

**Testimony of the New York State American Academy of Pediatrics (NYS AAP), District II
Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Health February 10, 2026
State Fiscal Year 2027 Executive Budget**

To: Senate Finance Committee Chair Krueger, Assembly Ways and Means Chair Pretlow and Members of the Legislature:

Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Dr. Jeff Kaczorowski, and I am testifying on behalf of the New York State American Academy of Pediatrics (NYS AAP), District II, representing nearly 4,500 pediatricians across Chapters 1, 2, and 3. Our members care for infants, toddlers, children, adolescents, and young adults in every region of New York State, and we are committed to protecting and promoting the physical, mental, and social health of all children.

Pediatrics is the foundation of lifelong health. Pediatricians see children more than ten times in the first 30 months of life, placing pediatric practices at the center of early development, prevention, family support, and identification of health and social needs. Yet child health and pediatrics in New York State are facing a crisis. Immunizations, nutrition, and access to health care are under threat for children and families. And trauma for children and families has accelerated by enforcement actions that target immigrant families. 38% of NY's children live in immigrant families. Children and families are foregoing health care and education because of fear, and that fear extends to so many children even those who are not targeted.

Provisions included in the federal reconciliation bill, H.R. 1, combined with recent administrative actions, jeopardize children's access to health care, nutrition, and preventive services. Of particular concern is the loss of continuous Medicaid coverage protections for children ages 0–6, which were designed to ensure uninterrupted access to care during the most critical period of brain development. Without these protections, children are at heightened risk of coverage churn, missed well-child visits, delayed developmental screenings, and lower vaccination rates.

At the same time, federal actions that undermine vaccine confidence and weaken nutrition supports such as SNAP and WIC place additional strain on families and the pediatric health system. With Medicaid covering approximately 44 percent of New York's children, nearly half of all births, and 44 percent of children with special health care needs, New York State must act as a firewall to protect children from harmful federal policy shifts and ensure continuity of care, access to preventive services, and long-term health stability.

For pediatric practices and providers, inadequate Medicaid reimbursement, rising practice costs, and administrative burdens are pushing many practices to the brink of closure or forcing them to reconsider whether they can continue serving children enrolled in Medicaid.

NYS AAP appreciates Governor Hochul's continued commitment to children and families in the State Fiscal Year 2027 Executive Budget, including investments in mental health, school-based health services, early childhood supports, and health care workforce initiatives. These investments are important and timely. However, additional targeted actions are urgently needed to preserve access to pediatric care and ensure that children can thrive.

Maintain Access to and Coverage of Vaccines

NYS AAP strongly supports state efforts to maintain comprehensive vaccine coverage and access. We urge the Legislature to advance policies that require coverage and payment for the full National American Academy of Pediatrics recommended immunization schedule. This evidence-based schedule, continuously updated since 1930, is essential to protecting children and communities from preventable disease. Ensuring consistent coverage across payers will reduce confusion, improve vaccination rates, and safeguard public health. The National recommendations were released January 26, 2020 and can be found [here](#).

Keep Children Covered

Continuous health coverage is one of the most powerful tools to improve child health outcomes, particularly in early childhood. Federal policy changes under H.R. 1 eliminate protections that allowed children ages 0–6 to remain continuously enrolled in Medicaid, despite overwhelming evidence that stable coverage improves preventive care utilization, developmental screening, immunization rates, and long-term health outcomes.

Without state action, New York children will experience increased coverage churn driven not by changes in eligibility, but by administrative hurdles. Even short gaps in coverage can disrupt care for young children, particularly those with chronic conditions or developmental delays.

NYS AAP urges the State to:

- Support federal efforts such as the Keep Kids Covered Act and actively engage New York's congressional delegation to restore continuous coverage for children.
- Establish state-level policies and operational safeguards that minimize coverage loss for children ages 0–6, even in the absence of federal requirements.
- Automate Medicaid renewals for children by leveraging existing data sources, including SNAP, WIC, and public assistance, through streamlined, one-click attestation processes.
- Invest in facilitated enrollment and community-based organizations to help families maintain coverage for themselves and their children, particularly during redetermination periods.

The Executive Budget's continued support for enrollment assistance provides an important foundation. However, considering federal rollbacks, additional state investment and policy direction are essential to ensure that no child loses coverage due to administrative barriers rather than true ineligibility.

Ensure Access to Pediatric Care

Inadequate reimbursement remains the single greatest threat to the viability of pediatric practices. NYS AAP applauds the State's prior investments in pediatric Medicaid rates, which helped stabilize access to care. These gains must be preserved and strengthened.

We urge the Legislature to:

- Maintain recent increases to Medicaid fee-for-service pediatric rates.
- Require Medicaid Managed Care plans to pay pediatricians at least the Medicaid fee-for-service rate for all child well visits. Currently, many plans pay significantly less, undermining community-based pediatrics and access to preventive care.

In addition, NYS AAP requests a \$1 million investment to establish a Pediatric Technical Assistance Center. This center would support practices by assisting with patient-centered medical home certification, addressing billing and managed care challenges, providing education on state initiatives, and supporting transitions to value-based and alternative payment models.

Support Essential Child Health and Family Services

Nutrition, early development, and family support are fundamental to child health.

- **WIC Nutrition Program:** NYS AAP urges a \$30 million increase to expand WIC participation and reach all eligible families. With participation hovering around two-thirds of eligible individuals, additional outreach and enrollment support are critical. We support state efforts to better align and enroll families eligible for both WIC and SNAP.
- **Early Intervention Reform:** Early Intervention services are failing to meet the needs of eligible children, particularly those covered by Medicaid. NYS AAP supports a comprehensive review and reform of the Early Intervention system to ensure timely access, financial sustainability, and flexibility, including consideration of telehealth, group models, and strategies to address workforce shortages. The state should at a minimum fully fund the 5% rate increase which was committed to by the state over two years ago.

- **Dyadic Care and HealthySteps:** NYS AAP strongly supports legislation and budget action to sustain dyadic care models such as HealthySteps. As start-up grants sunset, practices need a sustainable payment mechanism. We urge the State to establish a \$25 per-visit rate add-on to support dyadic services, with an estimated \$4.7 million investment in the first year and \$8.5 million in subsequent state share.
- **Early Literacy and Reach Out and Read:** Early literacy promotion is a cost-effective, evidence-based intervention that strengthens child development and family bonding. NYS AAP requests a \$3 million investment to eliminate the waiting list for Reach Out and Read programs, allowing pediatric practices statewide to provide books and literacy guidance during well-child visits.

Conclusion

New York has long been a national leader in advancing child health. At a time of unprecedented federal uncertainty, the State's leadership for our children is more important than ever. By investing in pediatric care, protecting coverage, strengthening early intervention and family support, and ensuring fair reimbursement, the Legislature can safeguard the health and future of New York's children.

NYS AAP looks forward to continuing to work with Governor Hochul and the Legislature to ensure that every child in New York State has access to high-quality, comprehensive pediatric care.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Jeff Kaczorowski, MD FAAP

New York State Chair American Academy of Pediatrics