



COVID-19 ADVOCACY UPDATE

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Our Chapter has been very busy at the state-level in California advocating for policies and funding to support access to care for children and the financial viability of pediatric practices and children's hospitals in these extremely challenging times.

Most recently, along with the three other California AAP Chapters, we joined CMA in urging the Legislature to include direct funds for pediatrician practices experiencing financial difficulties due to the effects of COVID-19. With respect to the public sector, we've asked that unused Medi-Cal dollars (Prop 56) be redirected to vulnerable physician practices serving Medi-Cal children. On the private sector side, we've asked that commercial insurers and health plans be required to issue one-time grant payments to in-network providers based on their previous year average billing. Providing a financial bridge through both these initiatives will allow practices to pay rent, retain staff and cover other lost income during the shelter-in-place and associated patient flow disruption.

We have also been prioritizing advocacy for telehealth policies and funding, particularly with respect to the portion of well child visits that can be done virtually. The good news is that California's AB 744, an AAP California-supported bill, will go into effect in January 2021. This bill will require that telehealth visits be paid by commercial plans "on the same basis and to the same extent" as in-person services, closing a significant gap in the current level of payment for telehealth services for an estimated 20%-49% of California's insured. Also, through the time that the COVID19 state of emergency persists in California, Medi-Cal must provide telehealth parity. But after that, Medi-Cal could fall back to lower rates, and we are making sure that legislators and the Governor's office understand how disastrous that would be for children's access to care going forward.

Also at the top of our COVID-19 list right now is working with the school nurses and others to ensure that school reopenings are done safely for children and the community.

Meanwhile, the world continues to turn. The CA Legislature returned this week and scores of delayed bills on issues of importance to children and the practice of pediatrics, including those related to vaping, school meals, gun violence, immigrant health, vaccines and more, are slated to be urgently heard. We are keeping on top of those, and hope to share with you some successes there, too.

Thank you for your Chapter membership, which makes this state-level advocacy possible!