Alabama Legislature passes HB 41 to reduce kids’ access to e-cigarettes!

Alabama HB 41, which sets the legal age for alternative nicotine products and prohibits their marketing near places where children learn and play, passed the Senate in May and was signed by the Governor in early June! Many thanks to all of you who sent emails, tweets and made phone calls to your senators. The tobacco industry was out in full force against bill, and your advocacy made a big difference! As a reminder, the bill:

- Sets the legal sale age for alternative nicotine products and electronic nicotine delivery systems to fully align with tobacco products.

- Prohibits marketing them as tobacco cessation products, as healthier alternatives to smoking, or as available for purchase in flavor other than tobacco, mint, or menthol.

- Requires stores that sell e-cigarettes to obtain permits just like retailers who sell tobacco products.

- Prohibits marketing these products on any outdoor billboard within 1,000 feet of any public or private K-12 school or public playground.

- Ensures that specialty stores do not open within 1,000 feet of a public or private K-12 school, a licensed child-care facility or preschool, a church, a public library, a public playground, a public park or youth center or other youth-oriented activities.

Other Legislative News

The 2019 Regular Legislative Session came to a close the last week of May, with legislators meeting four days in a row to complete their work on the Education Trust Fund and General Fund budgets.

Here are a few updates:

- The Medical Marijuana bill, which the Chapter followed closely and opposed due to the lack of FDA research to support it, was substituted with legislation calling for the creation of a study commission, which will include the appointment of a pediatric neurologist.

- The ImmiPRINT bill, which would require all vaccinators to review the registry and enter all vaccines outside of flu immunizations, died before passage.

- The $2.1 billion 2020 General Fund budget passed, including full funding for Medicaid, ALL Kids and $200,000 for the Healthy Food Financing Initiative.

- The Legislature gave final passage to the ETF Budget, included a significant increase for Alabama’s Early Intervention Program and a historic $26.8 million increase in funding for Alabama’s First Class Pre-K, the largest-ever increase, bringing the total level of funding for the program to $122.8 million. The increase will enable the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education to create around 200 additional classrooms and raise the total percentage of four-year-olds enrolled in the program from 32
Thirty pediatricians, including pediatric residents, attended the 16th annual Alabama Chapter-AAP Legislative Day in April. Pictured here are attendees from UAB: (Back row L-R) Blake Foxworthy, MD; Sarah Spencer, MD; Austin Wheeler, MD; Cecelia Drennen, MD; and Mitch Cohen, MD, FAAP. (Front row L-R) Michele Nichols, MD, FAAP; Allison Davis, MD; Kristyn Jeffries, MD; Courtney Crayne, MD, FAAP; and Susan Walley, MD, FAAP.

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to nearly 40 percent. Both of these were part of the Chapter’s 2019 legislative priorities.
- Lawmakers passed the Alabama Literacy Act, HB388, which will require schools to retain for another year third-grade students who are not reading at grade level. The bill by Rep. Terri Collins, R-Decatur, requires schools to provide summer reading camps to all K-3 students who struggle with reading. Starting in the 2021-2022 school year, third-grade students will have to demonstrate “sufficient reading skills” for promotion to fourth grade. There are exemptions for special-needs students and students with limited English language skills. No student can be held back more than twice because of the legislation.

Help children be counted! Chapter members to be tapped to promote 2020 Census to parents

The Alabama Chapter-AAP is part of a larger statewide push to promote complete counting of Alabamians in the 2020 Census, which takes place in March/April 2020. To that end, Executive Director Linda Lee, APR, is part of the “Alabama COUNTS!” Healthcare Committee and is working with VOICES for Alabama’s Children to increase participation among parents. Families of young children, especially, are being targeted due to previous undercounting of children from birth to 5 years of age in the 2010 census. In addition, many rural areas, particularly in west Alabama, had among the lowest response rates in the state. Pockets of the state’s urban areas also experienced lower response rates.

Why does this matter?
- Many Alabamians directly benefit from the federal programs in which funding allocations are determined in part by census data—including Medicaid! In fact, based on 2010 Census response rates, these programs provided about $1,600 per person in Alabama. Completing a census form will help ensure that our state receives its fair share of funding.
- The assistance programs tied to census data are critical to all Alabamians. They support children, education, hospitals, health care, rural development and community programs that are important to rural communities. If this funding is reallocated to other states due to a poor census count, then the funding for the missing services will have to be made up in some way at the local or state level. This affects everyone.
- Alabama is currently at risk of losing a Congressional representative in the 2020 Census due to projected slow growth. That means one less voice for Alabama at the federal level. We need maximum census participation to retain our current Congressional representation.

In order to promote maximum participation among Alabamians, Governor Kay Ivey and the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs are conducting a broad campaign, “Alabama COUNTS!”, that will encompass both paid advertising and grassroots efforts to get the word out to all Alabamians.

The Chapter will be promoting details in the coming months on how your practice can help in your local area. For now, start getting the word out to your employees, partners and other colleagues about the importance of the census, and especially the importance of Medicaid funding to the overall picture of healthcare in Alabama. Look for more information and resources at https://census.alabama.gov/.