

# American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Section on Oral Health (SOOH) Advocacy Tool Kit 2019

*For pediatricians, dental professionals, and AAP Chapters*

Early childhood dental caries is the most common chronic disease of childhood, yet it is almost completely preventable. Awareness of the importance of oral health, including access to dental care, continue to be problematic for many children and families.

There are many ways for pediatricians and dental professionals to improve oral health promotion and disease prevention by advocating for kids' oral health in their practices, communities, and at the state and federal levels.

This advocacy kit contains ideas and tools to help you engage as an oral health advocate or weave oral health into your existing advocacy efforts.

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## AREAS OF FOCUS

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### Children's Oral Health

Preventing dental disease before it starts is key to improving children's oral health. There are many ways in which prevention can be achieved, including:

- educating children and families about how to keep their mouths healthy and the role of good nutrition
- educating pediatricians and other health professionals to look in the mouth and counsel on oral health
- raising awareness about school- and community-based programs that provide dental sealants, prevention education, fluoride use, and more.

**ACT!** – Access the [Smiles for Life](#) online training for primary care clinicians to learn risk assessment, fluoride varnish, and counseling. Use the AAP program [Brush, Book, Bed](#) to help families with young children understand the importance of a nighttime routine that includes toothbrushing. Get out in schools, scouting groups, prenatal/parenting classes, the media – anywhere there are children and caregivers – and educate others as much as you can about how to prevent dental disease before it starts!

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## Oral Health and Overall Health

Good oral health is much more than healthy teeth. Many diseases, such as diabetes, some autoimmune system disorders, and cancer, present in the mouth, often before symptoms are evident elsewhere. In the case of disease, pregnancy or other conditions that impact oral health, medical and dental providers need to work together to assure that oral health needs are met.



Because oral health intersects with so many areas of health and wellness, the AAP SOOH and the Campaign for Dental Health (CDH) advocate for the inclusion of oral health wherever applicable. Some of these areas include:

- safe drinking water, environmental health
- tobacco use prevention
- obesity and nutrition counseling
- breastfeeding advocacy
- access to care
- diabetes prevention and care
- school health
- poverty and food insecurity
- children with special needs
- social determinants of health
- prenatal care

**ACT!** - Think about how you, as a pediatrician or dental professional, can find connections between your oral health agenda and the agenda of others who are advocating for issues that affect overall health. Reach out and plug in! Talk about children's oral health and what you see in your practice. Raise awareness and share information.

## Access to Oral Health Care & Treatment

Many children, especially those who are covered by Medicaid, have difficulty finding and/or getting to a dental professional who can see them. There are lots of ways in which dental organizations and oral health advocates are working to address this problem, including school-based programs, expanded practice dental providers, co-location of medical-dental care, and educating dental professionals on seeing patients in need. The AAP has focused on training primary care providers to help ensure that all children who see a pediatrician are able to get preventive oral health care, including counseling, anticipatory guidance, and fluoride varnish application.

**ACT!** - Consider your community and what approach to access to dental care could be used to help children. Identify options that are available to the families in your practice who are experiencing obstacles accessing oral health care and treatment. Advocate for these individuals and programs!

**ACT!** – Do you know your professional counterparts? Pediatricians, introduce yourselves to pediatric and general dentists. Dental professionals, get to know pediatricians and family physicians. Host a get-together to arrange for referral and bi-directional communication to benefit your patients.

## Oral Health Education in Health Professional Training

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All health professionals need to learn about oral health and train to screen, assess caries risk, provide fluoride as needed, and refer to a dental professional. Advocacy is needed to achieve inclusion of oral health education in health professions curricula, competencies and residency training. Pediatricians who work in educational settings can introduce oral health and the need for more interprofessional training to assure that medical and dental professions are trained side-by-side and are comfortable working together once they graduate.

**ACT!** - Contact your local health professions training programs and ask what kind of oral health training their students/residents receive. Consider sharing AAP or other resources and trainings. Offer to present at grand rounds, during a class, or help organize interprofessional experiences for these students to make sure medical and dental professionals learn and work together.

### Community Water Fluoridation

Community water fluoridation (CWF), the practice of adjusting the level of fluoride in a water system, is one of the most effective and evidence-based methods of preventing dental disease in children, families and entire communities. It is important that children have access to water with fluoride and that families are aware of the importance of drinking it. Pediatricians and dental professionals can also advocate for water fluoridation in the community, either when it is challenged or by advocating to implement new systems where they do not currently exist.



**ACT!** - If your community does not have a water fluoridation program, consider advocating for the addition of one. If a community water fluoridation roll-back attempt occurs in your community, you can help by connecting with local advocates. Always reinforce the importance of drinking water with fluoride with patients and in community settings. Access trusted resources and counsel on this topic from the [Campaign for Dental Health](#) website or email [fluoride@aap.org](mailto:fluoride@aap.org).

### State and Federal Advocacy

Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) provide dental benefits to 43 million children from economically vulnerable families. These kids are most likely to have tooth decay, yet only 55% of them have an annual dental visit. CHIP has been extended through 2023, which is good news for children's oral health. But threats to Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act continue. Health and dental professionals must continue to monitor activity on Capitol Hill and in their states and advocate for funding programs to continue providing the oral health care children need.

**ACT!** - Stay connected to [AAP Federal Advocacy](#) efforts by becoming a Key Contact so you are alerted when there is a need for advocacy on programs relevant to children's oral health care. Visit [www.aap.org/stateadvocacy](http://www.aap.org/stateadvocacy) for the latest information on state policy updates related to children's oral health care. The [Children's Dental Health Project](#) tracks policy specific to oral health. Consider using these and other resources to stay abreast of oral health advocacy issues.

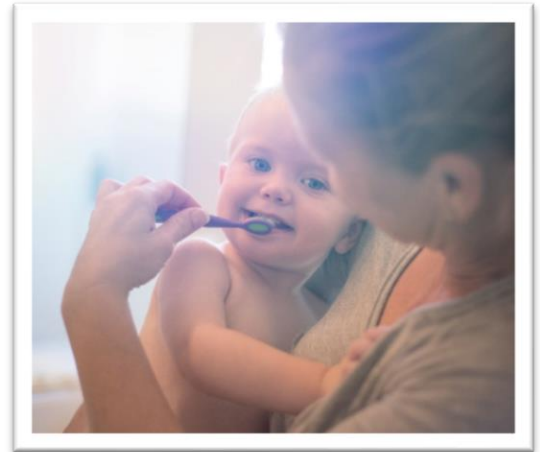
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**ADVOCACY ON SOCIAL MEDIA**

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Pediatricians are in a unique position to raise the visibility of oral health disparities and advocate. Join our ongoing social media campaign and tweet about how you advocate for children's oral health to families, communities, schools, legislators, and others, using the hashtags #StandforSmiles and #ilikemyteeth. Participate or follow along with the American Academy of Pediatrics (@AmerAcadPeds) and the Campaign for Dental Health (@ILikeMyTeeth).



### Campaign for Dental Health #StandforSmiles

**Date:** Ongoing | **Time:** All Day!

**Hashtags:** #ILikeMyTeeth and #StandforSmiles

**Host Organization:** American Academy of Pediatrics Campaign for Dental Health

**ACT!** – Become a Tweetiatrician by starting a Twitter account. Begin with the Tweets below, write your own, and retweet oral health-related material from trusted organizations.

#### Sample Tweets

##### Care in Pediatric Offices

We #StandforSmiles by making sure pediatricians can help families prevent tooth decay  
<http://ow.ly/tvdR30hT45A> #preventdecay #ilikemyteeth

Do you know how to #StandforSmiles at your medical practice? Learn about oral health -  
<http://ow.ly/bxJ230hT47H> #preventdecay #ilikemyteeth

##### Medicaid Coverage

Help more pediatric dentists #StandforSmiles and see children on Medicaid.  
<http://ow.ly/ENGJ30hT4a6> #preventdecay #ilikemyteeth

#StandforSmiles and ask: Are your kids covered? Learn more about Medicaid Coverage for Essential Oral Health Benefits: <http://ow.ly/MybN30hT4bE> #preventdecay #ilikemyteeth

Disadvantaged kids need you to #StandforSmiles. Only ~40% of children on Medicaid get a dental visit. Help them get to a dentist by visiting [insurekidsnow.gov](http://insurekidsnow.gov). #preventdecay #ilikemyteeth

##### Section on Oral Health

Pediatricians get help to #StandforSmiles by joining @AmerAcadPeds' Section on Oral Health  
<http://ow.ly/mFFA30hT4cW> #preventdecay #ilikemyteeth

##### Community Water Fluoridation

Let's do our part for a healthy start for all children by supporting community water #fluoridation.  
<http://ow.ly/lwmV3056TN8> #StandforSmiles #HealthyCommunities #ilikemyteeth

Water fluoridation is critically important. Tooth decay affects > 90% of Americans by adulthood.  
[www.ilikemyteeth.org](http://www.ilikemyteeth.org) #StandforSmiles #ilikemyteeth

Everyone deserves good #dentalhealth! Healthy mouths begin with community water fluoridation.  
[www.ilikemyteeth.org](http://www.ilikemyteeth.org) #ilikemyteeth #StandforSmiles

The @AmerAcadPeds boasts "Adding #fluoride to water benefits everyone" (not just kids)  
<http://ow.ly/wfMg30hT4Nc> #ilikemyteeth #StandforSmiles

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Dentist: “No child should have to endure decay where a fluoridated water supply could have strengthened her teeth” <http://ow.ly/Htxs30hT4n9> #StandforSmiles #Ilikemyteeth

Oral health equity begins with fluoridation: Great posters to download and use in your health setting: <http://ow.ly/GaAo30hT4SK> #Ilikemyteeth

Show how fluoridation helps your community and learn how to “Fight a Rollback:” #Ilikemyteeth #StandforSmiles <http://ow.ly/9K7K30hT527>

### School-based Oral Health

No dentist? Ask your child’s school if they have a school-based dental sealant program. <http://ow.ly/Xybs305jt7z> #StandforSmiles #Vitalsigns #Ilikemyteeth

### Oral Health Habits

#OralHealth affects overall health. Make sure children brush #2min2x, floss, & drink water with fluoride! [www.ilikemyteeth.org](http://www.ilikemyteeth.org) #StandforSmiles

Good oral health habits start at home. Teach kids to brush, floss & drink plenty of water w/ #fluoride! [www.ilikemyteeth.org](http://www.ilikemyteeth.org) #StandforSmiles

Early literacy and good oral health belong in every child’s life. <http://ow.ly/4mUvkU> #StandforSmiles #BrushBookBed #Ilikemyteeth

3 FREE shareable posters and images encourage families to instill good oral health habits: <http://ow.ly/Yqjh30hT4Wf> #Ilikemyteeth #StandforSmiles

### For Latinx Audiences

Use the Campaign for Dental Health “I Like My Teeth” website en español to educate Spanish-speaking families! Check it out: <http://ow.ly/Rgle30hT500> #LatinoHealth #StandforSmiles

Dr Francisco Ramos-Gómez of UCLA: Children should regularly drink #fluoridated water <http://ow.ly/P56G30hT4Uo> #LatinoHealth #StandforSmiles #Ilikemyteeth

Dr Alejandra Valencia is one of many health professionals who supports community water fluoridation <https://bit.ly/2uH9p5x> #LatinoHealth #StandforSmiles #Ilikemyteeth

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## CONTACTING ELECTED OFFICIALS

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Direct contact with legislators is one of the easiest and most effective forms of policy advocacy available to you. To find your US Senators, go to [www.Senate.gov](http://www.Senate.gov) and “Find Your Senators” in the upper left-hand corner. To find your US Representative, go to <https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative> and enter your zip code in the appropriate field.

You will find your elected official’s DC office contact information on their website. Upon calling, you will typically speak to a staff assistant or intern who will ask where you are a constituent (city, zip code, etc.) and listen to your comments. They will often note your profession. This is an opportunity for you to present yourself as a content expert and resource. Each day staff will summarize these calls in a report to the legislators, so make sure to be clear and direct about your issue.

**ACT!** - Contact your federal legislators to build a relationship with the office and explain the importance of oral health to children’s health care. Your legislators may not know about this issue and how it relates in his or her district unless they hear from you. Remember, Constituency matters! Only call senators and representatives from the state and district where you live and vote.

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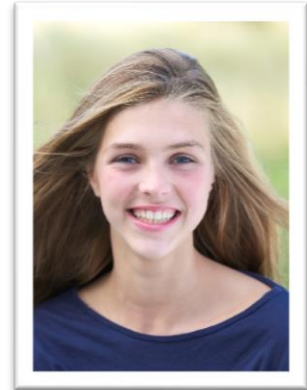
## ADVOCATING THROUGH TRADITIONAL MEDIA

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Traditional media outlets such as television and radio are important ways to reach certain audiences. Blogs and newsletters, both national and local, can also function as useful outlets for oral health messaging.

### Campaign for Dental Health Blog Posts

The AAP Campaign for Dental Health writes [blog posts](#) on a variety of oral health topics related to community water fluoridation, oral health news, social determinants of health and health equity, and more. If you are interested in writing a blog post for the Campaign, please email [fluoride@aap.org](mailto:fluoride@aap.org).



### Council on Communications and Media

The AAP Council on Communications and Media aims to be a resource for pediatricians who work in the media as print, on-line, or broadcast journalists, or who care about the effects of media on child and adolescent health and development. The Council has many resources that can help you as you begin to work with the media. Use the [AAP Media Training 101 YouTube Videos](#) and consider joining the Council.

### Links to Share as an AAP Section on Oral Health Member

#### My Health Matters Article

- [Why we should care about kids' teeth - David Hilden, MD, MPH](#)

#### AAP Videos

- [Oral Health - Lanre Falusi, MD, FAAP](#) – English
- [Healthy Beverages - Shelly Flais, MD, FAAP](#) – English
- [Bebidas Saludables - Ilan Shapiro, MD, FAAP](#) - Spanish
- [How Much Juice Should Children Drink? - Patricia Braun, MD, FAAP](#)

#### Healthychildren.org Ask the Pediatrician Article

- [How do I get my preschooler to let me brush her teeth? - J. Shahangian, DDS, MS](#)

#### AAP Voices Blog Posts on Oral Health

- [Why Oral Health Should Be a Primary Concern for Pediatricians - Brittany Bruggeman, MD](#)
- [Pediatricians are the First Line of Defense for Children's Oral Health - Qadira Huff, MD, MPH](#)

#### Protect Tiny Teeth Tool kit

- [Includes videos, social media content, practice tools, and other resources to educate the public about oral health and pregnancy.](#)

#### Campaign for Dental Health

- [Learn and Share Page](#)
- [“From the Front Line” Blog](#)

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**ACT!** - Consider writing an op-ed for a newspaper or a blog post for a site, and don't overlook local outlets. Would you be interested in being on TV or the radio to talk about oral health? You could plan to address any of the Areas of Focus explained above or other needs you have identified in your community.

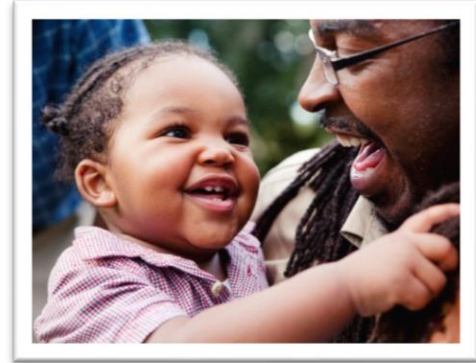
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## OTHER HELPFUL RESOURCES

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### American Academy of Pediatrics

- [AAP Oral Health Initiatives Website](#)
- [AAP Section on Oral Health Website](#)
- [AAP Policy Statements/Clinical Reports](#)
- [Campaign for Dental Health](#)
- [HealthyChildren.org Oral Health Articles](#)
- [AAP Advocacy and Policy Website](#)
- [AAP Section on Pediatric Trainees Advocacy Webpage](#)
- [Protect Tiny Teeth](#)



### American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry

- [AAPD Home Page](#)
- [AAPD Oral Health Policies, Recommendations and Guidelines](#)
- [Pediatric Oral Health Research and Policy Center](#)
- [AAPD Family Site: My Children's Teeth](#)

### American Dental Association

- [National Children's Dental Health Month Resources](#)
- [ADA Home Page](#)
- [Mouthhealthy.org](#)

### American Dental Hygienists' Association

- [ADHA Home Page](#)

### Children's Dental Health Project

- [Children's Dental Health Project Website](#)

### Families USA

- [Oral Health for All](#)

### Oral Health Progress & Equity Network (OPEN)

- [Oral Health Progress & Equity Network](#)