



ENSURING EVERY CHILD RECEIVES ALL OPPORTUNITIES TO THRIVE

Irvine, CA - March 8, 2025 - The American Academy of Pediatrics - Orange County (AAP-OC) Chapter is proud to have held, "The Social Drivers of Health: Gaps and Opportunities in Pediatrics, A Catalyst to Action" conference on Saturday, March 8, 2025 at the UCI Sue Gross Auditorium. This conference was made possible in part by a generous \$6,000 the AAP-OC Chapter received from a United Way Equity in OC grant project awarded to CHOC for physician education related to health equity. With funding came the opportunity to address a need in our community.

The conference goal was to increase the capacity of pediatricians to address the social drivers of health among our Orange County children, ensuring that every child receives all opportunities to thrive. In order to achieve this goal, the conference aimed to increase awareness and knowledge regarding the impact of the social drivers of health on children.

Social drivers of health are "those factors that impact children's abilities to thrive and flourish. Some examples of social drivers of health for children include access to safe housing, quality education, access to nutritious food, and healthcare," shared Dr. Geeta Grover, an AAP-OC Chapter member, a UCI Clinical Professor of Pediatrics, and a Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrician at the UCI Center for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders. Social drivers of health at the individual, family and community levels significantly impact children's health and well-being. Addressing these social factors is not only important for improving overall child health, but also for reducing health inequities that are often rooted in social and economic disadvantage. Given the numerous basic needs of families experiencing poverty and/or homelessness, the conference aimed to equip pediatricians and child health providers with the ability to provide referrals to local MediCal plan resources, nonprofit agencies and community resources that can help families with healthcare, housing navigation, food resources, and other specific needs.

Conference attendees included physicians, allied health professionals, community members, residents, trainees, students and community nonprofit organizations that demonstrated a collective understanding of the importance of engaging in dialogue, sharing resources and ideas, discussing advocacy needs and efforts, and disseminating best practices for social needs screening and referral in health care settings.

One attendee, speaker and advocate was Dr. Phyllis Agran, a pediatrician/pediatric gastroenterologist and AAP-OC Chapter Board Member. Her thoughts after the conference were,

“Pediatricians advocate for children from the clinic to the community, to the legislature. We must change policies from the local level, to the state, to the federal level, so that no child suffers from hunger, lack of secure housing, insufficient health care, or dies from a preventable injury. I was honored to present, along with Sharon Pham, MD, on harnessing the power of pediatricians as child health advocates.”

Thank you to our keynote speaker, Carol Berkowitz, MD, FAAP, FACEP for joining us. She is the current Chief of the Division of General Pediatrics in the Department of Pediatrics at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center and Distinguished Professor of Pediatrics at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA. We extend our gratitude to all the other speakers which included Geeta Grover, MD, FAAP; Pooja Bhalla, DNP, RN; Karen Betances, LMSW; Mark Lowry; Marian Martin, MD; Katie Kalvoda; Richard Pitts, DO, PhD; Phyllis Agran, MD, MPH, MA, FAAP; and Sharon Pham, MD, FAAP.

Dr. Geeta Grover a speaker and conference planning committee member shared,

“We hope that this conference will stimulate discussion and serve as a catalyst to action for the diverse and committed gathering of speakers and attendees across disciplines representing medicine, education, elected officials, nonprofit partners, and community members, with the common goal to increase OPPORTUNITIES for all children to thrive and flourish. In developing this conference, our hope was that participants would not only learn about critical gaps in children's access to food, housing, healthcare and education, but also learn about resources available in our communities to mitigate and address those gaps, and most importantly to share ideas together. In the words of one of our nonprofit partners, "it takes a community who cares to make changes and we're glad we saw a community show up today." It was a privilege to participate!”

Thank you to all our attendees, exhibitors, speakers, the planning committee, staff and volunteers for making this conference a success. Thank you to CHOC's Wellness on Wheels for being present with their mobile clinic program which brings resources, education and services directly to the community.

A special thank you to the CHOC, UCI Dorothy Waffarn Fund, and CalOptima for their contributions to making this conference possible.

Remembering and Honoring Dr. Benard Dreyer

We were profoundly saddened to learn of the passing of Dr. Benard Dreyer on January 1, 2025. Dr. Dreyer was a fierce advocate for children, especially those in greatest need. His talk in Orange County, 10 years ago was one that Dr. Grover remembers, saved notes from and has been a significant factor motivating her to continue this work. Dr. Dreyer's own words demonstrated his fervor for this initiative,

"I want to urge us to lead needed change for children. We need to act and advocate for children NOW. Together we can accomplish many great things. Together, WE CAN CREATE A BETTER WORLD FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES."¹

About AAP-OC Chapter

Founded in 1982, the American Academy of Pediatrics - Orange County Chapter (AAP-OC) is a dedicated community organization and an affiliate of the National American Academy of Pediatrics. The AAP-OC Chapter represents over 500 pediatricians, pediatric medical and surgical subspecialists, allied health providers, and other professionals serving children in Orange County. The AAP-OC works tirelessly to promote optimal health for Orange County's children by promoting pediatric excellence through education of our pediatric care providers, our numerous initiatives, and advocacy on the local, state and national levels.

AAP-OC is driven by a vision to ensure that children and families in Orange County experience optimal health and are valued by society. The Chapter strives to achieve this by delivering innovative and sustainable services focused on health and well-being.

AAP-OC is also a Healthy People 2030 Champion amongst organizations that impact health outcomes at the state, tribal, and local level and that demonstrate interest in, understanding of, and experience with disease prevention, health promotion, social determinants of health, health literacy, health disparities, health equity, and well-being.

Contact:

American Academy of Pediatrics - Orange County Chapter
www.aap-oc.org • info@aap-oc.org • 949-752-2787

¹ Dreyer BP. The 2024 Joseph W. St. Geme, Jr Leadership Award Address: To Create a Better World for Children and Families. Pediatrics. 2024; 154(5):e2024068085