiral Brett P. Giroir, M.D., said in his plenary on Sunday.

A four-star general trained in pediatric critical care, Dr. Giroir told the audience that shifting the system of care begins in the pediatrician's office.

"Today in America, your ZIP code still matters more than your genetic code," he said.

In America, life expectancy in the healthiest ZIP codes is 20 years longer than the unhealthiest ZIP codes.

Many child health policies and programs that the AAP advocates for fall under Dr. Giroir and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

To combat the obesity epidemic, guidelines were released that for the first time include obesity prevention in 3- to 5-year-olds, <http://bit.ly/HHSActivityGuidelines>.

Sixty percent of today's 2-year-olds will be obese by the time they are 35, according to a 2016 study. Among 17- to 24-year-olds, 71% would not be able to enlist in the military primarily due to obesity, drug use or lack of education.

"Not only is this a public health issue, but it is absolutely a national security issue in our country," he said.

HHS released a Five Point Strategy to Combat the Opioid Crisis. The number of babies born with neonatal abstinence syndrome also has reached epidemic levels, prompting a new system to track children exposed to opioids and other drugs and help deliver services and interventions.

Dr. Giroir noted a holistic approach to recovery is necessary along with prevention and treatment of addiction as a disease.

"You cannot arrest your way out of opioid use disorder as a disease," he said. "If we have a person and put them into treatment but send them back out with no education, no home, no food security, no employment, they're going to be trapped right back where they started."

As HHS works to shift the focus away from sick care, Dr. Giroir is optimistic that the "fingerprints of pediatricians" will continue to be on the well-care system as it works to address HIV, sickle-cell disease and noncommunicable diseases.

"If we don't get it right in children, we won't get it right anyone else."

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