



Blueprint for Children

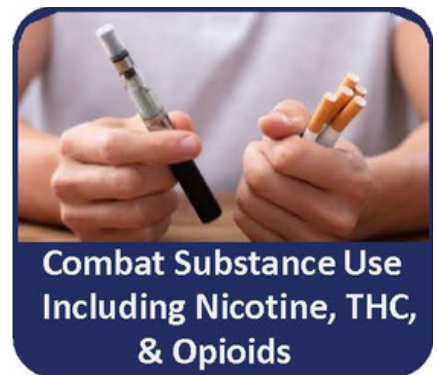
A State Child Health Policy Agenda for 2024 and Beyond

Priorities and recommendations to foster child health and well-being, achieve health equity, eliminate health disparities, optimize lifespan outcomes, strengthen families, support our communities, and enhance the position of Maine as a leading state for children.

Advocacy Agenda

Maine Chapter | American Academy of Pediatrics (Maine AAP)

The Maine AAP: 280+ pediatricians, pediatric subspecialists and child health providers working together, across the State, to better the lives of Maine's youth. We advocate locally, statewide, and nationally for improved child health. Check out our 2024 Blueprint for Children for our current goals!



The Maine AAP's mission is, "To improve the lives of children and adolescents in Maine".

Our 2024 Blueprint:

How Maine pediatricians are working to ensure every child thrives!

Improve Access to Quality Healthcare for Every Maine Child

Every child in Maine deserves the best start. That means access to high quality healthcare, from birth to young adulthood. Unfortunately, many face barriers: limited insurance, high costs, and geographic disparities. We are advocating for change, ensuring mental, oral, and physical health services are available to Maine children up to age 26. It's an investment in our future and in every child's chance to thrive.

We advocate for every child's health by fighting for:

- Affordable, high-quality coverage to close the healthcare access gap and expand coverage equitably, especially for pregnant women and children.
- Comprehensive benefits that require insurance to support children's needs.
- Insurance coverage of evidence-based treatments for obesity.
- Increased access and fair reimbursement for mental and dental health services and school-based counseling.
- Availability of easy crisis evaluation referrals and trauma-informed care.
- Universal coverage for all recommended immunizations.
- Comprehensive, coordinated, family-centered care provided in a primary care practice/medical home.

Safeguard Children from Gun Violence and Accidents

There is a public health epidemic of gun violence plaguing our youth and families as firearms are now the leading cause of death for children and young adults. All children should feel safe in school. Evidence-based solutions that prioritize prevention and intervention protect and empower children to thrive in safe and healthy environments.

We prioritize common-sense gun safety policies and evidence-based school security to build a safer, healthier future for Maine's children:

- Strengthen safe gun storage laws, institute extreme risk protection orders, and require background checks and waiting periods on all firearm purchases.
- Ban assault-style weapons and high capacity magazines, and raise the firearm and ammunition purchase age to 21.
- Fund gun violence research, family education, and school safety training.
- Implement non-traumatic, age-appropriate school safety drills.
- Oppose arming school staff and support research-backed security measures.

Combat Substance Use, Including Nicotine, THC, & Opioids

To build a healthier future for Maine's children, substance use must be addressed. Although cigarette smoking among teens has declined, vaping and nicotine addiction are on the rise. Developing brains should be protected from THC exposure that risks neurological effects. Families affected by substance use disorder and the opioid crisis need investment in prevention and treatment programs to break the cycle of substance abuse.

We want to shield kids from nicotine, protect young minds from chemicals, and break the cycle of addiction:

- End the sale of all flavored tobacco products, raise tobacco-product taxes, and close advertising loopholes.
- Restrict nicotine product use in public spaces and while driving with others.
- Use tobacco settlement funds to decrease all forms of nicotine use.
- Raise the legal marijuana age to 25.
- Fund evidence-based drug education and develop public service ads about the risks of substance use.
- Provide opiate prescription education and training for pain management, including evidence-based recommendations and alternatives.
- Expand access to treatment programs for opioid use disorder.

Partner for Strong Families and Bright Futures

Raising healthy children takes a village. That is why Maine pediatricians are partnering with parents and communities to build support systems for all families. We advocate for policies that strengthen families, ensure access to vital resources, and provide tools for raising resilient kids. When families thrive, children flourish.

We urge decision-makers to prioritize strong families and healthy childhoods:

- Equip Maine families with stable job opportunities with family-friendly benefits.
- Ensure safe, affordable housing free from discrimination.
- Invest in accessible, high-quality childcare that is available in all regions.
- Expand access to comprehensive substance use disorder treatment for parents, both outpatient and inpatient, to keep families together and healthy.
- Proactively address causes of domestic and intimate partner violence and child abuse and neglect.
- Promote education campaigns on healthy pregnancy behaviors such as no alcohol, tobacco, THC, or drugs, for expecting parents and promote healthy pregnancies and births for all mothers and babies.
- Empower families with early childhood support and resources and strengthen parenting skills and family well-being.
- Increase access to comprehensive reproductive healthcare services.
- Prioritize in-family reunification and lasting placements within the child welfare system.
- Support measures that decrease greenhouse gas emissions and promote a healthy environment.

Nurture Every Mind

Equitable school funding should foster opportunity for all children, regardless of zip code or income. Early childhood education for every child builds a strong foundation for future success. Holistic education includes investments in mental health support and resources within schools outside of the classroom including culturally responsive curricula and inclusive learning. By investing in education, we invest in healthier, brighter futures for Maine's children.

We support comprehensive and fair educational access to nurture all young minds:

- Increase state funding and fairer revenue sharing to close the education opportunity gap.
- Provide universal Pre-K and expand Head Start for early success.
- Develop teacher training and Early Childhood Education programs to fuel future generations of educators.
- Offer equitable access to extracurriculars, athletics, arts, and STEM activities.
- Ensure quality counseling services in every school.
- Expand broadband availability for digital access and learning.
- Normalize age-appropriate, comprehensive sex education for all children and adolescents.

Alleviate Childhood Poverty and Food Insecurity

In 2021, 13.8% or 34,000 Maine kids faced poverty – we aim to make a difference. Systemic issues of racial inequality and discrimination, climate change, and inadequate healthcare and economic opportunities impact child poverty and hunger as well as kids experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity.

We support evidence-based solutions to childhood poverty:

- End regressive taxes and prioritize policies that reduce child poverty.
- Make permanent increases to the child tax credit and earned income tax credit.
- Support policies and investment in affordable, quality child care and early childhood education.
- Raise the minimum wage and expand income support for families with children.
- Invest in job retraining and efforts to address homelessness & housing insecurity.
- Boost WIC, food stamps, and other vital food support programs to address food insecurity.
- Promote access to affordable healthcare and the development of innovative solutions to address health care needs for children and families.

Champion Health Equity

Health equity ensures everyone has a fair and just opportunity to attain their highest level of health, regardless of their social, economic, or demographic background. Marginalized communities frequently encounter barriers to achieving their full, healthy potential. Additionally, there are health issues, such as obesity, exposure to environmental hazards, and climate change, that have a disproportionate impact on certain communities.

We support bridging the health equity gap and work with policymakers to:

- Fight racism's impact on health by partnering with organizations to dismantle barriers to equitable care.
- Guarantee healthcare, food, and housing for all children, regardless of immigration status.
- Foster safe and inclusive schools for every child.
- Ensure access to all appropriate mental and physical health care for LGBTQ+ youth, including access to medically necessary gender-affirming care.
- Defend the right of youth to use appropriate facilities for their gender and to participate fully in sports and other activities without discrimination.
- Champion the potential of children with special health care needs.
- Combat childhood obesity using a public health approach, including launching programs for better nutrition and physical activity.
- Continue the Maine Lead Program and fight pollution in all forms including monitoring and limiting exposure to harmful chemicals in the home.
- Educate patients and families about health risks of climate change and advocate for clean energy and climate action policies.
- Educate healthcare professionals and the public about obesity as a disease.
- Support legislation for cleaner water, land, and air for all.
- Support & monitor research on chemicals suspected to have developmental, endocrine, and other negative health effects.
- Empower communities to make positive changes.