



Letter from the President

Open enrollment for health insurance: what to expect from the AAP



Dr. McInerney

As AAP president, I've learned that child health advocacy is not confined to the walls of a pediatric practice or even the halls of Capitol Hill. Pediatricians are as varied in the ways we advocate for children as the spectrum of child health itself.

One example of a unique way pediatricians are preparing to protect children's health is coming Oct. 1: open enrollment for health insurance. As part of health reform implementation, individuals and families can begin enrolling in health insurance plans through the health insurance marketplace on Oct. 1, or compare plans and decide not to switch if they're already covered. In preparation for open enrollment, your Academy is developing tools for you to share with parents, such as a checklist of things to keep in mind when selecting a health insurance plan for their children and how to learn about their state's health insurance marketplace.

Just as pediatricians educate parents about child safety concerns like swimming pools and household chemical storage, we also can play an important role in educating parents about what the Affordable Care Act means for them and their children. Some of the law's consumer protections, such as requiring insurance plans to cover kids with pre-existing conditions and allowing young adults to be covered under their parents' insurance until they turn 26, have been in effect since 2010.

While children were the first to benefit from many of the law's protections, many adults will be eligible for the first time in 2014. Pediatricians care for children, but we also develop relationships with their parents. Because of this, parents trust pediatricians for much more than just checkups and immunizations. During the next few months, part of this role may involve letting parents know that they will be newly eligible for protections, such as guaranteed coverage for pre-existing conditions. Parents may ask pediatricians which health insurance plans are best for their children and perhaps even how to enroll in health insurance themselves.

The Academy is here to help you answer these questions. Stay tuned for several communications where we will share state-specific

resources on how to sign up for health insurance and basic questions parents should ask about what benefits their children need. We also will work with our state chapters, particularly those in areas with high concentrations of uninsured but eligible individuals, to help parents who are uninsured find coverage. Data demonstrate that when parents have health insurance, children are more likely to be healthy themselves.

Through our website for parents, www.HealthyChildren.org (now also in Spanish), we can engage parents and educate them about how to enroll in health insurance in the health insurance marketplaces and how to make sure their children are enrolled in plans that are affordable and offer comprehensive, age-appropriate benefits. The only parenting websites backed by 60,000 AAP member pediatricians, HealthyChildren.org and [HealthyChildren.org en Español](http://HealthyChildren.org) offer trustworthy, up-to-the-minute health advice and guidance for parents and caregivers, along with interactive tools and personalized content.

I hope you share my excitement as we prepare for open enrollment. Stay tuned, as you will be hearing from me and from the Academy in the months ahead. We will need every one of you to help make sure parents have health insurance and their children have the best possible coverage to meet their needs.

One of my favorite definitions of advocacy is "creating an environment in which change can occur." By educating parents and helping empower them to enroll in health insurance coverage for their families, we can change their understanding, their behavior and in turn help improve health across the lifespan. I look forward to working and advocating alongside all of you to make that happen.

For more information on open enrollment, see *Washington Report* on page 1.

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