



U.S. MUST NOT NEGLECT MILLIONS OF CHILDREN STILL LIVING IN POVERTY, SAYS AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS

In response to growing number of children living in poor and low-income households, AAP convenes leadership work group to address the health effects of child poverty

Contacts: Debbie Jacobson – djacobson@aap.org (847-434-7084)
Susan Stevens Martin – ssmartin@aap.org (847-434-7131)

CHICAGO (Sept. 17, 2013) – More than 1 in 5 children – 16.1 million – were poor in 2012, according to [U.S. Census data](#) released today. The childhood poverty rate of 21.8 percent in 2012 represents no statistically significant change from 2011. The economic recovery has come slowly, and many families continue to struggle with joblessness, homelessness, and food insecurity. The picture is worse for our nation’s youngest children, with about 1 in 4 infants, toddlers and preschoolers still living in poverty in 2012.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) urges the nation’s leaders and child health advocates to recommit to programs that help vulnerable families and ensure the health and development of our youngest generations.

“Children have suffered more than any other group in the economic recession and recovery,” said AAP President Thomas K. McInerney, MD, FAAP. “The stress and poor nutrition that afflict children in poverty have lifelong consequences to their health. All children deserve a healthy start in life, and supporting our children’s health and development is the best way to ensure our nation’s future growth and success. It’s deeply troubling that our youngest children are the ones most likely to suffer in poverty, at a time when their developmental needs are the greatest.”

An estimated 16 million children live in households where food is scarce. Without important social supports like Medicaid, WIC and SNAP (the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as food stamps) to provide low-income families with food and preventive health services, today’s poverty findings could have been worse. According to a [recent report from the U.S. Department of Agriculture](#), households with children had a substantially higher rate of food insecurity (20.0 percent) than those without children (11.9 percent) in 2012. Unsurprisingly, 72 percent of the 47 million SNAP beneficiaries are in families with children.

“The AAP supports full funding of SNAP and urges Congress to maintain strong SNAP funding in the Farm Bill under consideration,” McInerney said. “A family’s ability to afford food directly impacts children’s

health and development. Since children account for close to half of all SNAP recipients, cutting this program will disproportionately hurt children and jeopardize national efforts to help lift children out of poverty.”

In 2013, the AAP designated poverty and child health a strategic priority, making this issue a focus of the Academy’s work for the next three years. The AAP has convened a Poverty and Child Health Leadership Work Group consisting of pediatricians with expertise in early brain and child development, pediatric environmental health, adolescent health, obesity and food insecurity, immigrant child health and underserved populations. Over the coming year, the work group will develop a strategic plan that addresses the health effects of poverty and ensures the healthy development of all children within a medical home.

As part of this work, the AAP will examine opportunities to:

- Expand access to affordable health care services
- Expand access to basic needs such as food, housing and transportation
- Promote positive early brain and child development and school readiness and success
- Support parents and families to reduce their children's stress

“The Poverty and Child Health Leadership Work Group will engage leading experts in the field of pediatrics and child development to craft a robust response to the challenge of endemic child poverty and its effects on children’s health in the United States ,” said Andrew Racine, MD, PhD, FAAP, chair of the leadership work group. “The Academy’s focus on poverty reflects the values that pediatricians bring to the clinic every day. The Academy and its members will work to combat the health effects of poverty and ensure all children have the greatest chance to achieve their potential.”

###

The American Academy of Pediatrics is an organization of 60,000 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety and well-being of infants, children, adolescents and young adults. For more information, visit www.aap.org.