EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PS#86 – Caring for Immigrant Children

PS#86 explored the topic of caring for immigrant children. The survey questions addressed pediatricians’ needs and primary concerns regarding the care of immigrant children, including perceived availability of and current use of resources for immigrant children, comfort level assisting immigrant families, and attitudes toward advocacy strategies.

PS#86 was an eight-page self-administered questionnaire sent to 1,624 nonretired U.S. members of the AAP, August 2013 to January 2014; pediatricians were offered the option to respond electronically. Response to the survey was 44% (698 respondents, including pediatric residents). Analysis for this report is limited to pediatricians who provide patient care to immigrant children (605 respondents).

Immigrant Patients in Pediatric Practice:

The term “immigrant” children or youth refers to patients who are foreign-born or who have at least one foreign-born parent (citizen, documented or undocumented).

- Pediatricians estimate that 24% of their patients are immigrants to the U.S.
- About 57% of pediatricians estimate that all or most of their immigrant patients have special language, economic or social needs.

Resources for Addressing Immigrant Patients’ Needs:

- More than 60% of pediatricians report using 7 of 9 listed resources to assist immigrant families in their practice, such as providing written materials in patients’ primary language (76%), professional interpreters (68%), referrals to federal/state programs with benefits for eligible children (68%), and referrals to social services (66%); only 18% report referring families in need to legal/immigration related services and 8% say they refer parents with low English proficiency to an adult English language class.
- Seven out of 10 pediatricians say it is “very” or “moderately” difficult to find mental health providers for immigrant patients in need of their services, 45% say it is difficult to find legal/immigration assistance, and 43% report difficulties finding specialists that provide language services.
- Most pediatricians report little or no difficulty finding federal/state benefits (86%), social services (79%) or a dental home (60%).

Comfort Level Assisting Immigrant Families:

- Most pediatricians are “very” or “moderately” comfortable providing medical care to newly immigrant and/or refugee children (79%) and prescribing pre-travel medication to patients traveling back to countries of origin for visits (63%). Fewer are comfortable discussing immigration status with parents as it relates to the patients’ health (48%), addressing issues of acculturation (45%), addressing culturally-specific approaches to health care (43%), or addressing issues of inter-generational conflict among these families (39%). Only 29% are very or moderately comfortable discussing documentation status with parents as it relates to patient care and 12% are comfortable discussing ways to obtain legal permanent resident status.
- Most pediatricians think they have the information to adequately address parents’ concerns regarding their immigration status or any immigration policies: only 11% say parents brought up an immigration issue during the past three months about which they did not have sufficient information; 80% say they had the information to address parents’ concerns.
16% of pediatricians feel “very well prepared” and 46% feel “moderately well prepared” to provide care for children in immigrant families.

**Attitudes Toward Strategies to Enhance Care for Immigrant Children:**

- Nearly all pediatricians (92%) think pediatricians should support legislation to promote English proficiency in early elementary education; 79% think pediatricians should support efforts to enact legislation that reduces barriers to college education for immigrant youth, and 54% support legislation that offers eligible undocumented families a pathway to citizenship.
- More than 80% of pediatricians agree that the AAP should advocate for government policies that increase access to health care for immigrant children (84%) and increase access to public health services for immigrant children (86%).
- Only 23% of pediatricians think current local or federal immigration policies negatively impact their ability to care for immigrant children; however, 50% have no opinion.
- 38% of pediatricians are “very” interested in receiving practice tools to assist in caring for health needs specific to immigrant children. About one-fourth each are “very” interested in receiving information on public policies or advocacy regarding access to health care for immigrant children, information on public policies or advocacy for educational programs for immigrant children, and cultural competence skills training for office staff. About 4 out of 10 pediatricians said they are “somewhat” interested in each of these.