



Alabama Chapter-American Academy of Pediatrics

2024 Legislative Agenda

2024 Legislative Priorities

We advocate for:

- *Increased vaccination rates among Alabama youth:* It is imperative that we sustain Alabama's historically strong immunization system to prevent childhood diseases. The Chapter opposes any legislation that would create additional barriers for children to receive recommended childhood immunizations or restrict their availability.

- *Improved child health through adequate Medicaid/CHIP funding and coverage:* Sustainable and permanent revenue solutions to adequately fund Medicaid and CHIP for children is a permanent priority of the Chapter. We also strongly support expanded coverage for low-income adults who don't currently qualify for Medicaid, because children whose parents have coverage are known to have better health outcomes. These priorities are dependent on an adequately compensated healthcare workforce to assure access for Alabamians covered by Medicaid.

- *Protection of the Medical Home and the practice of medicine:* With the pediatric medical home established as the best place for care of children of all ages, the Chapter opposes any legislative efforts that threaten the medical home and supports those that protect it. The Chapter also opposes any attempts to control the practice of medicine, interfere with the doctor-patient relationship, or dictate requirements that violate current American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) guidelines and recommendations for the care of children.

- *Adequate funding for birth to 5 services:* To support the needs of infants and young children, the Chapter advocates for: 1) additional funding for voluntary, high-quality, pre-k programs; 2) adequate funding for Alabama's Early Intervention Services; 3) continued funding for Maternal and Infant Mortality Review in the General Fund; and 4) increased funding for treatment beds for pregnant women with substance use disorder and their children.

- *Support for children affected by mental health issues:* A rising number of children are faced with trauma and adverse childhood experiences. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the AAP and other organizations have declared a national children's mental health emergency. The Chapter strongly supports the Alabama Department of Mental Health's budget request, which would fund 24 additional psychiatric beds at Wellstone in Huntsville, as well as passage of the "988 bill," which would provide funding to increase in-state response to crisis calls to 988.

Long-Range Legislative Priorities

- *Amending Alabama's Chemical Endangerment Law:* The Chapter supports new recommendations to amend Alabama's Chemical Endangerment Law to reduce negative outcomes on families, further the law's original intent of protecting children from harm, and promote wellness in the community.

- *Strengthening Alabama's Child Passenger Safety Law:* The Chapter strongly encourages consideration of amendments to the state's child passenger safety seat law to reflect the current recommendations of the AAP and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, which could help decrease the risk of serious injury to children involved in motor vehicle accidents by as much as 90 percent and fatalities by as much as 67 percent.

- *Prevention of firearm-related injuries in children:* Firearm-related injuries are the leading cause of death among children and youth up to age 24. Alabama is in the top five states in firearm-related death rates. The Chapter urges consideration of policies that would impact these statistics, such as safe storage, expanding background checks, instituting red flag laws, and conforming the age to purchase assault rifles to that of handguns.

- *Illicit substance exposure.* Protecting children and youth from exposure to illicit substances, ranging from unintentional ingestion of medical marijuana to intentional drug use, is a long-term priority of the Chapter. Measures to protect youth such as stocking naloxone in schools and public places and requiring safer packaging of medical marijuana are considerations that should be explored by the legislature.