POLICY & PRACTICE

Groups Urge Child Focus in Election

Thirty of the nation's child-related organizations—including the American Academy of Pediatrics, Prevent Child Abuse America, Every Child Matters, and the National Association of Social Workers—pleaded for an election-year focus by candidates and the news media on the plight of millions of at-risk children and youths. Representatives of the groups pointed out at a press briefing that since the start of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, 28,000 U.S. children have died because of abuse, homicide, or suicide; 1.1 million more children are living in poverty; and an additional 4.4 million families lack health insurance. "It's time for us to step up for kids," Dr. Renee Jenkins, AAP president, said at the briefing. "We do it in our everyday lives, but we need to do it in the political arena as well. As a nation, we're sorely lacking in our commitment to children."

Healthier Drinks Seen in Schools

The beverage industry has significantly reduced the number of high-calorie beverages available in schools, 2 years into the 3-year implementation of the national School Beverage Guidelines, according to an independent evaluation. The Alliance for a Healthier Generation, a joint initiative of the William J. Clinton Foundation and the American Heart Association, worked with major beverage manufacturers to establish guidelines that limit portion sizes and reduce the number of calories from beverages available to children during the school day. The 2007-2008 progress report showed that the total number of calories in the beverages shipped to schools decreased by 58% since 2004, and that 79% of schools in contracts with bottlers already are in compliance with the guidelines. Under the guidelines, approved beverage options include 100% juice, low-fat milk, and bottled water in elementary and middle schools. High schools can add diet sodas, calorie-capped sports drinks and enhanced waters, and low-calorie teas.

Rx Monitoring Finds Problems

One-third of drugs studied as part of a Food and Drug Administration initiative designed to spur more testing in children required labeling changes or other actions to warn of side effects or other reactions in the pediatric population, a study found. The FDA initiative, approved as part of FDA legislation in 1997, grants an additional 6 months of marketing exclusivity to drug companies that agree to conduct studies of their drugs in the pediatric population. Researchers reporting in Pediatrics found that of 67 drugs granted exclusivity under that program, the FDA's Pediatric Advisory Committee recommended labeling changes for 12 drugs, continued monitoring for 10 drugs, and production of medication guides for 9 drugs. One drug also had an update to its label changes. Several of the adverse events revealed during the study process were rare and life threatening, the researchers said.

Special Needs Dental Center Opens

In an effort to provide better access to oral health care for patients with disabilities and to train the next generation of dental practitioners to care for them, the University of Pittsburgh School of Dental Medicine has opened the Center for Patients With Special Needs. The center, which will offer services for those who are physically limited by birth defects, injury, or disease, as well as patients with intellectual and developmental disabilities, will be staffed by specialists from the departments of pediatric dentistry and anesthesiology. Specialty residents, predoctoral students, and dental-hygiene students will rotate through the center to expand the pool of future dental practitioners with skills to care for patients with special needs, according to the school.

SAMHSA Opens 5-Year Grant Program

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration has opened Project LAUNCH (Linking Actions for Unmet Needs in Children's Health), a new grant program designed to promote the well-being of children from birth to age 8 by addressing the physical, emotional, social, and behavioral aspects of their development. More than $27 million in grant funds will be awarded to state and tribal programs over the next 5 years, according to SAMHSA, with grantees each receiving approximately $900,000 annually.

Foundation Launches Recess Project

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has announced an $18 million investment in recess activities to improve children's health at 650 low-income schools. The foundation will team with Sports4Kids, a national nonprofit organization ts pioneered an effective model for using play and classic games—such as kickball, four square, and tag—to transform the learning environment at elementary schools serving minority and low-income children. Sports4Kids puts trained adults on the playground to introduce the games, as well as to give kids simple tools, such as rock-paper-scissors, to avoid fights and keep the games going "An investment in bringing safe and healthy play back to school playgrounds … reaps dividends for the entire community," said Dr. Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, president of the foundation.

—Jane Anderson

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