Priorities and recommendations to optimize lifespan outcomes, foster child health and well-being, strengthen families, support our communities, and enhance the position of West Virginia as a leading state for children's health.
Building a healthy future

Policy Goals

**PROMOTE HEALTHY CHILDREN**
All children must have access to the highest-quality health care to thrive throughout their lifespan. Policymakers must ensure that all children, regardless of their immigration status:

- have affordable and high-quality health care coverage,
- have insurance with comprehensive, pediatric-appropriate benefits,
- have access to needed primary and subspecialty pediatric care and mental health services, and
- receive comprehensive, family-centered care in a medical home.

**SUPPORT SECURE FAMILIES**
Together we can work to advance efforts to ensure that parents can give their children the best foundation for the future. Policymakers must ensure that all families have:

- work that provides a stable and adequate income and family-friendly benefits,
- safe and secure housing,
- affordable and safe child care,
- access to adequate, healthy, and nutritious foods throughout the year, and
- resources that support positive parenting skills training.

**BUILD STRONG COMMUNITIES**
Strong communities are the building blocks for secure families and healthy children. Policymakers must ensure that communities:

- are safe from violence and environmental hazards,
- provide high-quality early education programs,
- support public health systems that protect children from infectious diseases and support maternal and child health, and
- respond effectively when disasters and public health emergencies occur.

**ENSURE OUR STATE IS A LEADER FOR CHILDREN**
Child health and well-being must be elevated and maintained as a priority in our state. Policymakers must develop and implement policy that:

- funds and supports public health and health services to help children grow into healthy adults,
- addresses environmental health and climate change issues that affect children, and
- addresses factors that make some children more vulnerable than others, such as race, ethnicity, religion, immigration status, sexual orientation or gender identity, and disability.
2020 Advocacy Priorities
West Virginia Chapter | American Academy of Pediatrics

ACCESS TO CARE
States, including West Virginia, have made historic gains in covering children thanks to Medicaid, Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), and the Affordable Care Act. However, there have been setbacks. As coverage rates stall or head in the wrong direction, the WV AAP emphasizes the importance to reach and enroll eligible children, focus on system improvements to keep them covered, and ensure that parents have health insurance so they can keep themselves and their families healthy. Medicaid and CHIP serve West Virginia’s most vulnerable children and are critical to children’s healthy development and success in life.

- The WV AAP continues to support protecting and advancing children’s health coverage through these vital programs for all children, including the most vulnerable in foster care, kinship care, and transient guardianship.
- WV AAP supports policy that strives to make medications, such as insulin and injectable epinephrine, more affordable and therefore more accessible to patients.

ADDRESSING ACEs AND TOXIC STRESS
Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and toxic stress have a significant, long-term impact on child health, quality of life, economics, and education. Research shows ACEs are common and affect all income levels. Protecting young children from adversity is a promising, science-based strategy to address many of the most persistent and costly problems facing contemporary society, including limited educational achievement, diminished economic productivity, criminality, and disparities in health.

- Physician and health care professional training should focus on the importance of trauma-informed care within pediatric practice to more fully address the health of all patients.
- The WV AAP supports the development and implementation of new, evidence-based interventions (regardless of the provider or venue) that reduce sources of toxic stress and/or mitigate their adverse effects on young children.

MAINTAINING STRONG IMMUNIZATION LAWS
The WV AAP has long supported preventive care, including immunizations, in the medical home setting as a major component of pediatric health care and disease prevention. Evidence-based studies have consistently shown that vaccines are safe; vaccines are effective; vaccines save lives. WV has one of the nation’s strongest school entry immunization requirements, in that we only allow medical exemptions for immunizations prior to school entry. In states with weak immunization laws that allow nonmedical exemptions, the number of unvaccinated children has increased. When the number of unvaccinated students grows, herd immunity is compromised and the likelihood of disease outbreak increases.

- The WV AAP applauds the WV legislature for maintaining strong immunization policies and continues to support these vital public health prevention laws.
FIREARM INJURY PREVENTION

Every child has the right to live in a safe home, play in the safety of others’ homes, and live without fear of firearms. Gun violence is a public health epidemic that profoundly affects children and must be addressed that way through evidence-based policies. As pediatricians, we counsel parents on proper storage of firearms and do everything in our power to keep children safe – we also depend on our elected leaders to use the same common-sense approach to advance comprehensive gun violence and firearm injury prevention policies.

- We urge legislators to reject any legislation that weakens gun violence and firearm injury prevention laws and puts children’s safety at risk.

OBESITY PREVENTION AND TREATMENT

Prevention of childhood obesity, the most prevalent chronic health disease in the pediatric population, remains a priority for the WV AAP. Although many social sectors need to be mobilized to completely address this epidemic, pediatric primary care has a unique role to play as a community resource and an integral part of the solution.

- Because there is no evidence of health benefits of sugary drinks, health-promotion efforts in pediatric practice should aim at removing all sugary drinks from children’s diets. WV AAP promotes policies that eliminate sugary drinks access and consumption.

OPIOID EPIDEMIC & THE IMPACT ON CHILDREN

Opioid use disorders are a growing problem among young people. The rate of “nonmedical use” (i.e., use without a prescription or more than prescribed) of opioid medication by adolescents (aged 12-17) and young adults (aged 18-25) more than doubled between 1991-2012, and the rates of opioid use disorders, including heroin addiction, and fatal opioid overdoses increased in parallel. Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS) is another devastating consequence from the opioid epidemic that impacts the most vulnerable population in West Virginia.

- The WV AAP supports increasing resources to improve access to medication-assisted treatments.
- 1 in 7 babies are born exposed to substances, and among those, 1 in 3 are diagnosed with NAS. West Virginia has the highest incidence rate of NAS in the country. WV AAP will continue to collaborate with state partners to ensure adequate care for children impacted by this epidemic.
- As the opioid epidemic continues to contribute to rising foster care placements, the WV AAP promotes policies that provide access to evidence-based treatment for the whole family. Specifically, we support the implementation of a health passport for all foster care children and additional resources, such as care navigators, to support foster care children and families.

PROMOTING TOBACCO CESATION

Preventing youth tobacco initiation and exposure are important to reducing tobacco-related diseases.

- WV should enact and enforce laws that mandate smoke-free environments including electronic nicotine device systems (ENDS) to reduce exposure and protect children from tobacco-related diseases.
- WV AAP supports universal screening of caregivers and assisting them in reducing and eliminating tobacco use.
- WV AAP supports measures that will decrease tobacco use and increase recommended funding for cessation services- by increasing the tobacco tax including parity with electronic cigarettes and delegating funds specifically for tobacco prevention and cessation.