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## Washington Report

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## Building strong children AAP leaders speak out during Child Abuse Prevention Month

“It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.” More than 100 years after Frederick Douglass spoke these words, they guide the Academy’s child health advocacy efforts, particularly during National Child Abuse Prevention Month in April.

The Academy recognized pediatricians’ role in child welfare and the need for pediatric expertise in child maltreatment long before the child abuse and neglect subspecialty was formed in 2006, with AAP President Robert W. Block, M.D., FAAP, holding the first certificate.

In 1990, the Academy created the Committee on Child Abuse and Neglect (COCAN) and launched its education and training arm, the Section on Child Abuse and Neglect. These two entities have developed 24 policy statements and clinical reports; created a residency curriculum and fellowship programs in child abuse and neglect; and contributed to the education and training of pediatricians and others working in child maltreatment.

Indicative of the collaborative nature of the field, COCAN Chair Cindy Christian, M.D., FAAP, serves as director of Safe Place: The Center for Child Protection and Health at the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia as well as medical director of Philadelphia’s Department of Human Services.

“Child welfare work is incredibly challenging, but it’s also incredibly rewarding,” Dr. Christian said. “The work is also interdisciplinary. I work with colleagues in medicine, social policy and practice, law, engineering, nursing and so many more areas of expertise. So to really be effective in this field, you need to walk out of the hospital, both literally and figuratively.”

### Child Abuse Prevention Month activities

The Academy is tweeting facts about child abuse prevention and treatment from its Twitter handle, @AmerAcadPeds, as well as from Dr. Block’s handle, @DrBob Block. The facts also will be posted to the AAP Department of Federal Affairs’ Facebook page, [www.facebook.com/AAPFederalAffairs](http://www.facebook.com/AAPFederalAffairs).

The AAP Committee on Native American Child Health will focus its annual Capitol Hill briefing on April 3 in Washington, D.C., on the prevalence and impact of child abuse and neglect on Native American children, their families and their communities.

The need for advocacy extends beyond the month of April. Stay tuned for additional coverage of child abuse prevention and treatment in future issues of *AAP News*.

### Lifelong consequences of child abuse

The total lifetime estimated financial costs associated with just one year of confirmed cases of child maltreatment (physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological abuse and neglect) is \$124 billion, according to a recent study from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The report documents that in fiscal year 2008, U.S. state and local child protective services received more than 3 million reports of children being abused or neglected — about six complaints per minute. (See related article on page 12.)

The recent AAP policy statement and technical report on toxic stress identified that abuse during childhood increases risks for unhealthy adult behavior choices and serious diseases, including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, pulmonary disease and autoimmune conditions.

“Sadly, not all children will have the chance to become adults, but every adult was once a child,” said Dr. Block. “The experiences and opportunities we each go through in our early years, both positive and negative, have a long-term impact on our health and development and create a substantial imprint on the adults that we one day become.”

### Complex problem, federal solutions

Recognizing the significance of early childhood experiences on the adult lifespan, the Academy is focused on preventing child maltreatment in its earliest stages.

“There aren’t many other fields of medicine where just recognizing what’s going on can save a life,” said Dr. Christian.

Indeed, preventing child maltreatment involves identifying and reporting abuse. Although pediatricians, teachers, law enforcement officials and others who come into contact with children are required by law in every state to report suspected and known cases of child abuse to the proper authorities, there is no federal standard on how to do so.

The lack of federal guidance on mandatory reporting has implications, as evidenced by a recent study from the AAP Pediatric Research in Office Settings network that found child abuse is consistently underreported. Clinicians did not report 27% of injuries considered likely or very likely caused by child abuse, or 76% of injuries considered possibly caused by child abuse.

“What many fail to realize is that a report is not an accusation but a request for further investigation,” Dr. Block said during recent testimony before the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and

Pensions' (HELP) Subcommittee on Children and Families. "This underscores the importance of specialized education and training for pediatricians, as well as for all mandated reporters."

The HELP Committee has jurisdiction over the AAP-endorsed Protect Our Kids Act. This bill would create the first Presidential Commission on child maltreatment, bringing together experts from health, education, child welfare, law enforcement and academia in providing long-term guidance on this issue.

The only federal law that addresses child abuse and neglect is the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), enacted in 1974 and amended numerous times since then. CAPTA also funds most state programs that support child abuse and neglect prevention, assessment, investigation, prosecution and treatment activities. The Academy has advocated for Congress to increase funding for CAPTA so states can receive the resources they need to protect children properly.

As a result of the Academy's advocacy, the last CAPTA reauthorization in December 2010 required the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to publish recommendations on how to protect individuals who assist with filing child abuse reports from time-consuming and often frivolous lawsuits. Every state has a law protecting mandatory reporters of child abuse and neglect from prosecution if they act in good faith. While pediatricians are protected,

most states do not extend these protections to other health care providers, investigators, child welfare agencies or law enforcement officials who cooperate or assist with filing mandatory reports.

HHS' recommendations, expected to be released within the next few months, should serve as a first step toward extending good faith reporting protections to other mandatory reporters of child abuse.

The Academy also has urged Congress to fund the development of a Health Child Abuse Research, Education and Services (Health CARES) network. Such a network would bring the medical profession into partnership in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of child abuse and neglect, providing the infrastructure to collect and coordinate resources for services, education and research on child maltreatment. The network also would establish Centers of Excellence to disseminate best practices in abuse diagnosis and prevention, provide further education and curricula for all health care providers, and provide resources for multidisciplinary research.

"If we help children avoid maltreatment and help heal those who are victims in spite of prevention efforts, we can deliver healthier adults into our health care system," Dr. Block said. "This would save billions of dollars that could be invested back into that all-important aspect of any system — the care of children."