AAP pediatricians say they support government stepping in to provide food, shelter and health insurance to people in poverty, according to a new study.

“The high level of support for advocacy and policies related to children affirm the AAP policy statement on Poverty and Child Health and should encourage the AAP and its members to aggressively pursue advocacy efforts to ameliorate the effects of poverty on children,” authors wrote.

About 42% of U.S. children experience poverty or economic hardship. Pediatricians witness the impact of these stressors, including delayed development, chronic health conditions and mental health issues. The Academy's 2016 policy Poverty and Child Health in the United States calls for screening children for risk factors and connecting them with resources. It also advocates for numerous public interventions, including early childhood programs, public health insurance, food supplementation, affordable housing and increased parental income.


The following percentages of pediatricians said they completely or mostly agree government should guarantee interventions for people who can’t provide for themselves:

- 90%: food and shelter for every child;
- 89%: health insurance for every child;
- 69%: health insurance for every citizen; and
- 64%: food and shelter for every citizen.

The data showed those with more patients experiencing financial difficulties were more likely to support government-guaranteed health care. Regions outside the Northeast had lower odds of supporting any of these government programs than those in the Northeast. In addition, pediatricians in rural areas were less likely to support interventions compared to urban inner-city pediatricians.

The majority of pediatricians expressed support for the Academy's ongoing advocacy for government programs, especially health care access and pre-kindergarten/Head Start programs, according to the report.

"Pediatricians, policy-makers and other advocates may use these data to support policy agendas, in forming partnerships or in raising awareness within their communities," authors wrote.

Resources

- AAP federal advocacy on child nutrition programs (login required)
- AAP state advocacy on poverty
- AAP Poverty and Child Health website
- Addressing Food Insecurity: A Toolkit for Pediatricians
- AAP FACE poverty campaign for pediatricians-in-training