

Pediatrician perspectives on child health issues facing next president

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While the next president of the United States will face a variety of issues impacting the country, the Academy and pediatricians will work to ensure children and adolescents have a place at the top of the federal policy agenda.

The Academy submitted questions to both presidential campaigns on the following pressing child health issues: poverty, gun violence, access to care and the need to invest in children to provide for the future. In anticipation of their replies and to help highlight the importance of each issue, pediatrician experts shared their own perspectives on the topics and why they should be prioritized by the next presidential administration.

Poverty

“Eliminating childhood poverty in the United States should be a priority for the next presidential administration because it is possible to accomplish,” said Andrew D. Racine, M.D., Ph.D., FAAP, chair of the AAP Poverty and Child Health Leadership Workgroup. “Its effect would be profound on moving us toward the type of society we wish to be, and the role of government in achieving this objective is indispensable.”

In 2013, the Academy added “Poverty and Child Health” as a strategic priority in its Agenda for Children. Since then, an AAP policy statement was released to address the impact of poverty on child health. The statement also provides recommendations to ameliorate poverty’s effects, including encouraging doctors to ask families during well-child visits if they are able to make ends meet.

At the federal level, the Academy has long advocated for safety net programs and policies that support families, such as the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and Medicaid, Head Start and Early Head Start, and nutrition assistance programs.

“Government has a vital role to play through the design of appropriate incentives, revision of the tax structure to prioritize the needs of children and young families, and rewarding those areas of our society, both public and private institutions, that focus attention on how they can contribute to lifting children and their families out of poverty,” Dr. Racine said.

Gun violence

The Academy reasserted the need for lawmakers to work across the aisle to advance common-sense policies to protect children from gun violence after the Senate failed to pass amendments earlier this year

that would expand background checks on all firearm purchases and make it more difficult for suspected terrorists to buy guns.

Kyran P. Quinlan, M.D., M.P.H., FAAP, chair of the AAP Council on Injury, Violence and Poison Prevention, works in the inner-city of Chicago and has witnessed firsthand the effects of gun violence on children, families and communities.

“This will take time, but I believe we can work towards a future where gun violence does not threaten our young people the way it currently does. The next administration has an opportunity to help guide us,” Dr. Quinlan said. “We can do better. We can make our world safer so young children don’t have to fear for their lives as they try to grow up.”

Access to care

The uninsured rate among children is at the lowest level ever recorded. Dennis M. Cooley, M.D., FAAP, chair of the AAP Subcommittee on Access, recognizes this critical progress, while emphasizing that having insurance coverage does not necessarily mean having adequate access to care.

“We have an important opportunity here because while we have made great gains in numbers of those insured, we have even more progress to make when it comes to making sure everyone has access to quality health care,” Dr. Cooley said.

Persistent issues such as narrow insurance networks, limited access to pediatric specialists and low payment rates for providers impose roadblocks on children and families trying to access care and are issues in need of action by lawmakers.

In addition, the next administration will be faced with impending CHIP reauthorization, said Lynda M. Young, M.D., FAAP, chair of the AAP Committee on Federal Government Affairs. Funding for CHIP, which has worked hand-in-hand with Medicaid to cut the child uninsurance rate in half, expires in 2017. The Academy will be advocating in the months ahead for the program to continue.

“Children deserve every chance they can to have a healthy, productive life; having access to health care is paramount to that,” Dr. Young said.

Investing in children

“By investing in children we unequivocally invest in our country. There is no population of greater importance or one that should be addressed with more urgency,” said Lauren K. Gambill, M.D., FAAP, chair of the AAP Section on Pediatric Trainees.

The Academy has been a consistent voice in Washington, urging federal leaders to invest in programs that promote children’s health. By focusing on policies that are most supportive of children, legislators can help to ensure a strong, productive future for the country.

“We know without a doubt that the environment in which children grow up influences their long-term health and success,” Dr. Gambill said. “Aside from giving each child the opportunity they deserve to live up to their unique potential, we must give our country the opportunity to thrive by nurturing our future leaders.”

Resources

- [With Election Day approaching on Nov. 8, now is the time to help get out the vote. For updates and resources from the Academy’s #VoteKids campaign.](#)

- If you are attending the AAP National Conference & Exhibition in San Francisco, be sure to stop by the AAP Advocacy Action Center and attend the session "Election 2016 Spotlight: Pediatricians' Role in Shaping the Future for Children" from 5:45-6:15 p.m. Oct. 23 in Moscone West, 1st floor foyer.
- "Blueprint for Children: How the Next President Can Build a Foundation for a Healthy Future"

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