



Martin H. Smith, M.D., FAAP, AAP past president (1985-'86) presents honorary FAAP designations to former first lady Rosalynn Carter (center) and former Arkansas first lady Betty Bumpers.

Former first lady Rosalynn Carter, Honorary FAAP, remembered as champion for child immunizations

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Former first lady Rosalynn Carter, who was awarded an Honorary FAAP designation by the AAP for her work to strengthen childhood immunization rates, died Nov. 19 at age 96.

Mrs. Carter spent her life as a leading advocate for mental health, caregiving, early childhood vaccinations, human rights and conflict resolution through her work at The Carter Center in Atlanta, a nonprofit she founded in 1982 with her husband, former President Jimmy Carter.

“We mourn the loss and celebrate the life and many contributions of first lady Rosalynn Carter, whose work to promote vaccinations and mental health care improved the health, safety and well-being of all children,” said AAP President Sandy L. Chung, M.D., FAAP. “Her work in these areas began before she arrived at the White House and continued through the rest of her life. We are grateful for the opportunity to work with her on these issues and her lifelong commitment to children’s health.”

In 1991, Mrs. Carter and Betty Bumpers, former first lady of Arkansas, founded Every Child By Two (ECBT) in response to the 1989-'91 measles epidemic in the United States. The epidemic sickened more than 55,000 people, hospitalized more than 11,000 and led to the deaths of more than 100, many of whom were young children. Mrs. Carter served as president of the organization, now known as Vaccinate Your Family, through 2021.

The work of Mrs. Carter and Mrs. Bumpers led to laws mandating vaccination for children entering school.

Mrs. Carter delivered [a keynote address](#) at the 2004 AAP National Conference & Exhibition, where she stressed the importance of early intervention by pediatricians for improved child mental health.

“At no time is mental health more important than in childhood,” Mrs. Carter said during her address. “I have great admiration for you, trying to give children a great start.”

When Mr. Carter became president in 1977, Mrs. Carter took on the role of honorary chair of the President’s Commission on Mental Health. Her efforts have been credited with helping to pass the Mental Health Systems Act in 1980.

One of Mrs. Carter’s ongoing programs at the Carter Center is a mental health task force that brings together experts and advocates promoting positive change in the mental health field.

She also served as president of the board of directors for the Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregivers (RCI). Established in 1987, RCI promotes the mental health and well-being of family caregivers by building partnerships, leading research projects and strategic initiatives, developing and implementing evidence-based programs and advocating for public policy.

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