



TEN ADVOCACY ACTIONS PEDIATRICIANS CAN TAKE TO ADDRESS CHILDHOOD FOOD INSECURITY

1) Write an Op-Ed or Letter to the Editor: Writing an op-ed or a letter to the editor provides an opportunity to dive deeper on a specific issue, offering an invaluable personal perspective alongside research and policy recommendations. Both are highly effective ways to communicate a message to the public and lawmakers, who regularly read the editorial pages of their local newspapers.

Julie Linton, MD, Member of the AAP Council on Community Pediatrics Executive Committee, penned an op-ed in the Winston-Salem Journal urging Congress to oppose any efforts to separate WIC eligibility from Medicaid.

2) Meet, Brief, Call, Write, or Email Congressional Representatives: Appealing directly to your members of Congress and their staff allows you to offer expert information on the health and well-being of children and the role of the federal nutrition programs in promoting healthy growth and development.

Evelyn D. Johnson, MD, President, Georgia chapter of AAP, and Dennis Cooley, MD, of Topeka, Kansas, met with their respective state's congressional delegations in support of strong, bipartisan Child Nutrition Reauthorization (CNR) legislation. Dr. Cooley encouraged other pediatricians to do the same by writing about his advocacy experience in his AAP chapter's newsletter.

Diana B. Cutts, MD, of Hennepin County Medical Center in Minnesota and a founding member of Children's HealthWatch, [presented](#) on the critical role of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in supporting children's nutrition and food security at the Food and Agriculture Policy Collaborative Hill briefing in 2015.

3) Testify Before Congress in Support of Key Federal Nutrition Programs: Offering your expertise during a legislative hearing is an effective strategy to raise awareness of childhood food insecurity and the multiple health and nutrition benefits of the federal nutrition programs.

Sandra Hassink, MD, then-AAP President, [testified](#) on the importance of the child nutrition programs to our nation's health, economy, and security before the U.S. Senate Agriculture Committee in 2015.

4) Take the SNAP Challenge: Taking the SNAP Challenge allows participants to not only share their experiences about living on a food budget of about \$33 per week, but also to advocate for increasing SNAP benefits. For more information, visit FRAC's [SNAP Challenge page](#).

Lewis First, MD, Chief of Pediatrics at Vermont Children's Hospital and Chair of the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Vermont College of Medicine, took the [3Squares Vermont Challenge](#) (Vermont's SNAP) to highlight the problem of childhood hunger.

5) Work With Your State AAP Chapter to Prioritize Food Insecurity: Elevating the issue of childhood food insecurity as a chapter priority provides a valuable way to connect practitioners to evidence-based opportunities to screen and intervene.

In California, the AAP Orange County (OC) chapter's [No Child Hungry initiative](#) hosted town hall meetings on food insecurity, collaborated with the Waste Not OC Coalition on an OC Food Pantry map application, and developed educational materials for physicians and community partners on issues related to food insecurity, poverty, and health.

6) Support State Legislation: Supporting state legislation allows pediatricians to promote policy changes that are important based on their expertise. It also can provide opportunities to connect with new, interested stakeholder groups.

In 2013, the AAP West Virginia chapter, then led by Raheel Khan, MD, collaborated with the West Virginia Healthy Kids and Families Coalition and State Senator John Unger, to enact the West Virginia Feed to Achieve Act (SB 663) that requires all children in school (Pre-K-12) be offered breakfast and lunch.

7) Push for State Appropriations: Weighing in for increased funding for state anti-hunger efforts helps lawmakers understand the need for adequate funding and resources to safeguard children against food insecurity.

In 2015–2016, the Virginia AAP chapter was part of a coalition that successfully advocated for increases in funding for breakfast after the bell. The funding provides schools an additional \$0.05 per breakfast served when using alternative breakfast models, such as “grab and go” and breakfast in the classroom.

8) Serve on a Hunger Task Force: By joining a local task force or broader state coalition, pediatricians can add tremendous value to coalition activities and influence goals and priorities.

Stephen Cook, MD, of Rochester, New York, was appointed by Governor Andrew Cuomo to the New York Anti-Hunger Task Force. Dr. Cook was appointed due to his tireless advocacy for children’s food security, which included [testifying](#) before the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry in 2014 and being active on social media in staunch support of SNAP.

9) Testify Before a Local Body: Engaging with local lawmaking bodies, such as a school board or city council, supports local actions to address childhood food insecurity, including the successful implementation of new local policies.

Marsha Raulerson, MD, of Brewton, Alabama, testified before her local school board on the importance of healthy food and the [Community Eligibility Provision](#), which allows high-poverty schools to serve breakfast and lunch at no cost to all enrolled students.

10) Educate the Next Generation of Doctors: Educating future doctors bolsters the network of individuals capable of addressing food insecurity and effectively advocating for federal nutrition programs.

In June 2016, the New Jersey AAP chapter, under the leadership of Fran Gallagher, chapter Executive Director, partnered with Robert Wood Johnson Medical School-Rutgers University and Children’s Specialized Hospital to host an advocacy day for residents on food insecurity.

Ben Hoffman, MD, of Oregon, integrated child nutrition advocacy into his legislative skills curriculum for residents. Dr. Hoffman had residents create their own one-pagers, and craft and deliver media messages and mock testimony about CNR.

Want to get even more involved with AAP?

Become an AAP Key Contact and join thousands of pediatricians who are armed with the most up-to-date knowledge on federal legislation affecting children and pediatricians. AAP Key Contacts are ready to speak up during critical decision points in the legislative process. Email the AAP Department of Federal Affairs ([DOFA](#)) for more information.