Legislative Session 2016

Medicaid funding battle a constant uphill climb in legislative session

As most members know, the 2016 Regular Session of the Alabama Legislature ended in early May with an $85 million hole in the budget for Alabama Medicaid, leaving child and healthcare advocates tired and hanging in limbo. The entire session was spent in earnest as advocates clocked countless hours getting the word out to the public and legislators on the importance of full funding.

On March 22, the Alabama Chapter-AAP partnered with VOICES for Alabama’s Children for its annual Legislative Day, which proved to be a huge success as we advocated together for additional Pre-K funding (see sidebar story) and adequate funding for Medicaid.

In April, the Chapter conducted a survey of members to ask them what would happen to their practices if severe cuts occurred, and then contracted with a public relations consultant to conduct a media blitz showcasing that feedback, including a hosted media conference call with four state pediatricians, Bhagwan Bang, MD, FAAP, of Opp; Meg Moore, MD, FAAP, of Fairhope; Tracy Tindle, MD, FAAP, of Birmingham, Eric Tyler, MD, FAAP, of Alex City; and Chapter President Cathy Wood, MD, FAAP, of Montgomery. The effort resulted in more than 60 stories in the media.

But the biggest applause goes to the pediatricians in the trenches, who spent many hours using both traditional and social media to spread the message. The two pervasive campaigns, #CanYouHearUsNowAL and #IAmMedicaid, resulted in hundreds of tweets and Facebooks posts from pediatricians and other advocates from across the state, whose outcry was heard by legislators and the public.

The Chapter leadership offers its heartfelt thanks to all members who took the time to participate.

What now? Keep up the fight

The fight isn’t over! Although we are hearing that legislators are working hard to come up with a solution to minimize cuts, we should continue the drumbeat. Here are two things the Chapter asks you to do:

1. Continue to use the #IAmMedicaid hashtag on Facebook and Twitter, using the faces of your Medicaid patients (with the appropriation permissions, of course!) to humanize Medicaid so that the public understands who is covered by Medicaid—they might be surprised!
2. Take a little time and make personal contact with your legislators over the summer, while they are at home in their districts, to explain why this issue is so important to you and to the children you serve. It is especially important to reach out to your Senator.

Look for our e-news alerts for steps on how to help in both of these areas, and remember, keep your chin up!

All is not lost: Pre-K funding is bright spot for children

In May, Governor Robert Bentley announced 155 new First Class Pre-K grants for the upcoming school year, bringing the total number of high-quality, voluntary First Class pre-kindergarten classrooms to more than 800 statewide. Approximately 25 percent of the state’s four-year-olds will have access to a classroom in their community next school year.

That announcement was possible thanks to the Alabama Legislature appropriating an additional $16 million in funding for the 2016-2017 school year—brought in the budget and approved.
Pre-K program by the 2022-2023 school year. ASRA estimates that a level of funding of $144 million is needed for the First Class Pre-K program to serve every family in Alabama that wants to enroll their child.

“We are grateful that state leaders once again prioritized some of the growth in the Education Trust Fund budget to expand Alabama’s high-quality, voluntary First Class Pre-K program,” said pre-k advocate Allison Muhlendorf, ASRA executive director.

For ten years in a row, Alabama’s First Class Pre-K program, which is managed by the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education, has been ranked the number one state-funded pre-kindergarten program in the country for quality by the National Institute for Early Childhood Education.