



THE OFFICIAL NEWSMAGAZINE OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS

AAP News

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Learn How to Use Your Voice to Advocate for Children

by Carla Kemp, Senior Editor

Editor's note: *The 2017 AAP National Conference & Exhibition will take place from Sept. 16-19 in Chicago.*

Lack of fluoride in her city's water supply was the issue that propelled Lynda Young, MD, FAAP, to begin an advocacy journey that has spanned more than two decades.

"I took it upon myself to try to change that," said Dr. Young, who lives in Worcester, Mass.

She began by advocating for fluoridated water at the city level but then was advised to talk to her state representative and senator.

"I literally said, 'Where are they?' I knew nothing," she acknowledged.

Dr. Young now is chair of the AAP Committee on Federal Government Affairs, and she has learned a great deal about how the political process works. Yet it was something she was told on her first trip to the Massachusetts State House that still resonates with her.

"Legislators hate doctors," a lobbyist said to Dr. Young, "but they love pediatricians."

"That really gave me the energy," she said. "And all these years I still kept at it because it's so true."

Dr. Young plans to amplify the message that pediatricians can be a powerful voice for kids during her presentation titled "Children's Health: What's at Stake in the New Administration (11048)" from 8:30-10:00 am Saturday, Sept. 16, in Room W181 A of McCormick Place West Building.

During the interactive group forum, attendees will be briefed on some of the main child health issues the Academy is concerned about such as Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program, access to care and immigration. Then they will learn how to advocate on the local, state or federal level on issues that speak to them, Dr. Young said.

She will start with the basics such as how to set up a meeting with a legislator and where to find information about a particular issue. One of the main resources pediatricians can draw on is the Academy's Blueprint for Children, <https://www.aap.org/en-us/Documents/BluePrintForChildren.pdf>. The document presents policy recommendations to assist the federal government in putting children and families at the center of its policy agenda.

Dr. Young also will explain how legislation is introduced and moves through committees as well as how to give oral or written testimony at public hearings.

Those who take on the task of advocating for children should be prepared to hurry up and wait, as it may take years to see the fruits of their labor. In the case of Dr. Young's initial advocacy effort, she's still waiting. Referenda to bring fluoridated water to her city were voted down in 1996 and again in 2001. Her efforts, however, were not in vain.

"Even though we didn't get fluoride in our water, (grant) money was used to set up dental clinics at health centers and schools for evaluations and fluoride varnishes," said Dr. Young, clinical professor of pediatrics at University of Massachusetts Medical School.

During the session, Dr. Young also plans to ask advocacy veterans to share their experiences with those who



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are new to the process.

"If people have had successes," she said, "I want to hear about that." She also wants to hear about failures "because we learn from failures more than we do from successes."

Above all, Dr. Young wants attendees to come away knowing how powerful their voice is, how well-respected they are and that the time they spend advocating for children will be worthwhile.

"It's very energizing and very gratifying," she said.

Follow Dr. Young on Twitter @lyndayoung4.

For more stories on educational sessions and events at the 2017 AAP National Conference & Exhibition in Chicago, visit <http://bit.ly/2vm1VUU>. To register for the conference, visit <http://aapexperience.org/conference-registration/>.