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AAP News

AAP campaign: Vote like children's futures depend on it

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With Election Day approaching on Nov. 3, we find ourselves in a moment that feels unprecedented.

Our country and the rest of the world continue to endure a global health crisis that has laid bare the inequities and vulnerabilities in our health care, education and justice systems. The killing of George Floyd sparked a national dialogue on racial injustice, highlighting the extensive work our country needs to do to end racism.

Through it all, pediatricians have played a vital part, from serving on the front lines of the pandemic to leading conversations on how racism is detrimental to child health. Now, pediatricians and those who care for children have another critical task: voting.

This year, the Academy's Get Out the Vote campaign will focus on the connection between health equity and voting. AAP's message is clear: Vote like children's futures depend on it.

Every day, pediatricians witness how health care access, public health capacity, education, housing, nutrition, the environments in which children live and learn, and the legal system shape the health and safety of our patients and their families. In turn, the laws and public policies enacted by elected officials at all levels of government - or their failure to act - powerfully shape these drivers of health.

We continue to see widening disparities in health outcomes for U.S. children and families who traditionally are under-resourced. For instance, the disproportionate morbidity and mortality caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in Black, Indigenous, Latinx and lower-income neighborhoods have rendered long-standing health disparities more visible.

Voting is one of the main ways citizens can change these underlying drivers of health inequities to better ensure fair distribution of resources and to change public policy to achieve improved health status. The research on this connection is extensive.

Young adults who vote and who are civically engaged have better mental health, achieve higher levels of education and have higher incomes. States with a higher voter turnout have better access to health care.

Conversely, socioeconomic inequality and poor voter turnout are associated with worse self-reported health. Overwhelmingly, people of color, people with disabilities, low-income Americans, the uninsured and young



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people are those most likely to experience voter disenfranchisement and barriers to voting.

Pediatricians are uniquely suited to illustrate the direct connection between health equity and voting. We witness the effects of public policies on our patients, their families and communities. Through this lens, we can see how civic engagement and voting are vital to advancing health equity.

The AAP's campaign, in collaboration with the AAP Section on Minority Health, Equity and Inclusion, provides Academy members with the information and tools to add their voices to this effort. The effort is nonpartisan and focuses on what all children need to thrive and what elected leaders can do to make that possible.

Pediatricians can help mobilize peers, patients and parents to vote. Health equity is on the ballot, and the health of children depends on our civic engagement.

Following are ways you can get involved, educate yourself about what is at stake and encourage others to vote with children's futures in mind on Nov. 3:

- Make sure you are registered to vote and are aware of your state's requirements, deadlines and absentee voting options. Visit www.vote.org for information.
- Encourage others to register to vote and have what they need to cast their ballot on Election Day.
- Share messages on social media about why you plan to vote like children's futures depend on it using the hashtag #VoteKids.
- Check out the resources available for medical professionals from *VotER*, a nonprofit, nonpartisan voter registration effort at www.Vot-ER.org. The AAP is partnering with the organization this year.
- Write an op-ed to your local newspaper about what is at stake for children's health and the important connection between health equity and voting.

The AAP campaign website, www.aap.org/VoteKids, has all of this information and more, including information on key child health issues and their ties to health equity, questions to ask candidates, voter registration resources, sample social media messages and other tools to help pediatricians share the importance of voting.

The Academy will continue to keep members informed of new Get Out the Vote opportunities and resources as the election approaches.

Drs. Chomilo and Kumar are members of the AAP Section on Minority Health, Equity and Inclusion. Drs. Jeung and Jones are members of the section's executive committee.