

# MAINE



## A State Child Health Policy Agenda 2023 and Beyond

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Priorities and recommendations to foster child health and well-being, achieve health equity, eliminate health disparities, optimize lifespan outcomes, strengthen families, support our communities, and enhance the position of Maine as a leading state for children.

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# Policy Goals

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## Maine Chapter | American Academy of Pediatrics

### PROMOTE HEALTHY CHILDREN

**All children, adolescents, and young adults from birth to the age of 26 years must have access to the highest-quality health care, so they can thrive throughout their lifespan. Policymakers must ensure that all children, regardless of their race, ethnicity, income, family composition or immigration status have:**

- equitable, non-discriminatory access to affordable and high-quality health care coverage,
- insurance with comprehensive, pediatric-appropriate benefits,
- access to needed primary and subspecialty pediatric care and mental health services,
- access to necessary COVID-19 services, supports, and treatments, and
- comprehensive, family-centered care in a medical home.

### PROMOTE 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, including paid family medical and sick leave,
- safe, secure, and non-discriminatory housing,
- affordable and safe high-quality childcare,
- access to adequate, healthy, nutritious foods throughout the year, and
- resources to support family placement and permanency within the child welfare system.

### PROMOTE 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, especially in segregated urban, suburban, and rural communities,
- 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 and be reflected in the policies our legislators put forth.**

Maine AAP will encourage policymakers develop and implement policies that:

- acknowledge racism as a public health crisis and work towards reducing racism through interdisciplinary partnerships with organizations that have developed campaigns against racism,
- fund and support public health and health services to help children grow into healthy adults,
- address environmental health and climate change issues that affect children, and
- address factors that make some children more vulnerable than others, such as race, ethnicity, religion, immigration status, sexual orientation or gender identity, and disability.

# Advocacy Agenda

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## Maine Chapter | American Academy of Pediatrics

### REDUCE NUMBER OF CHILDREN LIVING IN POVERTY

**30,612 or 12.8 % of Maine Children ages 0-17 are in families living with incomes below the Federal poverty threshold – a slight decrease from 2020.**

Maine AAP supports:

- Tax policies that are NOT regressive
- Increases in the minimum wage
- Income supports for families with children
- Improved access to job re-training for families whose jobs left the state
- Expansion of WIC, food stamps, and other food support programs

### REDUCE CHILDHOOD EXPOSURE TO TOXINS

**There is an organized program in Maine to combat Lead Poisoning, but no systematic effort to deal with other widespread environmental hazards. The contributions of lead to decreased IQ, poor air quality to respiratory illness, radon and arsenic to a variety of cancers are well known. The effects of some of the newer complex organic chemicals on developmental and endocrine disorders are poorly understood but highly suspected.**

Maine AAP supports:

- Continued funding for the Maine Lead Program
- Efforts (working with the Maine Lung Association) to reduce both indoor and outdoor air pollution
- Legislation that controls environmental contamination waste dumps and incineration
- Legislation that forbids practices that lead to contaminated farmland
- Legislation that prevents hazardous materials from contaminating our rivers, lakes, and ocean shorelines

### ENSURE A HIGH-QUALITY EDUCATION

**As Pediatricians, we understand the relationship between early childhood experiences and later success in school. The current funding mechanism for public education does little to minimize the disparities in educational opportunity based on income – which has its start in the early years and often persists through the high school age level.**

Maine AAP supports:

- Increasing the State % subsidy to local school districts
- Adjusting the formula for revenue sharing to reduce the disparities that exist between regions
- Expansion of teacher training and Early Childhood Education programs at Maine institutions of higher learning
- Providing extracurricular opportunities to ALL children – including athletics, art, music, and STEM activities
- Access to quality counseling services in public-school systems
- Expansion of high-speed internet

# GIVE EVERY CHILD A HEALTH START

**Factors that assist or disrupt normal development begin early – even before conception. Pediatricians understand that we need to attack the risk factors that can disrupt this process EARLY and establish the foundation for a healthy childhood by promoting resilience where risk factors are present. We also recognize that parenting can be challenging for ALL families.**

Maine AAP supports:

- Policies that offer teens effective education regarding reproductive issues and responsible behavior so that pregnancies can be planned
- Increase access of teens to contraception, including LARC
- Publicity campaigns that inform prospective parents about the importance of healthy behaviors in pregnancy – alcohol, smoking and vaping, street drugs
- Decriminalization of opiate addiction and improved access of pregnant women to MAT
- Expand home visitation programs so they are routine postnatal care
- Cost free parent training programs that are universally available – both online and in person
- Availability of quality affordable day care in all regions
- Improving the efficiency and capabilities of Child Development Services
- Expansion of Head Start programs to eliminate waiting lists
- Universal Pre-K in EVERY school district

# MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE PREVENTION

**In the category of “All Suicidal ER Visits (Intentional Drug Overdose, Suicidal Ideation, Suicide Attempt), from 2017 to present: 13,140 patients were 19 years of age or younger. 210.8 out of every 10,000 ER visits were for a suicidality related reason.**

Maine AAP supports:

- Access to counseling services in all schools, beginning in Middle School
- Establishment of seamless referral systems for crisis evaluations accessible to primary care practitioners and front-line mental health workers
- Safe storage legislation for firearms
- Yellow flag legislation
- Increased availability of mental health practitioners skilled in trauma-based therapy and promotion of resilience

# UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE FOR ALL CHILDREN

**Lack of insurance, or underinsurance (with high copays and deductibles) cause delays in treatment for many children with chronic health issues, especially those with mental health challenges. Extremely restrictive formularies also interfere with appropriate care. While Maine pediatricians recognize that political realities argue against universal health care for all, we feel that investing in the health of CHILDREN is relatively inexpensive and, in the long run, cost saving. In addition, healthy children need healthy parents.**

Maine AAP supports:

- Expanding access to Medicaid programs for pregnant women
- Increasing over time the income floors for MaineCare enrollment for children of all age levels
- Eventually providing that ALL Maine children have access to MaineCare
- Increasing mental health and dental reimbursements towards parity with private programs
- Continuation of the Maine Immunization program policy of universal free access to vaccines

# TOBACCO AND VAPING ELIMINATION

**While tobacco use has decreased over the last decade, vaping of nicotine containing products has replaced tobacco as the major substance abused by teens. CDC estimates that 38% of high schoolers and 13% of middle school children have experience with these highly addictive products.**

Maine AAP supports:

- Ending the sale of flavored tobacco products which hook kids
- Raising the tobacco tax and increasing the tax on vape products
- Eliminating the advertising loophole that allows vaping products to be presented on TV
- Use of tobacco funds for anti-smoking and vaping
- PSA's, Laws restricting the use of all nicotine containing products in public spaces, and while driving with passengers

# PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM DANGEROUS SUBSTANCES

**The legalization of marijuana for adult use has increased the use of marijuana by teens in other states. Pediatricians have a research base showing the negative impact of THC exposure on neurotransmitter balance from use in persons under 25. Thus, keeping kids away from all drugs, including marijuana, is a priority and a challenge. This also has implications for the next generation... already almost 7% of infants born in Maine are exposed to opiates. The numbers also reflect health disparities, where the incidence of perinatal exposure varies from 3-4% in southern Maine to over 15% in some rural counties.**

Maine AAP supports:

- Increasing the legal age for marijuana use to 25
- Drug education programs in schools
- Avoidance of opiate use for chronic pain and restrictions on duration for acute pain
- Ensuring that teens from all regions have access to IOP and MAT programs

# ATTACKING THE OBESITY EPIDEMIC

**Obesity is an epidemic in our society. 30+% of our kids are in the overweight category, and we regularly observe the paradox that 15% of kids are above the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile for BMI. In addition, Type 2 DM has emerged as a Pediatric condition. Pediatricians recognize that the increased prevalence of obesity has had a profound effect on population measures of both quality of life and life expectancy. In addition to managing the metabolic consequences in individual patients, Pediatricians need to attack the bias and stigma associated with this disease – which has impeded the establishment of a coordinated public health effort.**

Maine AAP supports a multi-pronged approach which includes:

- WIC expansion with nutrition education and counseling
- Promotion of accessible parks, playgrounds, trails, pools, and gyms in communities open to all residents
- Physical education in schools, along with after-school recreation programs
- Inclusion of fresh fruit and vegetables in food support programs
- Promotion of farm to table programs for school lunches
- PSAs to counter the influence of food and sweetened drink advertising, especially advertising directed at children
- Breast feeding education and lactation programs in delivery hospitals
- Public education to address stigma, emphasizing that obesity is a **disease** and not a result of choice

- Professional education for primary care providers to improve their ability to recognize early warning signs and initiate appropriate interventions

**In addition, the Maine AAP will promote multidisciplinary treatment options for families already challenged by the disease. These should include access to telehealth or in person visits with skilled health counselors, regional weight management programs aimed at the pediatric population, and specialty clinics for evaluation/treatment of metabolic comorbidities. Third party payor must cover all these options, including care coordination by primary care providers. Insurers also should not place restrictions on appropriate tertiary care interventions that meet established guidelines, such as effective medications and bariatric surgery.**

## **REDUCE EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE**

**Changes in temperature, sea level and weather patterns/events bring instability to the major determinants of human health. Children are particularly vulnerable due to their incomplete development and immature physiology and metabolism, higher exposure to air, food/water intake relative to body weight, behavior patterns and dependence on care givers to protect them from environmental toxins. Pediatricians can educate patients, families, and those in the medical community regarding the potential adverse health effects of global climate change.**

Maine AAP supports:

- Encouraging our health care institutions to review and improve their carbon footprint and that of their supply chain, and to prepare for climate impacts.
- Advocating for urgent action in the legislative arenas (local, state, and national) for policies that promote clean energy and take steps to mitigate the effects of climate change.
- Providing information to patients and families about the effects of climate change and the relation to our overall health and how they can make changes in their homes and help promote change in schools and in communities.