

Stay in the know: COVID-19 updates from the nation's capital

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Devin Miller, Washington Correspondent

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Editor's note: For the latest news on COVID-19, visit

<https://www.aapublications.org/news/2020/01/28/coronavirus>.

The AAP continues to play a leading role in speaking up for children and pediatricians through its advocacy work to advance federal policies and legislation addressing the COVID-19 crisis.

These efforts range from outlining its policy priorities for future response legislation to speaking with administration officials about the needs of pediatricians and children. AAP President Sara “Sally” H. Goza, M.D., FAAP, has continued to keep members apprised of the Academy's advocacy efforts through email updates.

Child health advocacy victories

Tucked into the \$2 trillion Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act package — which became law — are two long-standing AAP advocacy priorities: over-the-counter (OTC) drug reform and reauthorization of the Pediatric Subspecialty Loan Repayment Program.

Understandably, much of the attention paid to this sweeping legislation was on the critical provisions it included to address the pandemic. It also is important to recognize these priorities, which were included with little fanfare but will have a major impact on children's health.

Meaningful reform of the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA's) OTC drug regulatory system has been long overdue. Pediatric labeling on older drugs is outdated, as it is based on evidence that no longer meets current safety and efficacy standards or is based on incorrect assumptions about how adult data should inform the labeling of drugs for children.

The new law will make it easier for the FDA to update labels based on the latest scientific developments, ensuring that OTC drugs are safe and effective for use in children. It also

strengthens the agency's ability to require packaging that keeps children safe from accidental ingestion.

The CARES Act also reauthorized the Pediatric Subspecialty Loan Repayment Program for five years. The program helps address shortages of pediatric subspecialists in underserved areas. The Academy is urging Congress to provide \$50 million in funding for the program for fiscal year 2021.

Pediatric subspecialists provide care for children with complex medical conditions or who require long-term, coordinated care for chronic illnesses. Shortages of pediatric subspecialists force families to face long wait times for appointments or travel long distances.

The program would provide up to \$35,000 annually for a maximum of three years to pediatric subspecialists who agree to practice in an underserved area, helping to ensure children can receive care no matter where they live.

After years of AAP and pediatrician advocacy on both of these issues, their inclusion in the broader coronavirus legislation represents a long-fought victory for children's health.

Pediatricians speak up virtually for children

The COVID-19 pandemic catalyzed virtual interaction in unprecedented ways in Washington, D.C. For the first time in its history, the U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments via teleconference this May, allowing the public to listen live.

The Academy's work to speak up for children is no different. The nation's capital often relies on in-person events, such as congressional briefings, press conferences on the Capitol steps and hearings. While members of both chambers of Congress were in their home districts due to the coronavirus, pediatricians participated in virtual events and satellite media interviews to continue to serve as the voice for children's health.

For example, Deanna M. Behrens, M.D., FAAP, joined U.S. Rep. Lauren Underwood (D-Ill.) for a Facebook Live town hall, taking questions from parents about dealing with the coronavirus and keeping their children and families safe.

Dr. Goza participated in numerous satellite media interviews. She talked about the importance of parents continuing to take their children to the pediatrician for vaccines as well as the need for the federal government to provide immediate financial support to pediatricians impacted by the pandemic.

Earlier in the pandemic, Jonathan P. Winickoff, M.D., M.P.H., FAAP, participated in a virtual media tour on the connections between COVID-19 and smoking and vaping.

Speaking through computer screens, pediatricians across the country have reached a wide audience and spread important messages about the virus and its many impacts on children's health.

Resources

- [For the AAP's latest COVID-19 advocacy resources, visit www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)

- Visit <https://federaladvocacy.aap.org> (AAP login required) for up-to-date advocacy opportunities
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