

AAP

## CHAPTER TWO



# *Pediatricians Are Natural Advocates*



As a pediatrician, **YOU ARE IN A UNIQUE AND POWERFUL POSITION** to advocate for children’s health issues. This chapter explains what makes you an effective advocate and how the individual advocacy you provide every day naturally translates into broader advocacy efforts at the community, state, and federal level. This chapter also demonstrates how you can easily incorporate community, state, and federal advocacy into your professional setting.

## I. THE POWER OF THE PEDIATRICIAN'S STORY

### *Making the issues real*

Many pediatricians came to the profession because they wanted to make a difference in the lives of children. Sometimes this difference means providing information to parents on how to keep their children healthy; at other times it means providing critical and lifesaving treatment. While “making a difference” can be defined in a multitude of ways, one thing is certain: The children you serve—the children for whom you have made a difference—have names and faces. They are part of the collective story of what drives you to provide the best care possible every day.

These stories are also what motivate many of you to get involved in advocacy efforts.

- You don’t want to see another child with a brain injury because there are inadequate child helmet laws in their communities.
- You don’t want to see another child miss their immunizations or preventive care because of lack of affordable health insurance.
- You don’t want to limit the number of patients seen by physicians because of inadequate payment and burdensome regulations.

Patients’ stories put a face on the broader issues that require policy and systems change to improve children’s health and well-being.

These stories also give pediatricians influence to drive change. **Your story can make the issue real in a way that fact sheets and statistics alone do not. This personal touch can capture the attention of community leaders, elected officials, the media, and the general public, and help propel your issues and concerns forward.**

## II. PEDIATRICIANS ARE UNIQUELY QUALIFIED TO ADVOCATE FOR CHILDREN

*Authority, credibility, and trust*

In addition to your story, there are other factors that make you as a pediatrician a natural advocate for children. Consider the following:

### CREDIBILITY

As a pediatrician, you have authority and credibility on your side. By the nature of your training and credentials, pediatricians are viewed as well-respected members of the community. Community leaders, elected officials, the media, and the general public care what you think. They trust you, and when you speak out on behalf of an issue, you bring with you credibility, legitimacy, and greater importance to the issue.

### SKILL SET

Advocacy skills are not much different from the direct care skills you use every day. As a pediatrician, you know how to quickly establish rapport and trust with your patients. You know how to provide a solution to the problem at hand and explain in simple terms to your patients what is wrong, why it needs to be fixed, and how you're going to go about providing treatment. You know how to point your patients in the right direction to get additional help, education, or resources. This is what advocacy is all about: telling your story, establishing trust, and illustrating the problem at hand and what needs to happen to solve it.

### YOU ARE NOT ALONE

You are one of many, both within your profession and within your community, who cares about the health, safety, and well-being of children. Through speaking out, you join the voices of others who care about children. These voices represent strength in numbers. Your voice—combined with the voices of other pediatricians and child advocates—can have an impact in creating positive and lasting change for children's health.

## III. FITTING ADVOCACY INTO YOUR PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

*Every contribution counts*

There are many ways to fit advocacy into your professional responsibilities. As you get started with incorporating advocacy into your work, consider

### ADVOCACY DOESN'T NEED TO TAKE A LOT OF TIME

Advocacy can quickly and easily fit into your professional responsibilities and demanding schedule. For example, one pediatrician took 5 minutes between patient appointments to call her state representative about a bill she cared about. Later that day, the representative spoke on the floor of the state house on behalf of the bill, and specifically stated:

“My pediatrician supports this bill, and if it's good enough for her, it's certainly good enough for the state.”

You can play a role in creating positive and lasting change for children's health in as little as an hour a month or less. Other pediatricians have decided to spend multiple hours a week advocating. Regardless of how much time you spend engaging in advocacy, each contribution adds up and has a positive and cumulative effect for children's health and well-being.

### **PRIORITIZE BASED ON YOUR PASSIONS AND INTERESTS**

You don't have to be an advocate on every single issue. In fact, when it comes to advocacy, sometimes less can be more. Think back to the patients whose stories provide you with the most inspiration. Prioritize the issue that you care about most and follow your passion. Get involved at the level at which you personally feel is best for you, whether that is on a community, state, or federal advocacy level.

### **WORK WITH YOUR AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS (AAP) CHAPTER**

Your AAP chapter is likely to already be involved in many community and state advocacy initiatives. Connect with them to learn more about what they are working on and how you can get involved in their efforts to advance children's health and well-being and pediatric practice issues.

## CAN ADVOCACY REALLY MAKE A DIFFERENCE? I'M JUST ONE PEDIATRICIAN.

As a pediatrician, you have the ability to influence change. You have a story that is both personal and powerful in illustrating why changes and reforms in children's health and safety need to be addressed. You also have the credibility and authority that accompanies your profession. People, including decision-makers and community leaders, will listen to what you have to say.

*Additionally, it is important for you to know that you are not alone in your efforts. Your advocacy efforts are part of a larger movement coming from pediatricians and AAP chapters around the country who are using their voice and credibility to change the way broader systems respond to children's health issues. You are joining countless other pediatricians, parents, teachers, and child advocates who want to see children's health become a greater priority. Together, you will make a meaningful and lasting difference for children in your community and state, and nationwide.*

## DO DECISION-MAKERS REALLY CARE WHAT I AS A PEDIATRICIAN HAVE TO SAY?

As a pediatrician, your community leaders and decision-makers are influenced by what you have to say because

### YOU CAN PUT A HUMAN FACE ON THE ISSUE

The unique story and perspective you bring helps decision-makers put a human face on the issue. Your story is much more tangible to them than data alone. Through sharing your story, decision-makers can understand how the issue personally affects children living within their communities.

### YOU HAVE INFLUENCE

By nature of your profession, you can get a decision-maker to respond to you in a way that sometimes other citizens cannot.

### YOUR STORY REPRESENTS OTHER CONSTITUENTS IN THEIR AREA

When you contact a decision-maker, you are not just representing yourself, but also children and their families and potentially others in your community who care about children's health and well-being. If an issue is important to you, most decision-makers will assume that the issue is of importance to others as well.

## HOW DO I GET STARTED? WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW?

Start by choosing an issue that you care about. Take a few minutes to explore why you care about this issue, what it is that you want to change, and how this change can impact your patients. Consider using the “Identifying Your Story” tool included in the Tools and Support section of this chapter.

Most of what you need to know to be an effective advocate you already know. You know that you have a powerful story to tell. You know that you have credibility and influence in your community and that your decision-makers care what you have to say. You also know that you have research, facts, and science to add additional support to your efforts.

Nearly everything else you need is included in this guide. As you get started with your advocacy efforts, remember that you don’t need to be an expert on the decision-making process, or know all the ins and outs of how your community, state legislature, or Congress works. This guide will provide you with a general overview of what you need to know, as well as tip sheets, tools, and resources to guide you along the way. Additionally, your AAP chapter can also provide you with support.

## HOW CAN I EFFECTIVELY TELL MY STORY WITHOUT BREACHING PATIENT CONFIDENTIALITY?

Putting a human face on your story does not mean that you need to specifically identify your patients. Instead, consider talking generally about the 9-year-old girl you know who doesn’t have health insurance coverage, or the 14-year-old boy you treated with severe head injuries because he wasn’t wearing a helmet while skateboarding. Telling your story using generalities such as these does not violate patient confidentiality and still allows you to paint a personal picture illustrating why your issue matters.

## THIS ADVOCACY SOUNDS GOOD IN THEORY, BUT I’M REALLY BUSY. HOW MUCH TIME WILL IT TAKE ME TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

There are many, many ways that you can be an effective advocate in less than 1 hour per month. Regardless of whether you take 5 minutes to e-mail your decision-maker, 30 minutes to write a letter to the editor of your local paper, an hour to speak at a community meeting, or a day to participate in your chapter’s “Day at the Capitol,” your advocacy is making a difference.

## WHAT ARE SOME CONCRETE WAYS THAT I CAN WORK ADVOCACY INTO MY PROFESSIONAL SETTING?

Advocacy can quickly and easily fit into the work you are doing every day. Consider some of the following ways to integrate advocacy into your professional setting:

### SET THE HOME PAGE OF YOUR WEB SITE TO YOUR LOCAL NEWSPAPER'S WEB SITE

This can allow you to quickly learn what's going on in your community, who's active, and who's making the decisions.

### WRITE A QUICK OP-ED OR LETTER TO THE EDITOR OF YOUR LOCAL NEWSPAPER

If you see an article in your local paper that interests you or that reflects what you are seeing with your patients every day, consider writing a brief letter to your newspaper about the importance of this issue to children's health. Check with the AAP for sample letters or op-eds already crafted by other chapters on popular issues, and adapt to the unique characteristics of your community, if appropriate.

### RESPOND TO ACTION ALERTS FROM YOUR CHAPTER, THE AAP, OR A COALITION YOU ARE PART OF

Many advocacy groups, including the AAP, have electronic action alerts. Consider signing up to receive action alerts from groups whose issues match your interests. It usually takes just a few minutes to take action electronically.

### MAKE IT EASY TO CALL YOUR PUBLIC OFFICIALS WHEN YOU HAVE A FEW FREE MINUTES

Program the phone numbers of your community leaders or state and federal public officials into your cell phones. That way, their numbers are always ready to dial whenever you receive an action alert and have time available in your schedule or have a crucial issue to raise with them.

### TALK TO OTHER PEDIATRICIANS, PHYSICIANS, OTHER HEALTH CARE CLINICIANS, AND PARENTS

Remember that as a pediatrician, you have a lot of credibility. Take a few minutes to talk to colleagues and others you work with about the importance of the issue you are involved in, and let them know how they can support the issue themselves.

### INVITE COMMUNITY LEADERS OR DECISION-MAKERS TO TOUR YOUR PROFESSIONAL SETTING

Invite community leaders and elected officials to spend some time visiting your professional setting. This can give them a chance to see the children, families, and issues that you care about firsthand.

### TEACH ADVOCACY WITHIN YOUR RESIDENCY PROGRAMS

Talk to residents about the importance of advocacy, or teach them advocacy skills through grand rounds or noon conferences.

## SET UP AN INFORMATIONAL TABLE ABOUT YOUR ISSUE IN YOUR PROFESSIONAL SETTING

Put up a display in your professional setting that brings awareness to the issue that you care about. Use the display as a way to get others involved in your advocacy efforts, such as a sign-up sheet to receive updates from an organization working on the issue, instructions for writing a letter to a decision-maker on the issue, or voter registration materials.

## WHAT ARE POTENTIAL ROLES THAT PEDIATRICIANS CAN PLAY AT THE COMMUNITY ADVOCACY LEVEL?

Some examples of the role that you as a pediatrician could play in community advocacy could include

- Partnering with child advocacy organizations in your area
- Informing community leaders, decision-makers, and elected officials about issues that are affecting children in your community
- Inviting decision-makers to visit your professional setting or community project
- Providing testimony and telling your story at community forums, events, and in your local media
- Serving on the board of an organization that supports children's health and well-being or children's interests such as a school board
- Offering medical expertise to schools, youth organizations or institutions, and child care centers
- Asking parents, teachers, and other health care professionals and clinicians in your area to get involved in local efforts to improve children's health and well-being
- Initiating a community project or forming a partnership, alliance, or coalition to address a problem

## WHAT ARE EXAMPLES OF ROLES THAT PEDIATRICIANS CAN PLAY AT THE STATE AND FEDERAL LEVEL?

Potential roles that you as a pediatrician could play in state and federal advocacy include

- Writing, e-mailing, or calling your state or federal lawmakers on behalf of children's health issues that you feel strongly about
- Getting involved with your chapter in order to network on issues you are passionate about
- Participating in the AAP Key Contacts program, which helps pediatricians develop a relationship with their federal lawmakers and provide their expertise as a pediatrician to the lawmaker
- Developing a relationship with your local elected official so that you can become a trusted source of information to that decision-maker
- Voting for candidates who make children's health a priority
- Supporting child-friendly candidates through volunteer time and financial contributions



- Participating in your chapter or another statewide child advocacy group's "Day at the Capitol"
- Testifying at a state or federal hearing, in collaboration with your chapter or the national AAP, or at a public meeting on behalf of an issue you care about
- Taking part in candidate forums, such as asking questions of the candidates; signing on as a candidate forum cosponsor; or recruiting other pediatricians, health care providers, and child advocates to attend
- Participating in a press conference or media interview in support of a state or federal issue that affects children's health and/or the pediatric profession

## PEDIATRICIAN ADVOCACY STORY

*I was asked to provide testimony at the state legislature as 1 of 3 speakers representing my state chapter. It was several years after the measles outbreak and the state health department had decided to require a second MMR vaccine. However, some legislators were in opposition to the vaccine because they viewed it as "Big Brother" trying to tell their constituents how to live their lives.*

*My job was to present the bigger medical picture of how the vaccine requirement would get implemented, and how it would positively affect the health of the states' children. I was really nervous and, frankly, doubtful that I was the right person to carry this important message. After I was finished, a long-standing and very powerful member of the committee, clearly peeved at what we were saying, said to me directly, "Dr Grossman. You said that more than 120 people died in the country as a whole as a result of this measles outbreak. Is that correct?" I responded affirmatively that there were more than 120 deaths from measles, more than half in young children. The legislator then responded, "Only 120? That doesn't seem like an awful lot of people to me now!"*

*I was absolutely speechless for several minutes, but after regaining my composure I said, "In my way of thinking, even one death of a child, especially a totally preventable, unnecessary death, is one death too many." The bill to prohibit the state health department from mandating immunizations for schoolchildren died right then, and children in the state began to receive a second vaccine.*

*I believe that my story illustrates what any child advocate can and must do. We can make a difference, and we do, all over the country, in big ways (occasionally) and in smaller ways (constantly), every single day. Our young patients cannot vote and have no financial or political clout, so we must do it for them.*

Lindsey K. Grossman, MD, FAAP  
Professor, University of Maryland Department of Pediatrics, Baltimore, MD



# TOOLS AND SUPPORT

*This section contains tips and tools to help you further explore how you as a pediatrician can be an effective advocate. In this section you will find tip sheets on the following:*

## **Identifying Your Story**

*A tool to help you explore your own advocacy story and the role that advocacy can play in your work.*

## **Pediatricians Are Natural Advocates**

*The top 9 reasons why you as a pediatrician are a natural advocate.*

## **Being An Effective Advocate in About an Hour a Month**

*A list of ways you can fit advocacy into your busy schedule.*

# IDENTIFYING YOUR STORY

*As you begin to explore a role for advocacy within your work, please take a few minutes to reflect on your own experience. Exploring your own story can help you identify the issues that you care about and further help put a human face on your advocacy efforts. Some questions to consider asking yourself include*

Why did you want to become a pediatrician? When did you first remember wanting to become a pediatrician?

What was it about the profession that excited you? Why did you choose pediatrics and not another medical specialty?

Who are some of the people that motivate you in your work? What are the real-life stories that inspire you to do what you do every day?

How is the health and safety of your patients personally affected by the larger systems that they are a part of? What could make these systems better? What do you want to see changed? How will these changes affect your patients?

What clinical issues or problems do you see among your patients that you didn't see in the past?

# PEDIATRICIANS ARE NATURAL ADVOCATES

*As a pediatrician, you are a natural and powerful advocate on behalf of children's health. Consider the following reasons why you are uniquely suited for advocacy:*

**YOU PUT A HUMAN FACE ON ADVOCACY:** You care for children every day who are affected by greater health and social systems. When you tell your story, you make the issue of children's health real to people in a way that fact sheets or statistics alone do not.

**CREDIBILITY:** By nature of your profession, education, and training, people in your community respect and trust you. When you speak on behalf of an issue, you bring credibility to the issue.

**INFLUENCE:** Because you instill trust and are credible, you can easily inspire others to get involved in children's health issues. Others in your community will be influenced by what you have to say and will want to become part of your efforts.

**YOUR PATIENTS ARE DEPENDING ON YOU:** The children that you care for can't vote, and many do not have the power to advocate for themselves. They need you to tell their story. Through advocacy, you can help ensure that decision-makers don't just say children's health is a good issue, but actually act on the issue.

**PASSION:** Advocacy allows you to dig deeper into your interests and touches on why you became a pediatrician in the first place. Through advocacy, you can channel your passion for children's health into meaningful and lasting change.

**SKILLS:** Pediatricians already have the skill set of an advocate. The same skills you use every day to establish trust, develop relationships, and provide solutions to your patients can be applied in your advocacy work.

**RESEARCH IS ON YOUR SIDE:** The issues you care about are backed up by research. Through advocacy, you can convey both the personal and factual importance of your issue.

**YOU ARE NOT ALONE:** Through advocacy, you join other pediatricians who—through the AAP, chapters, residency training, and community partnerships—are making children's health a priority. This demonstrates strength in numbers.

**PART OF THE PROFESSION:** Pediatricians founded the AAP in part to ensure that patient advocacy received a higher priority. Advocacy allows you to help improve the lives of your patients and the strength of your profession at the same time.

# BEING AN EFFECTIVE ADVOCATE IN ABOUT AN HOUR A MONTH

*Contrary to what people think, advocacy is doable and it doesn't require a lot of time. Consider the following ways that you can effectively incorporate advocacy into your already busy schedule:*

## IN LESS THAN 1 HOUR PER MONTH

- Vote.
- Call, e-mail, or write a letter to your decision-makers on behalf of a children's health issue that is important to you.
- Contribute to a political campaign or a nonprofit advocacy organization that focuses on children's health issues.
- Provide information in your professional setting on community resources that you can refer patients to.
- Sign up for 1 or 2 e-mail lists that focus on children's issues.
- Patronize businesses that donate a percentage of their profits to children's health issues.

## IN ABOUT 1 HOUR PER MONTH

- Cultivate long-term relationships with a public official or other decision-maker in your community.
- Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper.
- Talk to other pediatricians, health care clinicians, and parents that you come into contact with about the advocacy issues you care about. Encourage them to get involved as well.
- Submit an article on an advocacy issue you care about to your chapter or school's newsletter or Web site.
- Meet with a decision-maker at your place of work or in the community.
- Attend community forums and events sponsored by decision-makers or children's health and safety groups in your area.

## IN MORE THAN 1 HOUR PER MONTH

- Testify before the state legislature or participate in community forums.
- Set up an advocacy booth or display in your professional setting that explains the issue you care about and gives people information and resources for getting involved.
- Serve as a spokesperson for a local issue or community-based organization.
- Volunteer as a board member of a children's health organization working on advocacy in your community.
- Apply for community advocacy grants.
- Become a member or chairperson of your chapter's government affairs committee.