

# American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®



## SUPPORTING THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF IMMIGRANT CHILDREN RESOURCES FOR PEDIATRICIANS

### BACKGROUND

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Immigrant families are facing a rapidly changing political landscape and may be impacted by federal policies that increase deportation and detention, restrict travel, and prevent access to public benefits. These developments may cause significant stress, anxiety, and uncertainty for immigrant families, and the pediatricians who care for their children.

The American Academy of Pediatrics is dedicated to the health of all children, no matter where they or their parents were born. Relevant policy includes: [Providing Care for Immigrant, Migrant, and Border Children](#) and [Detention of Immigrant Children](#).

All approved AAP Immigrant health related policies can be found [here](#).

The following resources were compiled to assist pediatricians with supporting the health and well-being of immigrant children. These resources address common issues related to:

- Mental and Emotional Health
- Talking with Children
- Immigration Status and Family Separation
- Community Resources
- Advocacy

**This information is provided for informational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice.** This information will be updated with additional resources as they become available.

For more information, please contact the [AAP Council on Immigrant Child and Family Health \(COICFH\)](#)

### MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH

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Immigrant children and families may experience mental and emotional health issues associated with prior trauma, family separation, fear, discrimination, and uncertainty in a new environment. The

Due to immigration related public policies, pediatricians may be faced with families who are experiencing new and/or additional stressors. Signs of stress in children may manifest as physical symptoms, behavioral or developmental changes, or other psychological symptoms. If serious mental health issues are identified, the child should be actively linked to on-going psychological care. In all cases, pediatricians should show empathy and understanding for families who are distressed and reassure families that they are free and safe to share their concerns. While you may not be able to address every family's unique issue, you can show your

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support for their well-being. Pediatric practices can demonstrate that their practice is a supportive environment for families of all backgrounds. Posting welcoming language and signs in the practice can help indicate the environment is a “safe” or “welcoming” space.

*Related Resources:*

- AAP [Mental Health Initiatives](#)
- [Pediatric Mental Health Minute](#) Series. Short educational videos to improve knowledge and skills in supporting pediatric mental health such as: Partnering with Communities to Promote Positive Parenting in Immigrant Families; Mental Health of Newcomer Children and Adolescents.
- The AAP Trauma-Informed Care resource page: overview of trauma-informed care, clinician training opportunities, and resources for patients in both English and Spanish.
- [AAP Mental Health Resources for Families](#) (available in English and Spanish)
- The [American Psychological Association](#) provides a variety of resources related to immigration and mental health.

## TALKING WITH CHILDREN

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Parents may seek advice about helping their children understand and cope with issues related to immigration. Pediatricians should advise parents to allow their children to express their feelings, including fear, anxiety, or anger. Parents should focus on helping their children to feel safe. Children should be encouraged to tell a trusted adult, such as a parent or a teacher, if they feel threatened or experience bullying. Parents should be encouraged to monitor and limit children's exposure to the news.

*Resources*

- [Healthychildren.org](#) Information is available to help parents talk about [Bullying](#), [Racial Bias](#), and [How to Support Children’s Resilience in Time of Crisis](#).
- The [Southern Poverty Law Center](#) has additional clinician and family resources such as [Supporting Young People During Crisis Events](#); [Supporting and Affirming Immigrant Students and Families](#);
- [Pediatric Mental Health Minute](#) Series topics on: Vicarious Racism; Social Media and Adolescent Mental Health; Helping Adolescents Feel in Control During Stressful Times;

## IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT AND FAMILY SEPARATION

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Immigrant families may have unique concerns related to their legal immigration status. Immigration enforcement actions can lead to the sudden removal of a parent/primary caregiver

without giving the family notice or time to prepare for the parent's removal. It is extremely important for parents who may face separation from their children to develop a plan for their children's health and safety. Consider recommending the following basic steps:

- Appoint power of attorney to a trusted adult to care for children in the event of removal/deportation, particularly if the child has [special needs](#).
- Maintain copies of medical records, including immunization history, medications and other health information. Give a copy to a trusted adult.
- Maintain copies of your child's birth certificate, social security card and passport(s). Give a copy to a trusted adult.
- Maintain documentation of children's school records. Give a copy to the adult that you have designated as Power of Attorney.

### *Clinician and Family Resources*

- **Family Preparedness Plan** - The [Immigrant Legal Resource Center](#) is a detailed plan for families to protect and prepare themselves for the possibility of family disruption or separation. This comprehensive resource includes checklists and printable templates (e.g. a caregiver affidavit).
- **Tips for Clinicians Regarding Separation** - The [National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#) provides tips for clinicians to help children cope with a traumatic separation.
- **Know Your Rights** - The [National Immigration Law Center](#) and the [American Civil Liberties Union](#) (ACLU) provide information in many language for individuals who may interact with immigration or other law enforcement.
- **Society of Asylum Medicine: [Resource Page](#)** – Clinician and patient resources including links to advocacy tools, forensic evaluation information, deportation prevention resources, and more.

### *Legal Resources*

Families who need assistance with immigration cases should be advised to consult a licensed attorney.

- There are a number of sources to find legal support:
  - [Immigration Advocates Network](#) maintains a searchable online directory of free or low-cost nonprofit immigration legal services providers in all 50 states.
  - The [U.S. Department of Justice](#) provides a list of legal providers who serve individuals in immigration proceedings.
  - The [National Center for Medical Legal Partnership](#) maintains a directory of partnerships across the United States.
  - The [American Bar Association](#) maintains a directory of medical-legal partnership programs across the United States

### **Understanding local immigration enforcement policies**

In a changing political landscape, it is important to understand your state laws as a medical provider and your institution or organization's policies.

- The ACLU maintains a [Know Your Rights](#) resource page for health care providers with information and tips about interactions with law enforcement. The Illinois Alliance for Welcoming Healthcare created the [Model Policies and Protocols](#) document identifies

several recommendations healthcare institutions can implement to create a safe and welcoming environment by implementing internal protocols, designating public/private spaces within healthcare facilities and preparing for contact with law enforcement.

- [Immigrant Legal Resource Center](#) has a regularly updated interactive map of immigration enforcement laws by state.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND ADVOCACY

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Critical services for immigrant families include health care (primary care, mental health, relevant specialty care), legal representation, and public education. Pediatricians with an interest in advocating for immigrant children and families can join efforts in their communities. Many communities have local nonprofit organizations that focus on helping immigrant populations access services and supports. Pediatricians may consider learning about the services of these organizations, and opportunities to refer families.

Key organizations and advocacy partners may include:

- Immigration focused legal organizations
- Social work and community health worker organizations
- Immigrant and refugee social service organizations
- Educational institutions including school districts and universities
- Faith-based organizations
- Civil rights organizations
- Immigrant rights coalitions

[The National Center for Medical Legal Partnership](#) has trainings, webinars, and other resources to support organizations incorporating legal expertise into medical practices.

Pediatricians can consider the following advocacy actions:

**Attend community meetings, town halls, and events.** Many communities are hosting public events on immigration issues and related concerns. These events can provide an opportunity for you to support immigrant children and families, as well as learn about the specific issues in your local community.

- **Serve as a community liaison** – Migrant Clinician’s Network supports The Specialty Care Access Network (SCAN), a network of pediatric practitioners and specialists throughout the United States who have volunteered to connect patients with special health care needs to local specialists in their community. To become a SCAN Champion the email contact is at the bottom of the page.
- **Write letters of Declaration or Affidavits** - Volunteer to write Letters of Declaration or affidavits for pro bono legal organizations for children and/or adults with medical conditions that are worsening by being in detention. Letter writing tips available from [Immigrant Health Equity and Legal Partnerships](#).
- **Follow and respond to AAP [Federal Affairs](#) Updates** – Legislative updates are sent to all AAP members every Friday. They contain the latest updates and requests for action by

members. You can also become an AAP Key Contact. Email [kids1st@aap.org](mailto:kids1st@aap.org) to become a key contact.

- **Contact your Congressional representatives, state, and local officials.** Pediatricians can advocate for the health and safety of immigrant children, by contacting policy makers at the federal, state and local levels. AAP members can visit <https://federaladvocacy.aap.org/> (Log-in required) for more information
- **Write an Opinion Editorial or Letter to the Editor.** Pediatricians can provide an important voice for immigrant children and families by discussing their health and safety in the media. [AAP Advocacy Guide](#) (Log-in required)
- **Complete qualifications to conduct medical and psychological asylum exams.** Assist immigration lawyers in directly advocating for children by conducting forensic medical evaluations. By obtaining domestic asylum, children and families are legally allowed to remain in the United States. Physicians can complete training through [Physicians for Human Rights](#) or [Asylum Medicine Training Initiative](#)
- **Become a civil surgeon.** Individuals applying for adjustment of immigration status (e.g. green card) require a physical exam to be performed and forms to be completed by a USCIS designated civil surgeon. Details and application can be found at [USCIS](#)
- **Engage your Local AAP Chapter.** Find out if your [individual AAP Chapter](#) is involved in education or advocacy initiatives focused on immigrant child health at the state level.
- **Join the Council on Immigrant Child and Family Health ([COICFH](#))** for opportunities to join committees on immigrant health education, clinical care, and advocacy with other pediatricians who care for diverse immigrant children.

*Related Resources:*

The [National Immigrant Law Center](#) (NILC) is a leading national immigrant rights advocacy organization. NILC provides up-to-date analyses, fact sheets and other materials on immigrants' access to health care, immigration enforcement reforms, and other issues.

[Immigration Advocates Network](#) is a collaborative effort of leading immigrants' rights organizations designed to increase access to justice for low-income immigrants and strengthen the capacity of organizations serving them.