

## AAP National Conference: Dr. Hanna-Attisha used advocacy to preserve kids' future

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While the children in Flint, Mich., still do not have water they can drink, they now have access to a full complement of health, nutrition, education and transportation services to help support their development and mitigate effects of lead poisoning.

At Sunday's plenary session, Mona Hanna-Attisha, M.D., M.P.H., FAAP, shared her story of advocacy, persistence and community resilience after the city's water supply became contaminated with lead (see <http://bit.ly/1RimyI7>).

Her messages served to remind pediatricians how they can take action on similar challenges in their own communities and make an impact on public health policy.



Mona Hanna-Attisha, M.D., M.P.H., FAAP, receives the AAP Outstanding Achievement Award from AAP President Benard P. Dreyer, M.D., FAAP, for her advocacy and research that uncovered that Flint, Mich., water was poisoned with lead.

A city known for its high poverty rate and health disparities, Flint once was an economic hub and birthplace for the automotive industry, she said. But in April 2014, the city switched its water supply from the Great Lakes, the largest U.S. freshwater source, to the Flint River to cut costs and did not treat it properly. Residents noticed the change immediately and began to voice their concerns. Dr. Hanna-Attisha looked at the data and found that while blood lead levels among children were going down in the rest of the nation, they were increasing among children in Flint.

“The people of Flint were literally told to relax,” she said. “And General Motors stopped using their water because it was corroding engine parts.”

Raising her voice helped bring support that enabled the city to establish a new Pediatric Public Health Initiative at Hurley Children's Hospital. Dr. Hanna-Attisha serves as director of the Michigan State University-Hurley Children's Hospital initiative.

“A city that used to build really strong cars is now committed to building strong children,” she said. “My voice became a megaphone for our kids. You have that megaphone. Use that incredible voice in your community.”

She advised pediatricians to create networks that reach beyond health care and into the education system, government and community so they can take quick action on issues that may arise.

“You have to be prepared to crack the next case.”

She also urged them to stay current on environmental and public health regulations, noting that the Environmental Protection Agency's Lead and Copper rule is undergoing revision but still does not include protections for children in child care and school settings.

“What happened in Flint is an environmental injustice. It's our poor and our brown kids who are disproportionately affected,” she said, reminding pediatricians to vote with children in mind this election season. “If there was ever a time where I wish our kids could vote, it would be now.”