

Crunched for time? Here's how you can speak up for children

September 20, 2021

Carla Kemp, Senior Editor

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

Topics: [Advocacy](#), [Legislation](#)

Editor's note: For more coverage of the 2021 AAP National Conference & Exhibition, visit <https://www.aapublications.org/news/2021/08/18/nationalconference2021>.

During his 14-year advocacy journey, Shetal I. Shah, M.D., FAAP, has crisscrossed the state of New York and traveled to Washington, D.C. He has written letters, op-eds and state legislation. And he's received praise, awards and "his fair share of hate" for his efforts on behalf of children.

Yet, Dr. Shah recognizes that not all pediatricians can devote the same kind of time and energy as he has to being a voice for children. So his on-demand session "Pediatric Health Policy: What Pediatricians Should Know" (OD0320) includes a section called "advocacy for people in a hurry."

"What can you do if you only have five minutes? What can you do if you only have an hour? What can you do if you have two to five hours? And what can you do if you have half a day or a full day in terms of meeting with your legislators or going to a conference or going to a conference session?" asked Dr. Shah, professor of clinical pediatrics at New York Medical College and a neonatologist at Maria Fareri Children's Hospital in Valhalla, N.Y.

Dr. Shah was bitten by the advocacy bug after attending the AAP Legislative Conference in 2007. Since then, he has held myriad roles that put his skills to good use, including president of AAP New York Chapter 2, co-chair of the Society for Pediatric Research Advocacy Committee and chair of the Pediatric Policy Council, which is the advocacy voice of academic pediatrics.

During the session, Dr. Shah reviews some of the federal legislation the AAP is supporting and puts it in perspective for pediatricians with various professional interests.

"The AAP has to really be aware of the full spectrum of practice within the field of pediatrics," he said. "But an academic pediatrician can feel the importance of legislation differently than the way a general pediatrician who's primarily clinical would, which is different from the way a pediatric researcher might."

For example, it's harder for neonatologists to connect with issues related to transgender children or youth sports. "So the hope is that someone could listen to this talk and really understand the need for these pieces of legislation," he said.

Next, he discusses state issues that pediatricians can pursue, including Medicaid coverage of donor breast milk for premature infants.

He ends with a call to action: No matter how much time you have, you can do something.

“The common thread that goes into all of the advocacy is a genuine desire to improve the lives of children,” he said. “And that is something that we all can relate to.”

Copyright © 2021 American Academy of Pediatrics