



CATCH at 30: Addressing problems with community-centered approach

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Community Access to Child Health (CATCH) is a flagship program of the AAP which supports pediatricians in their efforts to collaborate within their communities to advance the health of all children.

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In bringing alive pediatricians' visions for healthier communities over 30 years, the Community Access to Child Health (CATCH) program has an integral home within the Academy.

When CATCH began in 1993, projects focused on strengthening the medical home and increasing access to care. Over time, project themes have evolved to reflect current pressing child health issues, including mental health, LGBTQ+ care, gun violence, social needs and health equity. Developing effective solutions to these daunting problems requires a community-centered approach.

"Part of the genius of CATCH is that it starts with getting out of the pediatrician mindset and acknowledging that the community is the expert," said AAP President-elect Benjamin D. Hoffman, M.D., FAAP, who served as a chapter CATCH facilitator.

Each year, CATCH awards seed funding to plan and implement innovative community-based initiatives that increase children's access to medical homes, immunization services and other health services. Pediatric residents, early career pediatricians, primary care pediatricians and pediatric subspecialists in the United States and Canada have received CATCH grants. Resident grants, in particular, teach budding pediatricians their critical role in community health and the pathways to successful grantsmanship.

The CATCH program has received support from more than 20 foundations and corporate supporters and hundreds of individual donors. Specifically, the AAP Friends of Children Fund and the Boulter Oral Health Endowment have provided critical and consistent support. This year, partnerships with AAP sections and councils have provided financial support for 17 resident grants.

In addition to providing financial and technical assistance, the program links grantees with a community of peers who can assist them.

One-third of grantees have leveraged CATCH dollars for additional funds. Anjali Garg, M.D., FAAP, Preeti Panda, M.D., FAAP, and Marie A. Clark, M.D., M.P.H., partnered to establish a medical home for youths who were trafficked through a resident grant at Rainbow Babies & Children's Hospital in Cleveland.

"We received more internal support because of our CATCH grant and built connections for life," Dr. Garg said.

Grantees also incorporate sustainability planning into their work. Nine in 10 grantees who responded to a survey said efforts made through their projects still exist, reflecting sustained change in how communities approach the care of children.

Pivoting during pandemic

CATCH recipients' ingenuity was put to the test during the COVID-19 pandemic, with unexpected successes. AAP Pennsylvania Chapter President Mary Ann Rigas, M.D., FAAP, modified her CATCH planning grant addressing food insecurity in Coudersport, Pa.

Her original project included conducting focus groups at local food pantries and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children offices to learn about families' needs and preferences on healthy food choices.

"Because we weren't allowed to do that, the food pantries pivoted by bringing a menu out to the family's car and letting the family choose what they wanted," Dr. Rigas said.

She and the team later conducted virtual focus groups that attracted a wider audience, including county commissioners, gardeners, farmers, school superintendents and hospital care managers who may not have been able to participate in on-site activities.

Cultivating leaders

While CATCH improves community child health outcomes, it also builds leaders who attest to the program's positive impact on their professional growth. Eighty-eight percent of grantees responding to the CATCH survey reported personal satisfaction in conducting a project.

"CATCH ensures that the role of advocate is woven into our DNA as pediatricians," Dr. Hoffman said. "Part of the solution to burnout is doing meaningful work, and CATCH allows you to do that."

CATCH grantees and leaders build networks with colleagues across the country. More than 120 AAP members volunteer as CATCH leaders to provide technical support, mentor applicants and teach others about the program. Many members of the CATCH network credit their experience with not only strengthening their commitment to community pediatrics but also helping them take their first step toward leadership. In fact, nine AAP presidents have been involved with CATCH.

"One of the great things about serving as a chapter CATCH facilitator is working with people with whom you might have an acquaintance and getting to support them in transformative work that is meaningful to the community. Nurturing them and watching the downstream impact of their work is amazing," Dr. Hoffman said.

CATCH program awards 39 grants

The Community Access to Child Health (CATCH) program has awarded grants to 39 Fellows and pediatric trainees/residents in 24 AAP chapters to implement innovative community-based child health projects. Read project summaries at <https://bit.ly/3qkjFAI>.

Seventeen of the resident grants were supported through funds from 11 AAP sections and councils to focus on priority issues.

To apply for a CATCH grant, volunteer as a leader or donate to the CATCH endowment as part of the 30th anniversary campaign, visit www.aap.org/catch or email catch@aap.org.

Dr. Gupta is a chapter CATCH co-facilitator for Kansas.