



Marian F. Earls, M.D., FAAP, speaks about mental health at the AAP Leadership Conference.

## AAP leaders focus on health of children, pediatricians at conference

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Support for the physical and mental health of children, families and pediatricians was a theme throughout the AAP Leadership Conference, which was held in person for the first time since 2019.

Chapter, committee, council and section leaders from all districts gathered Aug. 4-7 in Itasca, Ill. Drawing on their diverse perspectives and expertise, they debated and voted on resolutions, which provide input to the Board of Directors on the direction of policies and activities.

The No. 1 resolution asks the Academy to develop and promote a confidential resource for pediatrician advocates who are experiencing stress, threats of violence and/or public attacks, and to expedite connections to AAP, peer and/or local resources.

Attendees also were inspired by speeches from AAP leadership and plenary speakers.

### **Disrupting stress**

Plenary speaker Kemia Sarraf, M.D., M.P.H., addressed recognition and mitigation of stress and trauma experienced by pediatricians.

Physicians' prolonged exposure to stress and lack of support can lead to career- or relationship-ending behaviors, like aggression, disengagement, apathy, compassion fatigue and exhaustion, said Dr. Sarraf, adjunct professor in the Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion at Southern Illinois University School of Medicine and CEO of the consulting and coaching company Lodestar.

She advocated practicing the 4 N's: noticing, naming, normalizing and navigating trauma.

### **Repairing the world**

In her opening remarks, AAP President Moira A. Szilagyi, M.D., Ph.D., FAAP, spoke of the phrase "Tikkun Olam," which in Judaism means "Repair the World."

“It never fails to remind me that pediatricians are the best hope we have for fixing the world’s problems,” Dr. Szilagyi said.

She discussed AAP priorities, including responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, promoting vaccination, advancing health equity and addressing the pediatric mental health crisis.

“The pandemic pointed out what we as pediatricians already knew — that the disparities that exist in our country are historical, deep, structural and systemic, and erode the futures of our children and their families, especially our minoritized and marginalized populations,” she said. “We continue to advance our Equity Agenda and work with our partners to address upstream root causes of existing disparities in health.”

### **Responding to public health threats**

CEO/Executive Vice President Mark Del Monte, J.D., discussed how pediatricians and the AAP not only continue to manage COVID-19 but also have played an integral part in the nation’s response to gun violence, youth mental health disorders, vaccine hesitancy and disinformation, the infant formula shortage and threats to the practice of medicine.

Del Monte lauded leaders for their role in the Academy’s response to public health threats, including serving as a source of expert opinion throughout the world.

“Your time and expertise are a gift to the AAP — a gift we treasure and want to use with care,” he said.

Del Monte said the AAP also is focused on the business of pediatrics.

“One lasting lesson of COVID is that the current health care financing system does not work for children or their doctors,” he said. “And the AAP is working toward a better service model and payment system that includes value-based models, provider incentives and standardized benefits families can afford.”

### **Advancing equity**

Advancing equity and antiracism requires commitment, courage, humility and introspection, Joseph L. Wright, M.D., M.P.H., FAAP, said in his plenary address.

Dr. Wright, chair of the board’s Equity Committee, reviewed how race has been used inappropriately in algorithms and policies that have influenced clinical decision-making for years. Recent examples included earlier versions of AAP clinical practice guidelines on urinary tract infections and neonatal hyperbilirubinemia.

He highlighted the AAP’s leadership on race-based medicine, including publication in 2019 of [The Impact of Racism on Child and Adolescent Health](#), “the first such statement to call racism by name and established and addressed as an organizational priority.

“The [AAP’s Equity Agenda](#) recognizes that pediatricians must be equipped with the knowledge, skills and resources in order to deliver on the promise of equitable care for all children,” he said.

### **Addressing mental health**

Marian F. Earls, M.D., FAAP, enumerated myriad issues driving the childhood mental health crisis and addressed the difficulties patients and providers face in accessing services and resources.

Relationships between pediatricians and mental health professionals are just one part of the solution, said Dr. Earls, chair of the Council on Healthy Mental and Emotional Development Executive Committee. Families and schools also can assist youths.

“The goal here is not for pediatricians to become a psychiatrist,” she said. “The goal here is for us to be able to work in a team way with children and adolescents and families.”

### **2022 top resolutions**

Leaders selected the Top 10 resolutions as AAP priorities. They will be referred to appropriate areas for review and potential action.

1. Supporting Pediatrician Advocates Experiencing Adversity
2. Equitable Access to Quality Healthcare for Patients with Public and Private Insurance
3. Inclusions of Administrative Costs in Chapter Grant Opportunities
4. Expanded Education and Training on Transgender Care
5. Labeling of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) Screening on Explanation of Benefits (EOBs) to Support Adolescent Confidentiality
6. Alleviating Childhood Poverty Through Tax Credit Policies
7. Promote Sustainable Staffing Models for Pediatric Physicians and Their Healthcare Teams
8. Combatting Censorship: Promoting Open Access to Books and Information for Children and Adolescents
9. Improving Training for and Management of Pediatric Behavioral Health Crises in the Emergency Room Setting
10. Incorporating Environmental, Social and Governance Principles in the AAP's Investment Strategy



The full text of resolutions is available at <https://bit.ly/3zIkiF0> (login required).

### **Chapter awards**

**Outstanding Chapter Awards** (supported by Abbott Nutrition)

Medium Chapter: Kansas Chapter

Large Chapter: Washington Chapter

Very Large Chapter: Texas Pediatric Society (Texas Chapter)

### **Phoenix Award**

The Connecticut Chapter received the Phoenix Award, which recognizes a chapter that has overcome a significant challenge to improve its overall effectiveness.

### **Inspire Change Award**

The Washington Chapter received the Inspire Change Award, which recognizes a chapter that supports equity, diversity and inclusion among members, leadership and health outcomes for children.

*Anne Hegland, editor in chief, and Alyson Wyckoff, associate editor, contributed to this article.*