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AAP lays out child health priorities for new administration

by Devin Miller, Washington Correspondent



The transition period between presidential administrations is a critical time to educate incoming leadership about key policy priorities. For the Academy, this means ensuring children's health is at the top of the policy agenda for Joe Biden, who will be sworn in as the 46th president of the United States on Jan. 20, and Kamala Harris, the first woman and first Black and Indian American to serve as vice president.

The AAP has released *Transition Plan: Advancing Child Health in the Biden-Harris Administration*, which outlines policy recommendations to support the nation's children and their futures. The plan covers 26 child health issue areas, breaking them down into more than 140 recommendations for the administration.

"The stakes for children could not be higher right now. The global pandemic continues to have devastating consequences for children's physical and mental health, and we know that children and adolescents of color are being disproportionately affected," AAP President Sara "Sally" H. Goza, M.D., FAAP, said in a press release unveiling the plan.

"Our leaders must advance policies that address health inequities in our communities and ensure all children can grow up healthy and thrive. The Academy's transition plan for the Biden-Harris administration outlines bold policy recommendations crafted with those goals in mind."

It is important to note that the recommendations in the transition plan are specific to the Biden-Harris administration, and the Academy will be engaging with the 117th Congress to outline its priorities on issues that will require congressional action.

The recommendations build on the Academy's *Blueprint for Children* released in October. The *Blueprint* focuses on how government leaders can support healthy children, secure families and strong communities, and ensure America's role as a leading nation for youths.

Here is a closer look at some of the transition plan's recommendations.

Healthy children

This section addresses access to care, vaccines, children with special health care needs, reproductive health, tobacco, mental health and substance use disorders, pediatric workforce and American Indian/Alaska Native children.



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The recommendations outlined in the transition plan seek to address the health crises facing children and allow every child the opportunity to grow up healthy.

One important aspect of this work includes ensuring children have access to health care coverage. In 2019, an estimated 4.4 million children did not have health coverage, an increase of 726,000 since 2016. The Academy is calling on the Biden-Harris administration to work toward covering all children by facilitating children's enrollment in health insurance and rescinding Medicaid waivers that reduce coverage.

Vaccinations also are highlighted in this portion of the plan. Among the many requests that focus on the importance of vaccines and addressing vaccine hesitancy, the Academy is urging that children be included in COVID-19 vaccine trials as soon as safe and appropriate to understand any potential unique immune responses and/or safety concerns.

Secure families

This section covers child welfare, nutrition and breastfeeding, child poverty, family leave, injury prevention and product safety, and military health.

The Academy is urging investment in policies and programs that lift children and families out of poverty and improve their health.

Prior to the pandemic, one in six children lived in poverty, with child poverty rates much higher for Black and Hispanic children than for non-Hispanic White children.

Promoting secure families means strengthening federal anti-poverty and safety net programs that provide health care, early education, quality child care, affordable housing, home visiting and nutrition assistance.

This section also highlights the need to bolster the child welfare system and the importance of a public health approach to prevent child maltreatment and support strong, resilient families. One key priority is addressing systemic racism in the child welfare system. The AAP is asking the administration to create a federal initiative to promote racial equity.

Strong communities

Environmental health, gun violence prevention, health equity and racism, LGBTQ youths, child care, housing and disaster preparedness are addressed in this section.

All children and families should be safe in their communities and have equal access to opportunity.

The Academy emphasizes racism as a public health crisis.

"The administration must work to acknowledge the impact of systemic racism on American children and integrate racial and equity considerations into policy change at all levels of the federal government," the plan states.

The plan also outlines the threat that climate change poses to children's health and its role in exacerbating health disparities. The Academy is urging the Biden-Harris administration to rejoin the Paris Agreement and maximize reductions of carbon pollution, among several other actions.

Ensuring children and families are safe in their communities also means addressing gun violence. The list of AAP priorities includes actions the administration can take, such as increasing investments in gun violence



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prevention research and strengthening background checks.

Leading nation

The final section of the transition plan covers expansive issues impacting children in the United States and around the world, including COVID-19, immigration, global child health, respecting science, pediatric research and pediatric medical product innovation.

"Our leaders must show our commitment to the future by investing in child and adolescent health - within our borders and beyond," the *Blueprint* stated.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to have serious consequences for children everywhere, disrupting their lives at critical stages of development and disconnecting them from critical programs on which they rely. The physical, mental and emotional toll on children is alarming, and children of color are disproportionately affected.

The transition plan outlines a comprehensive set of policy recommendations to combat the pandemic. At the top of the list is a call to develop and fund a national strategy to implement the public health measures to stop the spread of COVID-19 in communities. Additionally, the AAP is urging the administration to provide schools with funding to re-open safely.

The health and well-being of immigrant children and families also is covered extensively in this section. Among many calls to action, the Academy is urging the immediate reunification of all separated children and ending family detention.

Looking ahead

The Academy looks forward to working with leaders across the new administration to advance children's health. It will continue to point to its transition plan as a way to shape an agenda that is most supportive of children, families and communities.

"Pediatricians stand ready to work with the Biden-Harris administration and leaders at all levels of government to ensure children's health is prioritized in all decision-making," Dr. Goza said. "Their futures are on the line, and children are counting on us to act."

To read the transition plan, visit [AAP.org/Transition](https://www.aap.org/Transition).

Pediatrician reelected to Congress

Rep. Kim Schrier, M.D., FAAP (D-Wash.), was elected for a second term, representing the 8th District of Washington state. In November 2018, Dr. Schrier became the first pediatrician elected to Congress.

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