

President's Message A Call To Action



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Vote Kids: Vote Like the Future of Children's Health Depends on It

Know the stakes. Know your plan. Research the issues. Get out the Vote. Put children first.

On Tuesday, November 3, 2026, Americans will head to the polls for the national midterm elections. Voters' decisions will help shape policies that affect children's health, safety, education, nutrition, and opportunities for decades to come.

Children cannot vote for themselves, but they will live with the consequences of the choices adults make today. That is why every pediatrician, health professional, parent, and adult who cares about the next generation should take this election seriously. Voting is one of the most powerful tools for influencing public policy. Through their elected representatives, voters help determine the future of Medicaid, childhood immunizations, nutrition assistance, maternal and infant health, pediatric workforce development, medical research, and the public health infrastructure children and families depend on. State and local elections also influence school health services, community resources, environmental protections, and access to essential care. These are not abstract political issues. They translate directly into the care available in our offices, clinics, hospitals, schools, and communities.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) is leading a nonpartisan Get Out the Vote initiative, **Vote Kids**, to highlight the connection between civic participation and children's health. Its message is straightforward: children's interests deserve a place at the ballot box. Voting is a civic responsibility, but for those of us dedicated to pediatrics, it is also an opportunity to help ensure children's needs are represented in decisions that will shape their futures.

The stakes extend well beyond Washington. All 435 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives and 35 seats in the U.S. Senate are scheduled to be contested, alongside thousands of state legislative seats and numerous state and local offices. State and local leaders make decisions that affect school health services, access to preventive care, public health programs, community resources, and the availability of pediatric specialists. Ballot initiatives and propositions can also directly affect children and families. Every level of government matters, and every election provides an

opportunity to consider how public decisions affect the youngest members of our society.

Vote Kids means looking beyond party labels and evaluating policies'

consequences for children. Before casting a ballot, take the time to learn where candidates stand on child health and to understand the potential effects of ballot measures and initiatives. Consider whether proposed policies support access to health care, protect children's nutritional needs, sustain essential public health services, strengthen the pediatric workforce, and promote healthy development. Review the available evidence, examine candidates' stated positions and records, and consider the likely effects of each proposal on children in your community.

This is not a call to support a particular political party or candidate. It calls for making children's well-being a meaningful consideration in every voting decision. A nonpartisan commitment to children requires us to ask informed questions, examine the evidence, and recognize that policies can affect families differently depending on their circumstances and access to resources.

Children Need Advocates at the Ballot Box

Of all the members of our society, children have limited ability to influence the decisions that affect them. They cannot elect the officials who determine their access to health care, the resources available in their schools, or the public health programs that protect their communities. They cannot organize a voting bloc or hold elected leaders accountable through their own ballots. Their interests must therefore be represented by adults who understand what children need and are willing to act on that knowledge.

Pediatricians are particularly well positioned to fulfill this responsibility. We see the effects of public policy firsthand. We understand what happens when families cannot obtain insurance, when children lack adequate nutrition, when preventive services become inaccessible, or when communities lack enough clinicians to meet their needs. We also recognize that the consequences of policy decisions may not become apparent for years. A decision that limits access to prenatal care, early intervention, immunization, or developmental services today can influence a child's health and opportunities well into adulthood.

Our professional responsibility to advocate for children does not end when a clinical encounter is over. It extends to helping the public understand the relationship between civic engagement and health. It also requires us to participate in the democratic process, communicate our professional perspectives to policymakers, and encourage others to consider children's needs when they vote.

Make the Call to Action Concrete

Awareness alone is not enough. A successful Vote Kids effort requires people to take specific, achievable steps before Election Day. Each of us can begin with our own ballot and then help others prepare to participate.

1. Check your voter registration today.

Do not assume that you are registered simply because you voted in the last election. If you have moved, changed your name, relocated for training, or changed your residence, verify your registration status and make any necessary updates. Registration deadlines and eligibility requirements vary, so check with your official state or local election office. If you are not registered, determine whether you can register online, by mail, or in person, and complete the process as early as possible.

2. Put Election Day on your calendar and make a voting plan.

Determine how and when you will cast your ballot. Review the options available in your state, including early in-person voting, voting by mail, and voting at your designated polling place. Check the applicable deadlines, identification requirements, polling hours, and ballot-return procedures. If you intend to vote in person on November 3, identify your polling location and consider how you will fit voting into your work and family schedule. If you are working a clinical shift, covering a busy service, or taking call, make arrangements in advance rather than assuming you will find time on Election Day.

3. Read your entire ballot, not just the names at the top.

Presidential elections and high-profile national races often receive the greatest attention, but state legislative races, judicial elections, local offices, and ballot initiatives can have substantial consequences for children. Set aside time to review every race and measure on your ballot. Read the official ballot summaries and voter information guides, consult the text of proposed initiatives when available, and look for independent analyses of their potential effects. Pay particular attention to measures involving health care funding, insurance coverage, nutrition programs, education, public health, and services for vulnerable children.

4. Ask candidates specific questions about children's health.

Do not rely exclusively on campaign slogans or general statements about supporting families. Visit candidates' official websites, review their policy positions and voting records when available, and attend candidate forums or town halls. Ask how they propose to address access to pediatric care, childhood immunizations, maternal and infant health, nutrition insecurity, the pediatric workforce, and the sustainability of public health programs. If a candidate commits to children, look for the policies, funding

proposals, or legislative actions that would support that commitment.

Pediatricians can make these conversations especially productive by describing the clinical consequences of policy decisions. A brief, factual explanation of how a proposed change might affect a family, a neonatal intensive care unit, or a community's access to pediatric specialists can help translate a complex policy debate into a tangible health issue.

5. Evaluate ballot initiatives on their actual effects.

The Vote Kids message applies to ballot measures and candidates. Initiatives and propositions may determine how public funds are allocated, whether particular programs are protected or changed, and how communities respond to health and social needs. Do not assume that a measure is beneficial to children simply because its title or campaign materials suggest that it is. Read the official explanation, understand what the measure would change, examine its fiscal implications, and consider both its intended benefits and possible unintended consequences.

When evaluating an initiative, ask three practical questions: What would change if it passes? How would that change affect children and families, particularly those with the greatest needs? What evidence supports the claims made by its proponents and opponents? These questions can help voters make informed decisions without relying on partisan messaging.

6. Help five other eligible voters get ready.

Once you have made your own plan, reach out to five colleagues, friends, relatives, or neighbors who are eligible to vote. Ask whether they have checked their registration, know their voting options, and have reviewed their ballots. Offer to share official election resources or remind them about relevant deadlines. Encourage them to consider children's health when evaluating candidates and initiatives.

This is a simple, measurable goal: one person makes a voting plan and helps five others do the same. If each person in a professional department or pediatric practice takes that step, the message can extend well beyond the immediate medical community. The objective is not to tell people how to vote, but to help ensure that eligible voters are prepared to participate and understand the implications of the decisions before them.

7. Bring Vote Kids into your workplace and professional community.

Pediatric practices, hospitals, medical schools, residency programs, and professional organizations can all help raise awareness of the relationship between voting and

health. Share the AAP's Vote Kids resources in appropriate staff communications, professional newsletters, educational meetings, and community outreach activities. Encourage colleagues to make a voting plan and discuss how civic participation relates to the health of children and families.

Before organizing activities at work, review your institution's policies on political activity and civic engagement. Keep efforts nonpartisan, distinguish personal advocacy from institutional positions, and respect the rights and choices of patients, families, and colleagues. The goal is to provide information and encourage participation, not to pressure anyone to support a particular candidate, party, or initiative.

8. Use clinical encounters to support informed civic participation when appropriate.

Health professionals can also help eligible patients and families find reliable information about voter registration and voting procedures. The AAP partners with *Vot-ER*, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that develops tools for civic engagement in health care settings. Resources may include voter registration badges and platforms that allow eligible individuals to access registration information.

Older adolescents may be eligible to register or preregister to vote, depending on state law. For families with younger children, parents can model civic participation by discussing community issues in age-appropriate ways and, where permitted, bringing children along when casting a ballot. These activities help demonstrate that civic engagement is not separate from community well-being.

Participation must always be voluntary. Health professionals should provide neutral information, protect patient privacy, and avoid making care contingent on registration or voting. Even a simple reminder that families can check voting options and deadlines on official election websites can help them take the next step.

Why Pediatrician Advocacy Matters

There is reason to remain engaged even when progress seems slow. Persistent advocacy has helped advance legislation, build bipartisan support for issues affecting children, and prevent or mitigate harmful proposals. Not every success makes headlines, and sometimes the most important achievement is preventing a damaging policy from taking effect. These outcomes demonstrate that informed, sustained engagement by pediatricians and their professional organizations can make a difference.

The relationship between civic participation and health also deserves attention.

Research discussed by Vot-ER has associated more inclusive voting policies and higher civic participation with better community health outcomes. These relationships do not mean that voting alone determines health, but they reinforce the importance of participation in the public decisions that shape the conditions in which children grow, and families live.

Pediatricians do not need to agree on every policy question to agree that children's needs deserve serious consideration. We can disagree about the best mechanisms for financing health care, delivering services, or allocating public resources while sharing a commitment to examining evidence and considering the consequences for children. A nonpartisan approach makes it possible to engage across political differences while staying focused on health and well-being.

The same principle applies to voters outside the medical profession. Parents, grandparents, teachers, nurses, social workers, community leaders, and all adults concerned about the future have a stake in the decisions made this November. Public policy effects are not confined to a single election cycle. They influence the resources available to children today and the opportunities they will have as adults.

Make Vote Kids More Than a Slogan

The AAP provides information and tools through [AAP.org/VoteKids](https://www.aap.org/VoteKids) to help pediatricians and community members participate in nonpartisan Get Out the Vote efforts. Voters can also consult their official state and local election offices for registration status, deadlines, polling locations, identification requirements, and voting options. The most reliable approach is to verify these details directly rather than relying on outdated information shared online.

Here is a practical challenge for every pediatrician and child health advocate:

- **Today:** Check your voter registration and add Election Day, November 3, to your calendar.
- **This week:** Review your ballot, research candidates' positions on child health, and examine the potential effects of relevant ballot initiatives.
- **Before Election Day:** Decide when and how you will vote, confirm the requirements, and make any necessary arrangements around clinical duties and family responsibilities.
- **Before November 3:** Contact five eligible voters and encourage each to check their registration, review their ballot, and make a voting plan.
- **At work and in your community:** Share nonpartisan Vote Kids resources and encourage thoughtful discussion about policies affecting children.

- **On Election Day or during an available early-voting period:** Cast your ballot and encourage others to follow through on their plans.

After the election, the work continues. Learn who has been elected, follow relevant legislative and budget decisions, communicate with representatives about child health priorities, and remain engaged when policies affecting children are considered. Voting connects citizens with their elected leaders; continued advocacy helps ensure children's needs remain visible after the ballots are counted.

Ultimately, children are among the people most affected by public policy, yet they have no direct vote in deciding it. Their interests depend on adults willing to consider more than immediate personal concerns and to recognize the long-term consequences of today's decisions. We cannot guarantee that every election will produce the policies we prefer, but we can ensure that children's needs are part of the discussion and that our decisions are informed by evidence, experience, and a commitment to their well-being.

The call to action is simple, but it requires follow-through. Check your registration. Learn about the candidates. Read the ballot initiatives. Make a voting plan. Help five other eligible voters prepare. Cast your ballot. Then continue advocating for the children whose futures depend on the decisions we make today.

Children cannot vote. We can.

On November 3, 2026, let us use that privilege thoughtfully and responsibly. Let us make children's health a consideration in every race, every relevant ballot initiative, and every discussion about our communities' future. Please reach out to the [AAP State Advocacy team](#) with any questions.

Vote Kids. Vote with children in mind. Vote for policies that support their health and well-being. Vote like the future of children's health depends on it (because it does).