

President's Message

Dear fellow pediatricians,

It is an honor for me to serve as President of our AAP chapter for the next two years.

First of all, I want to thank Dr. Alice Kuo for her excellent leadership over the past two years. Her time as chapter president will be remembered, for her advocacy efforts particularly related to children at the border, and city council town hall presentations to reduce vaping in LA county children. Job well done, Dr. Kuo!

The mission of the American Academy of Pediatrics California Chapter 2 is to champion optimal physical, mental, and social health and well-being for all infants, children, adolescents, and young adults and to advocate for and support its members in these endeavors.

I want to discuss four items: Membership, Covid-19, Prop 56 funds, and Advocacy efforts.

Membership is the heart and soul of any organization. With the help of our executive director, Dr. Tomas Torices, I will try to keep our membership engaged and well informed using a mobile app for AAP CA CH2, in addition to other modes of communication. I will also try to increase our membership by welcoming new members, who believe in the mission of our chapter.

During this Covid-19 pandemic, I see that there are two immediate challenges that need our attention. We first need to encourage pediatricians to provide timely care for children in their offices and next we need to protect reimbursement for pediatricians to provide services during these unusual economic times.

Sadly, as you all know, the Covid-19 pandemic has taken over 100,000 lives in the last few months in our country. Covid-19 has also manifested as a new childhood disease called "Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children (MIS-C)". Covid-19 changed our day to day lives to: wearing masks, keeping physical distancing, using frequent hand sanitizers, temporary closing of doctor's offices, practicing telehealth, delaying immunizations for children, worsening mental health problems, school closures with children staying at home and the list goes on and

on. Now it is time to see how we can gradually reopen our offices taking adequate precautions and catch up with immunizations before vaccine preventable diseases reemerge. We need to watch for the emerging issues and address them appropriately, when the schools reopen. I know that these are not easy issues to address. Common sense and humility are important in addressing these issues. But as a team, I am sure, we will prevail.

Next, I want to discuss Prop 56 funds. This tobacco tax generates 1.2 billion CA state tax dollars per year with some matching funds coming from the federal government. Medi-Cal provides health insurance for 40% of the over 9 million children living in California. For decades, since its inception in 1965, Medi-Cal only paid approximately 35% of Medicare allowed fee to pediatricians for providing service for children. Finally, a couple of years ago, we saw light at the end of the tunnel. Using Prop 56 funds, Medi-Cal started paying 85% of Medicare allowed fee for office sick visits, and 100% of Medicare allowed fee for preventive care services. By now, you all know that the governor's budget proposal is looking to repurpose these prop 56 funds. This will cause a huge financial blow to pediatricians providing care to 40% of children in California and may cause access to care issues. Soon we need to strengthen all our advocacy efforts to prevent this from happening. CA state senate and the assembly committees already rejected the Governor's budget proposal regarding Prop 56 funds. Hopefully I will get back to you in the next few months to give you some good news about these Medi-Cal payments. Issues related to privately insured children are different and I request our practice management council to guide me in addressing those problems.

Advocacy is very important and advocacy is the main part of our mission. AAP as an organization will put things together, but the advocacy efforts will succeed when each and every member takes an active part. I will try to motivate our chapter members to meet with their local Assemblymember, State Senator, and member of Congress once or twice a year at their local offices and discuss the issues related to providing care for children and the many needs of children in the community. We also need to develop good relationships with the staff working at these offices. These elected officials usually care about the input from their own constituents and respond to what their needs are. They also look at their staff to advise them

before they cast a vote on the bills. I call the members of our board of directors to be the chapter's ambassadors for member engagement, for our success with advocacy efforts and for the betterment of children that we provide care for.

With this request, now I would like to congratulate our newly elected vice-president Dr. Grant Christman, and all at-large members, and welcome them to our board.

Finally, thank you all again for giving me this opportunity to serve as President of our chapter for the next two years.

D.Rajasekhar, MD, FAAP.

Chapter president