



## National experts recommend improvements to public health emergency response affecting children

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A federal panel studying public health emergency preparedness and response affecting children is calling for improvements in funding, staffing, data collection and mental health training, as well as a focus on science over politics.

The National Advisory Committee on Children and Disasters (NACCD) voted 13-0 in favor of the [recommendations](#), which center on children's disaster mental health challenges, lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic and the recent surge in respiratory diseases affecting children.

NACCD Chair David Schonfeld, M.D., FAAP, who also is a member of the AAP Council on Children and Disasters (COCD) Executive Committee, said the NACCD wants to see a whole-of-government approach and strong public health infrastructure.

"The NACCD emphasizes that promoting resiliency in children, families and their communities while also building a more robust public health system prior to a disaster not only minimizes the negative impact of a disaster, but is more cost-effective overall in reducing both the financial and human resource costs of a disaster," Dr. Schonfeld said quoting from the report.

The group also stressed the importance of considering the needs of children who are especially vulnerable, including those living in poverty or rural communities, members of disenfranchised racial or ethnic groups and children with disabilities or special health care needs.

The AAP and its partners have [declared a national emergency](#) in children's mental health and called for action from federal officials. NACCD made several recommendations on children's disaster mental health, including more research on ways to reduce boarding of children with behavioral crises in emergency departments and funding to address mental health in communities with insufficient services. The group also called for more training for a variety of professionals who work with children and funding for behavioral health recovery interventions in schools.

NACCD also made [several recommendations](#) based on lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic. It called for improved collection of pediatric-specific data for disaster response, an emphasis on science over

politics, ensuring the federal government can implement necessary measures during a public health crisis and access to pediatric immunization data during pandemics.

Other recommendations include increasing federal staff focusing on children in disasters and determining pediatric-specific benchmarks for research and development of pediatric emergency medical countermeasures.

“Your report is excellent. It’s timely and the recommendations are sound,” COCD Chair Steven Krug, M.D., FAAP, said during a NACCD public meeting Wednesday.

The [recommendations](#) will go to Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) leaders who have been making efforts to increase the focus on children in all aspects of emergency preparedness and response.

Dr. Schonfeld said the committee is hoping to be reauthorized so it can make additional recommendations. It identified potential topics such as reducing pediatric visits to emergency departments, improved and expanded use of telehealth, requirements for development and deployment of emergency medical countermeasures, mitigating disaster-related environmental health risks to children, addressing vulnerabilities that impact children and better capitalization on community-based resources.

The AAP also called for the group to address payment issues for pediatric health care providers, self-care for health care providers and the role of the medical home in addressing pediatric mental health before and during emergencies.

Dr. Krug noted the importance of resiliency, which he said is “the ultimate antidote.”

“Yes, let’s continue to improve our readiness and response, but if you believe that disasters will continue to occur, we need to make our entire nation more resilient, including our health care delivery system,” he said.

## Resources

- [NACCD draft recommendations](#)
- [AAP policy \*Ensuring the Health of Children in Disasters\*](#)
- [AAP clinical report \*Providing Psychosocial Support to Children and Families in the Aftermath of Disasters and Crises\*](#)
- [AAP resources on disasters and children](#)