



# The Alabama Pediatrician

Second Quarter 2023

## From the President Celebrating success and moving forward



**Nola Jean Ernest, MD, FAAP**  
Chapter President

I hope this message finds you energized after our successful annual Spring Meeting. It was a pleasure to see so many of you come together to share your knowledge, experiences, and dedication to providing the best care for the children of Alabama. The event was a resounding success,

with engaging presentations, another successful Grand Pediatric Pentathlon, and valuable networking opportunities. I am, as always, proud to be part of such a vibrant and passionate community.

We would also like to take this opportunity to announce an exciting new development – the launch of our very own podcast. Recognizing the need for better communication and knowledge-sharing, your Chapter board has created this platform to provide you with an additional avenue for staying connected and informed. Through our podcast, we aim to explore various pediatric topics, highlight the latest research, and interview experts in the field. We are confident that this initiative will enhance our ability to serve you, our valued members. (See page 3 for more information.)

In addition to celebrating our recent accomplishments, I want to assure you that the Chapter board is actively reviewing the results of the member survey you participated in. Your feedback is invaluable and I am committed to making sure the actions of the board remain member-driven. One key finding from the survey revealed that a significant majority of our members are deeply concerned about firearm injuries and deaths among the children of Alabama. We share your concerns and recognize the urgency of this issue.

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## Spring Meeting combined quality education and networking in a relaxing location

The Chapter’s 2023 Spring Meeting & Pediatric Update, held May 25-28, at The Lodge at Gulf State Park, was a resounding success, with high attendance among both pediatric healthcare providers and exhibitors alike.

“The energy at the conference has never been any better, and that is in large part due to the enthusiasm and dedication of our Executive Board,” said Chapter Executive Director Linda Lee, APR. “Everyone enjoyed the atmosphere, the content of the education and getting to spend time with colleagues from across the state.”

National and state speakers provided top-notch presentations on topics including COVID-19 updates, substance use, child health equity, obesity QI learnings, and pediatric UTI, among others.

Our child health focus ambassadors, as well as our Area Representatives on the Board, were also on hand in the exhibits to share updated information with members.

In addition, attendees enjoyed networking events, including the Saturday night dinner and reception, which was held outside on the terrace and generously sponsored again this year by USA Health Children’s and Women’s Hospital.

One of the biggest highlights of the weekend was the time pediatricians shared with one another as they tackled the five events of the tenth annual Grand Pediatric Pentathlon. This year’s event was record-breaking in terms of the number of participants and the amount raised for Reach Out and Read-Alabama.

We are excited to announce next year’s Spring Meeting, set for April 18-21, 2024, to be held once again at the Lodge!



Chapter staff Jill Powell and Rachel Latham with “Short the Squirrel” character.



Medical students from USA Health were able to attend the conference, thanks to the sponsorship of generous pediatricians/practices/institutions. Standing left to right are: Benjamin Cockrell; Steven Overlaur; faculty sponsor Benjamin Estrada, MD, FAAP; Isabelle Hudson; Emily Pollhill; and Cana Brown.



Chapter President Nola Ernest, MD, PhD, FAAP, was able to corral 100 pediatricians and other attendees for a group photo in the lecture hall, showing our strength in numbers!

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**Alabama Chapter – AAP****Mission:**

The mission of the Alabama Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics is to obtain optimal health and well-being for all children in Alabama, and to provide educational and practice support for its membership so the highest quality of medical care can be achieved.

**Values:**

Children must be highly valued by society.

Each child must develop to his/her highest potential.

Children must have strong advocates for they have no voice of their own.

Pediatricians are essential to achieving optimal child health. The work of pediatricians, and the profession of pediatrics, must endure and grow even stronger.

**Vision:**

Children in Alabama are happy and healthy; Alabama pediatricians are professionally fulfilled and financially secure.

**From the President continued from page 1**

To tackle this problem head-on, we are planning to organize an educational session on working with legislators to address firearm-related injuries/deaths – even when legislators are not in session. This session will equip you with the tools and knowledge to engage with lawmakers effectively and advocate for policies that prioritize child safety.

We are currently finalizing the details for this educational session, and I encourage you to stay tuned for further updates this summer. In the meantime, we appreciate your continued dedication to providing excellent care to the children of Alabama and your commitment to the welfare of our community.

**Register now for Chapter's 2023 Annual Meeting at Ross Bridge Resort!**

Online registration is open for this year's Annual Meeting & Fall Pediatric Update, which will be held at the Renaissance Birmingham Ross Bridge Resort on September 8-10, 2023! As usual, this year's meeting includes a Friday Practice Management Workshop for pediatricians and their staffs (see page 5 for more details), as well as networking opportunities and fantastic clinical CME AND MOC Part 2 that will focus on mental health, vaccine refusal/hesitancy, toxic stress, chronic medical conditions, and more! Topics include:

- Social Determinants of Pediatric Cancer
- Bronchiolitis: The Journey to Safely Do Less
- “The Great Masticators”: Closing the Gap of Delayed Diagnosis in Eosinophilic Esophagitis
- Pediatric Food Allergy
- Panel Discussion: Mental Health Lessons Learned from Alabama Pediatrician PATHs participants
- Eat for Strength
- Virulent: The Vaccine War: Discussion
- Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome in Adolescents
- Pediatrician's Role in Preventing Childhood Toxic Stress
- 21st Century Cures Act and Information Sharing in Pediatrics
- Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder in Adolescents
- Pediatrician's Response to Children Presenting with Symptoms of Toxic Stress

The meeting will also include our annual Awards Dinner, sponsored by Children's of Alabama.

Register now on the Chapter website at [alaap.org](http://alaap.org)!

**Nominate a pediatrician for Chapter awards**

Speaking of the Chapter awards, now is the time to nominate colleagues for the Carden Johnston Leadership, the Marsha Raulerson Advocacy and the Early Career Pediatrician awards.

Go here to nominate an Alabama Chapter member pediatrician (link includes criteria for the three awards): <https://www.alaap.org/nominateapediatrician>



## Introducing the Alabama Pediatrician Podcast!

By John McLendon, MD, FAAP, Chapter Area 6 Representative and the Alabama Pediatrician Podcast Producer

Although I've been a member of the Chapter since residency, I was never very active until quite recently. Since that time, the main thing I have learned is just how much I was missing out. It has been a wonderful experience reconnecting with colleagues and mentors from medical school and residency and being part of a group of people dedicated to improving care for the children of my state.

Not being active was never my intention, but the daily grind of work and everyday life made it hard to get started. Also, I may be the worst emailer of all time. Not paying attention to emails is perhaps my superpower, often resulting in missing out on a lot of Chapter information and opportunities. I would always save the AAP publications I received in the mail with the best intentions of reading them at some point, but they often just ended up in a pile on my desk.

At the board meeting this past January, we were brainstorming ways to better communicate with Alabama pediatricians, both members and non-members, about Chapter activities and volunteer opportunities.

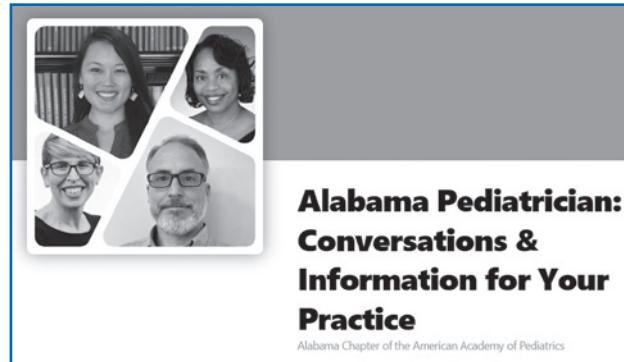
When the idea of a podcast came up, I knew it was a perfect fit for me. I am a self-professed podcast addict. If you know of any good ones, please let me know. I've always wanted to create a podcast. All I lacked was a good topic and the basic knowledge of how to start one.

Luckily, Dr. Ernest and Linda were enthusiastic about the idea, and trusted my good friend, Dr. Kym Middleton and me to get it started.

From there, the "Alabama Pediatrician: Conversations & Information for Your Practice" was borne. Our goal is to produce regularly scheduled episodes that are both beneficial and interesting. We interview pediatricians and other medical experts in order to provide updated clinical guidelines, practice management advice, and legislative updates. We also use it to highlight the many resources around the state of which many pediatricians may not be aware, such as the Regional Autism Network and the PATHS/ECHO project.

Through quite a bit of trial and error, we've been able to produce several episodes of which we are quite proud. We truly hope it will be an easy and effective way to reach and inform the hard-working pediatricians from, as our podcast introduction states, Birmingham to Mobile and from Pine Level to Slapout.

You can find the Alabama Pediatrician podcast on our podcast hosting platform here—<https://alabamapediatrician.buzzsprout.com/>--and subscribe to it on Spotify, iTunes, and any other format you may use. We sincerely hope you will give it a listen, and please let us know if you have any ideas for future episodes, or even if you would like to join us as a guest. Linda has created a form here for you to provide that input: <https://www.alaap.org/submit-your-podcast-topic-ideas>.



## How to Contact Your Chapter Leaders

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## How recipients will receive notifications and how they can respond

When it's time to renew, recipients should expect a recorded call, text message, and an email from Alabama Medicaid. The message will let them know that a renewal form will be mailed to them, and they can renew online or mail the form back.

Their renewal will be mailed to the address on file with Medicaid. This is why it is so important for their contact information is up to date!

Recipients may sign in to the My Medicaid portal to update contact information (<https://medicaidhcp.alabamaservices.org/Default.aspx?alias=medicaidhcp.alabamaservices.org/Recipient&AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1>).

They may also call the Recipient Call Center at (800) 362-1504 to update information or complete Form 295 and submit it to Medicaid.

If a recipient is disabled and qualifies for Medicaid through the Social Security Administration (SSA), they should contact the SSA office to update their address.

## MEDICAID NEWS

### Medicaid resumes standard enrollment processes after three years of “continuous enrollment”

As was mentioned in the last issue of *The Alabama Pediatrician*, Congress passed a law in late 2022 that put an end date of April 1 for the Family First Act’s “continuous enrollment” provision that prohibited Medicaid agencies from disenrolling recipients during the pandemic, whether they were eligible or not. Individuals could only be removed from the program due to death, a change to out-of-state residence or by request.

In May, the Alabama Medicaid Agency re-established its regular, methodical renewal process for child recipients, who are contacted prior to their enrollment anniversary date so that they can reapply. Some children will lose coverage because they are over the Medicaid child age limit of 19. Others may lose Medicaid but still be eligible for ALL Kids in Alabama. Age limits may not apply to children who are pregnant, low income parents, or receiving some long term care services or supports. Others could lose coverage because of now being over income limits.

Some recipients who are actually still eligible, however, could unnecessarily lose their coverage if they do not renew during the allotted time. So, it remains critically important for recipients to be aware of their eligibility for Medicaid and potential changes to their coverage because of continuous coverage ending.

Please continue to assure that your patients avoid lapses in coverage by alerting families to make sure they have updated their addresses, e-mail addresses and/or telephone numbers using the “Yellow Postcard” (delivered to offices last summer by Medicaid staff; linked below), as well as directing them to other coverage they may qualify for. Medicaid has an information sheet for recipients that explains for them to look for their Medicaid renewal in their mailboxes during the month they normally renew coverage. (See sidebar article at left for details.)

These resources and a tip sheet for providers are linked below; the Chapter will continue to monitor this process. The goal is to avoid any unnecessary terminations in coverage due to patients not being aware of the renewal process or their eligibility.

- PDF of Yellow Postcard - includes QR code linked to Form 295 (address change request)
  - English - <https://bit.ly/3J0eKdZ>
  - Spanish - <https://bit.ly/3KMPV7D>
- Informational flier for patients/families - includes information and QR code - <https://bit.ly/3SG2dQY>
- Tip Sheet for Providers - <https://bit.ly/3YgaI6C>

For all of the links, and to stay updated on this, visit <https://bit.ly/3Y5mNLS>.

### Chapter, partners advocate for pediatrics with Medicaid post-PHE telemedicine policy

As mentioned in the last issue of *The Alabama Pediatrician*, the Chapter Executive Committee and Pediatric Council members reviewed Medicaid’s draft telemedicine policy in the Spring and advocated for several changes, including the continuation of telephone-only visits, the continuation of telemedicine for sick visits; clarification of the location of the patient, and a consent process that is not burdensome for the patient.

The resultant telemedicine policy was released at the end of April (see <https://tinyurl.com/bp7wnz7n>), bringing with it a need for clarification. One of the big issues that several partners, including Children’s of Alabama, UAB and the Chapter, explored together was the language regarding services for children under 21 – which appeared to say that follow-up visits could not occur via telemedicine; this was particularly problematic for pediatric specialists.

After a series of emails, it was determined that this was unintentional and a clarification was sent out in an alert on June 16. That alert can be found here: <https://tinyurl.com/nsfwu4u>

Please continue to watch your emails for any further updates/clarifications. Also, please see this issue’s Coding Corner for a Q&A regarding telephone-only services post-Public Health Emergency.

A very special thanks to Prudence Nelson, Business Analyst with Dothan Pediatric Healthcare Network, who did the lion’s share in navigating this issue for the state’s pediatricians!

## Practice Management Association update

By Tonya Pitts, PMA Chair

The Practice Management Association is excited to announce the topics and speakers for our Practice Management Workshop on Friday, September 8 at Ross Bridge Resort in Birmingham! These sessions (see list below) are geared to both pediatricians AND practice managers and their staffs.

Mark your calendars, and register now!

Meanwhile, make sure that your practice manager is a member of the PMA. He or she can sign up on the Chapter website and begin networking with managers across the state, especially through our valuable practice management listserv.

Visit <https://www.alaap.org/practice-management-association-who-we-are>.

### 2023 Practice Management Workshop - Topics and Speakers

- Assessing for the Right Fit: The Hiring Process--*Andrea Lewis, PHR, SHRM-CP, CEO/Senior Consultant, Human Capital Services, Birmingham, AL*
- Consent in the Pediatric Practice: Major Issues with Minor Patients--*Brandy Boone, JD, General Counsel, Medical Association of the State of Alabama, Montgomery, AL*
- 2023 Coding Updates--*Jan Blanchard, CPC, CPEDC, CPMA, Consultant, PCC Pediatric Solutions Consulting Group, Winooski, VT*
- The Art of Delegation--*Katrina Skinner, MD, FAAP, Pediatrician, Fairhope Pediatrics, Fairhope, AL*
- Leadership in Waiting: Recognizing and Developing Leadership Potential in Yourself and Others--*Nola Ernest, MD, PhD, FAAP, Pediatrician, Enterprise Pediatric Clinic, Enterprise, AL*

## Breakthroughs will become cures here.

When people with extraordinary talent and passion are given the technology, the facilities, and the support, they achieve great things. The discoveries and innovations happening today will help shape the future of treatments and lead to cures. And it benefits not only the patients and families who come to Children's of Alabama, but people across the country and around the world for years to come.



Children's  
of Alabama®



Learn more at [ChildrensAL.org](https://www.ChildrensAL.org)

## Update from the Chapter's Mental Health Committee

By Shawn Cecil, MD, FAAP, Chair

Much progress has been made since the Chapter re-established the Mental Health Committee in late 2022. Our goal in all of this has been to help and support you in the care of the mental health of your patients. I am thankful to serve on this committee along with Drs. Madeleine Blancher, Elizabeth Dawson, Albert Holloway, Marsha Raulerson, Justin Schwartz, and Eric Tyler. I certainly could not act in this role without the support and expertise of each one of them.

As a committee, we have been meeting with Alabama Department of Mental Health Commissioner Kim Boswell quarterly. We have already had two very productive meetings with her in 2023, and the two remaining quarterly meetings for this year have already been scheduled. Commissioner Boswell even spoke at the Spring Meeting in Gulf Shores in May, sharing with us her vision and plans to make mental health care more accessible in Alabama. During her session, she talked about the PATHS program, integrating school behavioral health counselors, the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, piloting child and adolescent mobile crisis teams, and much more.

As part of these meetings with Commissioner Boswell, we have conveyed how critical the primary care physician (PCP) is in providing care for the whole patient. Part of this includes receiving complete information on what is happening outside of our office, which involves communication between us and our local Community Mental Health Centers (CMHC). Plans are underway to conduct HIPAA training with CMHCs across the state to express that HIPAA allows health information to be delivered to the PCP. While HIPAA does not cover counseling session details, medical decision-making is allowable to be shared with the PCP. By having medical records available and readily accessible to the PCP, we will then be able to make complete and informed decisions for our patients.

At our last meeting, we discussed multiple topics which should be the springboard for future conversations. Among these, we discussed the need for pediatric support at all local CMHCs as well as crisis centers developing across the state. We also discussed about having a way to track admissions at various inpatient psychiatric facilities across the state to identify who is being admitted multiple times. One other topic of discussion we are having is how to connect PCPs with early childhood specialists when it comes to working with families who are dealing with behavioral issues in children prior to starting school.

Lastly, I would like to share what I have been told myself from a member of the Mental Health Committee after dealing with some medical issues in my family. Make sure to take care of your own mental health. As physicians, it can become easy for us to burden ourselves with the issues and needs of our patients. To provide the best care for our patients, we need to take care of ourselves. I hope that you are able to step out and get some sunshine this summer, read a book, get some exercise, take a trip, etc. Whatever it is that helps you take care of yourself, do it. Encourage your colleagues and staff to do the same.

If you have any questions or feel there is something the Mental Health Committee needs to address, please feel free to reach out to me. My email address is [spcecil@ua.edu](mailto:spcecil@ua.edu).

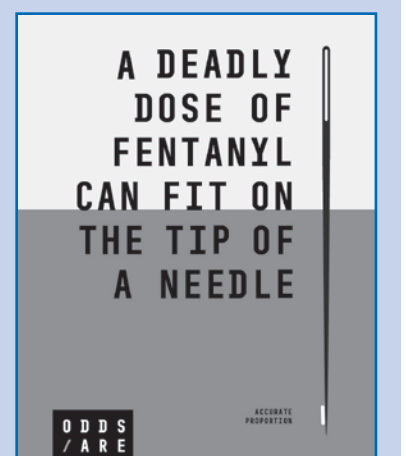
Thank you for the care that you are providing to your patients and the children of Alabama. You're doing a great job!

*...it can become easy for us to burden ourselves with the issues and needs of our patients. To provide the best care for our patients, we need to take care of ourselves.*

## Social media graphics available for practices to use from fentanyl dangers awareness campaign, "Odds Are Alabama"

As mentioned in the last issue of *The Alabama Pediatrician*, Odds Are Alabama is a year-long campaign spearheaded by several statewide organizations, including the Alabama Chapter-AAP, to put a spotlight on the prevalence and the dangers of the illicit use of fentanyl. The initiative will not only heighten awareness of its dangers, but will also share critical information regarding help for those with substance use disorders and information about medication that can reverse an overdose and strips to test drugs for fentanyl. One of the most striking facts: Six out of 10 fentanyl-laced fake prescription pills tested in 2022 contained a potentially lethal dose of fentanyl.

The campaign has a number of social media graphics that the Chapter encourages practices to use. Please click here to access them: <https://tinyurl.com/c8wncsyz>



# VACCINES *for* PRETEENS & TEENS

## Information for Health Care Professionals about Adolescent Vaccines:

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and The Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) recommend four vaccines for adolescents to prevent:

- **Tetanus, Diphtheria, Pertussis**
- **Human papillomavirus**
- **Meningococcal disease**
- **Influenza**

These recommendations are supported by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Family Physicians, and the Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine.

## What can YOU do to ensure your patients get fully vaccinated?

- Strongly recommend adolescent vaccines to parents of your 9 through 18 year old patients. Parents trust your opinion more than anyone else's when it comes to immunizations. Studies consistently show that provider recommendation is the strongest predictor of vaccination.
- Use every opportunity to vaccinate your adolescent patients. Ask about vaccination status when they come in for sick visits and sports physicals.
- Patient reminder and recall systems such as automated postcards, phone calls and text messages are effective tools for increasing office visits.
- Submit accurate vaccine data in ImmPRINT for better vaccine coverage rates, performance metrics, and HEDIS scores.
- Implement standing orders policies so that patients can receive vaccines without a physician examination or individual physician order.



### ALABAMA Vaccines for Children PROGRAM

Become a provider for Vaccines for Children (VFC), the program provides vaccines at no cost to professionals who serve eligible children. Children younger than 19 years of age are eligible for VFC vaccines if they are Medicaid-eligible, American Indian or Alaska Native or have no health insurance. VFC vaccines cannot be denied to an eligible child if a family can't afford the administration fee. For more information about participating in VC, visit [www.cdc.gov/vaccines/programs/vfc](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/programs/vfc).

Vaccine:	7-10 years	11-12 years	13-18 years
Tdap	Childhood Catch-up	Recommended	Catch-up
HPV	> 9 years	Recommended	Catch-up
MCV4	High-Risk	Recommended	Recommended
Flu	Recommended		



**Direct parents who want more information on vaccines and vaccine-preventable diseases to visit [alabamapublichealth.gov/imm](http://alabamapublichealth.gov/imm), [cdc.gov/vaccines/teens](http://cdc.gov/vaccines/teens), or to call 800-CDC-INFO.**

## 2023 Legislative Session recap

The Regular Session of the Alabama Legislature ended in early June, with mostly positive news for pediatrics. The Alabama Chapter-AAP leadership and lobbying team worked steadily to promote legislation that positively affects children and to oppose those bills that do not. Here are the outcomes from the Chapter's perspective:

Thankfully, no bills moved through the process that would have placed barriers on access to vaccines for children and adolescents, although there were several that were introduced that would have done so. Part of this success was once again a product of the Chapter's relationship with the House Health Committee.

- The Chapter-supported Physician Workforce Bill, put together by the Medical Association, passed. This bill amends Alabama law to:
  - Allow International Medical Graduates to begin initial license in Alabama after two years (instead of three) of residency and passage of the licensing examination;
  - Repeal a requirement that a physician sit for the SPEX exam in order to be licensed if he/she is not either 1) board-certified in the last ten years or b) initially licensed in Alabama within 10 years of completing training and testing; and
  - Create a permit process to allow bridge-year graduate physicians who do not match into residency the ability to temporarily work under the supervision of a licensed, on-site physician.
- The Education Trust Fund and General Fund passed, along with a Medicaid Emergency Reserve Fund bill, which were all critically important in assuring funding for the state's child-serving agencies and programs, including Medicaid, Public Health, Mental Health, Early Intervention and Early Childhood Education, including the state's high-quality pre-K program.
- HB 290, which would have allowed pharmacists to "prescribe" and administer vaccines, regardless of age, without any physician involvement, did not pass again this year. The AL-AAP, along with other specialty societies and the Medical Association, opposed this legislation; the House Health Committee worked with the Chapter to amend the bill to exclude ACIP-recommended childhood vaccines from the requirement. Even so, the legislation did not move further.
- The Chapter leadership was excited to support several pro-child bills, which DID pass:
  - Legislation that prohibits smoking tobacco products in a motor vehicle when a child aged 14 and under is also riding in the vehicle;
  - A bill that prohibits the sale, distribution, marketing or possession of psychoactive cannabinoids derived from or found in hemp to any individual under 21 years of age; and
  - Legislation that requires the state Board of Education to develop guidelines to train and authorize certain staff to administer injectables to students with adrenal insufficiency.
- Two bills that the Chapter supported did not make it across the finish line:
  - Improvements to the state's rural tax credit provisions – the Chapter will be working hard to get this re-introduced next year, earlier in the session; and
  - Improvements to the state's chemical endangerment law that would have put in place common-sense provisions to protect the mother-child dyad in certain cases.

## AAP Blueprint on Youth Suicide Prevention holds practical keys to helping youth in pediatric practice

By Madeleine Blancher, MD, FAAP, Chapter Suicide Prevention Ambassador



Madeleine Blancher, MD,  
FAAP

I am honored to have been asked to be the Youth Suicide Prevention Ambassador for the Alabama Chapter-AAP. My primary duty is to inform our members and all other clinicians who care for children and adolescents about the Blueprint for Youth Suicide Prevention. The Blueprint is a collaboration between the AAP, the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) and the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). It can be found on the chapter's website.

Suicide is the third leading cause of death in 10 -24 year olds in Alabama, according to 2020 data. Approximately 80% of adolescents who attempted suicide visited a health care provider within the year prior to their death by suicide. Of people 15 years old or older, 34% had contact with a provider within a week before their death. Since most young people do not spontaneously talk about their suicidal ideations, it is imperative that we ask the difficult



## AAP Blueprint on Youth Suicide Prevention continued from page 4

questions to ascertain if our patients are contemplating ending their life.

Suicide is preventable. The Blueprint not only discusses the risk factors and warning signs for youth contemplating suicide, but also the protective factors that will help keep them safe. There are links to screening tools that can easily be incorporated into a clinic's workflow. I understand how you might be thinking, "Not another screening tool!" but there is an update of a screener you are probably already using, the PHQ-9. This is an excellent screening tool for depression, but is not very accurate in identifying those patients with suicidal ideation. On the Chapter website is a link to PHQ-ASK, which adds a validated suicide questionnaire onto the PHQ. This does not really add any time to the clinic visit.

When we do get a positive screen, we all worry about what to do when we do not have access to an immediate mental health provider. The Blueprint discusses what needs to be done and how to do it. Yes, this part does take more time in the clinic, but it may save your patient's life. Remember that it is not always an emergency when your patients disclose thoughts of suicide. Sometimes just having someone listen to them helps defuse a potentially dangerous situation.

There is a lack of mental health professionals, especially child psychiatrists, in our state. I want to direct your attention to the PATHS program (Pediatric Access to Telemental Health Services) at Children's of Alabama, which is federally funded by HRSA through a grant with the Alabama Department of Mental Health. This program connects clinics in rural communities – and now even more suburban/urban areas – with access to psychiatrists and other mental health providers. This program is expanding!

The Blueprint is a very easy read, but chock-full of really down-to-earth information on how to implement suicide prevention strategies in your practice. I am also here to help you navigate the information. My contact information, along with links to the Blueprint and other resources, can also be found on the Chapter's website. Scan the QR code accompanying this article, or go to <https://www.alaap.org/suicide-prevention-resources-for-alabama-pediatricians>. I look forward to assisting you.



## Disaster preparedness – make it part of your practice's knowledge base

By Wes Stubblefield, MD, MPH, FAAP, Chapter Disaster Preparedness Champion and pediatrician with ADPH



Wes Stubblefield, MD,  
MPH, FAAP

Your Alabama Chapter-AAP has received grant funding from the AAP and CDC that focuses on helping pediatricians incorporate disaster planning into their practices. As your pediatric disaster preparedness ambassador, I am working to disseminate information that you can provide to your families about their personal disaster plans, as well as information that you can use to make disaster plans for your offices. I am also meeting with the state's Healthcare Coalitions, which exist throughout the state as multi-disciplinary task forces to look at local response to disaster.

In the next few months, we will prepare an on-demand webinar explaining what we learn from these meetings and how you can best serve your patients and your community, regardless of the nature of the disaster.

Meanwhile, I was on hand in the exhibit hall at the Spring Meeting, providing materials for practices and educating them on the Healthcare Coalitions. Here are links to those resources:

AAP Family Readiness Kit - <https://tinyurl.com/3j3vrwme>

Disaster Supply Kit ingredients for families - <https://tinyurl.com/yv3kf732>

Family Voices Emergency Disaster Planning - <https://tinyurl.com/3b5xpesb>

Pediatric Preparedness Checklist - <https://tinyurl.com/mtxm92at>

(Chapter has hard copies; if interested in receiving one, email Linda Lee at [llee@alaap.org](mailto:llee@alaap.org).)

## Event Calendar

September 8-10, 2023  
2023 Annual Meeting & Fall  
Pediatric Update  
(& the 2023 Practice  
Management Workshop)  
Ross Bridge Resort  
Birmingham, AL

October 20-24, 2023  
2023 AAP National  
Conference & Exhibition  
Washington, DC

April 18-21, 2024  
2024 Spring Meeting &  
Pediatric Update  
The Lodge at Gulf State Park  
Gulf Shores, AL

## Practices recognized for quality improvements

Cason Benton, MD, FAAP, Director, Alabama Child Health Improvement Alliance (ACHIA)

At the Alabama Chapter-AAP Spring Meeting, practices that participated in last year's teen vaccine collaborative were recognized for their commitment to quality. In addition to a certificate of achievement, each practice received a personalized 2019-2022 report comparing their vaccination completion rates to those of other participating practices and the state as a whole. While the state showed a slight downturn in vaccinations, early teen vaccinations for the 2022 ACHIA collaborative practices trended upwards. The data show that even with vaccine hesitancy, improving clinical processes increased vaccine completion in 2022.

If you missed the collaborative or spring workshop on teen vaccines but want to improve vaccination rates, visit the ACHIA website at <https://achia.org/resources/past-projects> for educational modules and change ideas.

Despite the impressive gains, ongoing data are essential to monitor if improvements are to be sustained. As part of its mission to improve health outcomes for Alabama's children through continuous quality improvement, ACHIA will continue to provide the annual vaccination report for both "process" and "outcomes" data to all collaborative participants. The annual reports will allow the practices to monitor if 2022 gains have been sustained.

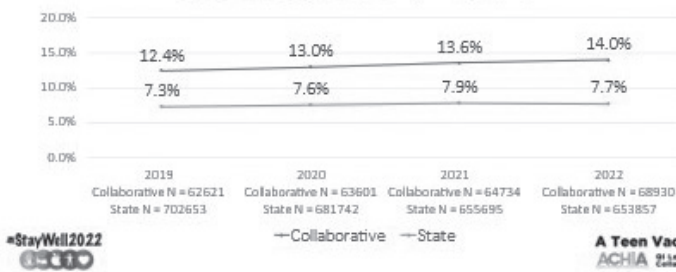
If your practice is interested in receiving longitudinal data reports on a variety of quality measures, contact [info@achia.org](mailto:info@achia.org).



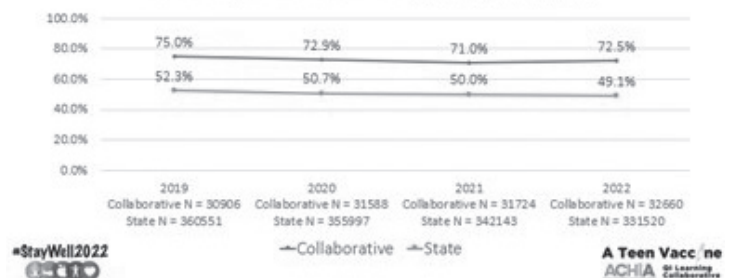
Pediatricians in ACHIA's 2022 teen vaccine collaborative receive certificates of achievement at the Spring Meeting



### ImmPRINT Data: % of 9 to 12 Year Olds with Dose >= 2 HPV



### ImmPRINT Data: % of 11-12 Year Olds with >=1 Dose Tdap/MenACWY



## Reach Out and Read All About It!

10th annual Grand Pediatric Pentathlon most successful yet

What began as an idea by Alabama Chapter-AAP member Grant Allen, MD, FAAP, the Grand Pediatric Pentathlon has grown to be Reach Out and

Read-Alabama's signature fundraising event, held at the Alabama Chapter-AAP's Spring Meeting.

The 10th anniversary of the event this year was the most successful yet, with 65 participants and 12 sponsors raising

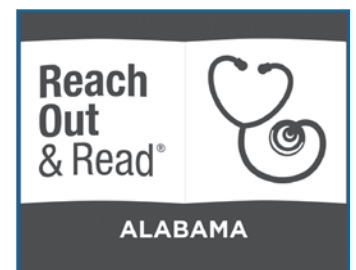
\$27,000 for Reach Out and Read-Alabama!

The Memorial Day weekend weather was perfect for the participants as they walked/ran, swam, kayaked, biked and read to benefit ROR-AL. After a beautiful, sunny Friday afternoon Fun Run on the

beach, many participants had a great time learning

how to build sandcastles with Sandcastle University. The participants completed various events throughout Saturday, culminating with a fun mixer overlooking the beach that included a photo booth and 18 prize drawings.

Our event sponsors that made this year's event possible include the following: Children's Rehabilitation Services and Early Intervention (Anniversary Sponsor); All About Books and Poarch Band of Creek



## Reach Out and Read continued from page 10

Indians (Storybook Sponsors); Medical Association of the State of Alabama and Joe Piper Inc (Picture Book Sponsors); MyCare Alabama (Bestseller Sponsor); Fair Advantage Consortium and Fruit of the Loom (Page Turner Sponsors); Alabama Academy of Family Physicians, Dothan Pediatric Healthcare Network, Jackson Thornton, and River Bank & Trust (Bookmark Sponsors).

Since its inception, the Grand Pediatric Pentathlon has raised \$150,000 for the program sites across the state.

View more photos from the event at [www.roralabama.org/grand-pediatric-pentathlon](http://www.roralabama.org/grand-pediatric-pentathlon).

Reach Out and Read-Alabama's 14th annual Summer Campaign demonstrates what happens "if you give a child a book"

If you give a child a book... He is going to want to read it. She will be captivated by the pictures and the text and will want to

keep reading to see what happens next. He'll ask you to read it to him again and again, And so you do...

Similar to the well-known children's book, *If You Give A Mouse A Cookie*, which illustrates what happens when

you give that little mouse a cookie, Reach Out and Read-Alabama's (ROR-AL) 14th annual summer reading campaign answers what takes place if you give a child a book.

Starting with the newborn well-child visit when a medical provider gives a child a book, families begin to understand the importance of reading aloud together with their child and the impact of the everyday moments they share. This is one of the



single most important actions families can take to support the critical development of their child's brain and to develop safe, stable and nurturing relationships that last a lifetime.

*If You Give A Mouse A Cookie* activities and events sponsored by 48 ROR-AL program sites throughout the state will take place throughout the summer. For more information, visit [www.roralabama.org/rx-for-summer-reading-2023](http://www.roralabama.org/rx-for-summer-reading-2023).

## LET'S HEAR IT FROM OUR DEPARTMENTS OF PEDIATRICS!

McDonald Scholars Program allows residents to get a taste of rural pediatrics in Alabama



Mitch Cohen, MD, FAAP

By Mitch Cohen, MD, FAAP, Katharine Reynolds Ireland Chair of Pediatrics, University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Medicine; Physician in Chief, Children's of Alabama

The McDonald Scholars Program was established in 2021 by the McDonald family to honor the legacy of Pediatrician Dr. H. Jack McDonald and his wife, Eva

Adams McDonald, who provided pediatric care in the Birmingham area for almost forty years.

UAB pediatric residents who apply and are chosen as a McDonald Scholar spend a two-week immersion experience in a rural or underserved area with a pediatrician in practice in Alabama. For the inaugural year we had five scholars, this year we had three, and we have five McDonald Scholars for the

upcoming academic year.

There has been great interest from pediatricians statewide in hosting the McDonald Scholars, including those in Alex City, Cullman, Enterprise, Sylacauga, Guntersville, and Alabaster.

One McDonald Scholar wrote, "I had a very informative and eye-opening experience at a rural clinic; I learned things that I



# Peanut Allergy Prevention Through Early Introduction

Over the last decade, research has led the way toward big shifts in recommendations about infant feeding to prevent peanut allergies. The early introduction of peanut foods has the potential to reduce healthcare costs, encourage consumption of affordable and accessible nutrient dense foods and reduce gaps in health equity in this country.

Through this online course, developed by the American Academy of Pediatrics, you will learn how to explain early peanut protein introduction to parents and how to prepare infant-friendly peanut-containing foods. The course will also help you effectively respond to common parental questions.

More resources for you and families available at [www.PreventPeanutAllergies.org](http://www.PreventPeanutAllergies.org)

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and Others Who Care for  
Families and Infants



**Let's Hear it from Our Departments of Pediatrics continued from page 11**

could not have fully understood within the walls of the hospital and things that I will take with me as I go out into my career as a general pediatrician in a similarly rural setting.” Another Scholar wrote, “I can honestly say it was one of the most meaningful and impactful experiences from my last three years of residency...I am so grateful.”

The program is led by UAB's Pediatric Residency Associate Program Director Candice Dye, MD, FAAP, and Program Director Michele Nichols, MD, FAAP.

We are very grateful for the ongoing support from the McDonald family that allows this unique, invaluable experience for our residents to learn from the great pediatricians and communities across Alabama.

### USA Pediatrics: Mapp Family Campus Clinic provides access to pediatric care in Alabama's fastest growing county



*By David Gremse, MD, FAAP, Chair, Department of Pediatrics, University of South Alabama*

Access to care has always been a priority of the USA Health Department of Pediatrics. The pediatric subspecialists at the University of South Alabama Whiddon College of Medicine and at USA Health Children's and Women's Hospital offer children and their families in our region

David Gremse, MD, FAAP

access to specialized care without them having to travel hundreds of miles for an appointment. It is in this spirit that USA Health opened pediatric subspecialty clinics in Fairhope, Ala. at the Mapp Family Campus in April 2023.

Baldwin County has been Alabama's fastest growing county since 2010. When describing plans for the Mapp Family Campus, Owen Bailey, Chief Executive Officer of USA Health announced, “We will be able to bring to the people of Baldwin County the specialized healthcare services they need in a much more convenient location for them.”

The clinic is built on an eight-acre campus in Fairhope donated to the University of South Alabama by Louis and Melinda Mapp. Pediatric subspecialty services offered at the campus include cardiology, endocrinology, gastroenterology, orthopedics, surgery and urology.

Osman Altun, MD, FAAP, is a resident of Fairhope and serves as the medical director for the Pediatric Medical Subspecialty Clinics. The clinic is located at 21950 AL-181, Fairhope, AL. For more information, call 251-410-KIDS or go to our website at <https://www.usahealthsystem.com/>.

## NEWS FROM PUBLIC HEALTH

*By Wes Stubblefield, MD, MPH, FAAP, District Medical Officer, Northern/Northeastern Districts, Alabama Department of Public Health, Morgan County Health Department*

The COVID-19 pandemic affected us in many ways, some expected and others unexpected. One concerning COVID consequence has been a rise in the rates of certain infectious diseases, particularly tuberculosis. In 2023, we have continued to see new cases of active tuberculosis that likely went undiagnosed and untreated during the pandemic. As pediatricians, we know that these infected and symptomatic adolescents and adults may be surrounded by children in whom profound disease, disability, and even death may follow.

Several years ago, the CDC had a campaign in which they urged providers to “Think TB!” I urge you to consider tuberculosis in children, particularly among those who were either exposed to or who were born in countries with a high incidence of tuberculosis. As you know, tuberculosis may manifest insidiously and progress rapidly in children.

If you have patients or family members who report chronic pneumonias or have difficult-to-treat infiltrates with demographic risk factors, Think TB! If you need help, contact us at ADPH. Keeping tuberculosis on your differential diagnosis will help us identify these at-risk individuals and contain the spread of this terrible disease. I can be reached at [wes.stubblefield@adph.state.al.us](mailto:wes.stubblefield@adph.state.al.us).

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## CHAPTER BRIEFS

## Custodio appointed to national AAP Committee on CME



Haidee Custodio, MD, FAAP

Haidee Custodio, MD, FAAP, Chapter CME Chair and Assistant Professor of Pediatrics, Pediatric Infectious Disease at the University of South Alabama, was recently appointed by the Board of Directors of the American Academy of Pediatrics to serve a six-year term on the Committee on Continuing Medical Education.

Having led the Chapter's CME planning and speaker/topic selection for several years and having provided the same for grand rounds at USA Health in Mobile, Dr. Custodio is a perfect fit for this position at the national level.

Well-deserved, Dr. Custodio!

Middleton featured in *Voices of Huntsville* piece in local Scout Guide

Kym Middleton, MD, FAAP

Congratulations to our very own Kym Middleton, MD, FAAP, for being featured in Huntsville's Scout Guide, a published and online local publication. The Guide's "Voices of Huntsville" feature is awarded to a local resident to share his/her personal perspectives of the community. In her piece, "Kids are My Calling," published in May, Dr. Middleton shares her passion for pediatrics and her community.

"Kids are my calling. They need someone to fight for them, to help them, and to support them. I am lucky to have the ability to do just that, whether it's at work or in the community. I devote a



In April, the Chapter hosted its annual "Life After Residency" Career Day at USA for second-year residents at USA Health in Mobile. Nola Ernest, MD, PhD, FAAP, Chapter President, and Linda Lee, APR, Chapter Executive Director, are pictured with the group of residents who were in attendance.

lot of my off time to helping the kids in my community and love Huntsville because there are so many opportunities to do so!"

## Joseph honored with AUA Distinguished Service Award

Congratulations to David Joseph, MD, FAAP, UAB Chief of Pediatric Urology, who has received a 2023 Distinguished Service Award from the American Urological Association (AUA). Each year, the AUA honors the contributions of physician researchers and educators to the field of medicine, the specialty of urology, and the AUA.



David Joseph, MD, FAAP

## Landers co-authors article on transformative TB treatment

In 2021, an estimated 10.6 million people developed tuberculosis (TB) and 1.6 million died from the disease worldwide. About 450,000 individuals with the infection are resistant to drugs used to treat TB; however, treatment for drug-resistant TB has been transformed. The new all-oral regimen requires less than half the previously recommended time and is safe and effective.

Chapter member Karen Landers, MD, FAAP, Chief Medical Officer at the Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) and the late Dr. Asharaf Edward "Ed" Khan, MD, of the Jefferson County Department of Health were among the co-authors of a major study in the May 30 issue of *Clinical Infectious Diseases* describing this innovative treatment. The study, titled "Implementation of BPaL in the United States: Experience using a novel all-oral treatment regimen for treatment of rifampin-resistant



Karen Landers, MD, FAAP



In May, Norma Mobley, MD, FAAP, Chapter Vice President (second from right) attended the Association of Immunization Managers' Vaccine Access Cooperative Regional Meeting in New Orleans as the Chapter's representative. The goal was for state representatives to come together to address ways to increase uptake and rates of immunizations. Pictured with Dr. Mobley are Kelly Wilson, RN, (ADPH/CHIP), Bakeba Raines (Medicaid Agency), Denise Strickland (ADPH) and Paul Lucas (CDC).

## CHAPTER BRIEFS

or rifampin-intolerant TB disease,” can be accessed here:

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/37249079/>

A published editorial commentary in the same issue praises the transformative treatment. Preventive TB treatment protects both the individual patient and the community at large from developing TB disease. A TB and disease control expert, Dr. Khan passed away in June 2022.



Giovanna Beauchamp, MD, FAAP,

### Three UAB faculty appointed to AAP PREP Editorial Boards

Giovanna Beauchamp, MD, FAAP, assistant professor in the UAB Division of Pediatric Endocrinology and Diabetes, Ammar Alishlash, MD, FAAP, assistant professor,

and Guillermo Beltran Ale, MD, FAAP, assistant professor in the UAB Division of Pediatric Pulmonology and Sleep Medicine, have been appointed to the American Academy of Pediatrics



Ammar Alishlash, MD, FAAP



Guillermo Beltran Ale, MD, FAAP



Melody Petty, MD, FAAP, assistant professor at the University of South Alabama and hospitalist at USA Health Children's & Women's Hospital, and pediatric residents Zoha Nizami, MD and Ibora Udote, MD, shown are here with their U.S. Congressman Jerry Carl. The three attended the AAP Legislative Conference in April in Washington, DC, learning about the federal legislative process and advocating for children!

Review and Education Program (PREP) Editorial Boards for their subspecialties. As PREP board members, they will play an important role in the development and success of the PREP Endocrinology and Pulmonology self-assessments. They will serve a three-year term through June 2026.

Congratulations, Drs. Beauchamp, Alishlash and Beltran Ale!

## Coding

### Telehealth Audio-Only Visits by Lynn Abernathy Brown, CPC

**Question:** Since the PHE ended, can providers still bill audio-only visits?

**Answer:** Depending on the payer and contract coverage, if the payer allows audio-only visits there are varying ways of coding these visits.

Many payers require time be documented in the visit note for codes such as CPT 99441-99443, telephone evaluation and management service by physician or other QHP (billing provider) who may report E/M services provided to an est. patient, parent, or guardian not originating from a related E/M service provided within the previous 7 days nor leading to an E/M service within the next 24 hours or soonest available appointment (5-10 min, 11-20 min, or 21-30 min), Place of Service code 10, patient's home or POS 2, outside of patient' home.

As you can see from the code description above, there are specific guidelines for billing the audio-only visits using CPT 99441-99443. Payers such as BCBS-AL allow these codes for audio-only visits (See BCBS-AL Telehealth Billing Guide for Providers for more information) as to a few other payers.

Alabama Medicaid continues to allow established patient visits for audio-only encounters but there is an update to the allowed coding.

Per the Medicaid Alert dated 06/16/23 and 04/26/23, audio-only visits may be billed for ages 0-20 years using CPT 99211 EP-99215 EP,

Modifier FQ should be added to indicate audio-only, Use Place of Service code 11,

Watch the Medicaid website for updates to the Alerts and the provider manual.

Benefits should always be checked to determine if there is audio-only coverage.

**DISCLAIMER:** Children's of Alabama does not accept responsibility or liability for any adverse outcome from the advice of Lynn A. Brown, CPC, for any reason, including inaccuracy, opinion and analysis that might prove erroneous, or the misunderstanding or misapplication of extremely complex topics. Any statement made by Lynn A. Brown, CPC, does not imply payment guarantee by any payor discussed.

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# Alabama Chapter

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It's no secret that rural Alabama needs primary care doctors.  
Currently, 21% of the state's population live in medically underserved areas.

## Alabama Rural Medical Service Award Up to \$150,000 for three years practice in rural Alabama

The Alabama Rural Medical Service Award (**ARMSA**) awards primary care physicians (family medicine, internist, general pediatrics) **\$50,000** per year stipend for up to three years once they begin practice in a rural area of need. These communities include Bay Minette, Oneonta, Troy and Wetumpka, along with dozens of others.

Physicians interested in making a difference in the health of rural Alabama are invited to explore this program. Contact [ARMSA@uabmc.edu](mailto:ARMSA@uabmc.edu) for information.



ARMSA is administered by the Alabama Department of Public Health and supported by the Office for Family Health Education & Research of the UAB School of Medicine.