American Academy of Pediatrics, California
2026 Year-End Advocacy and Legislative Summary
Advancing Policies to Protect and Promote Child Health

In 2026, the California chapters of the American Academy of Pediatrics, California (AAP-CA) continued their leadership in advancing evidence-based policies that protect the health, safety, and well-being of California's children. Working closely with legislators, coalition partners, state agencies, the Governor's Office and out lobbying team, AAP-CA championed legislation addressing youth mental health, online safety, substance use prevention, nutrition, health care access, injury prevention, and child welfare.

The 2026 legislative year will likely be remembered as a watershed moment for children's digital safety. California enacted a sweeping package of online safety laws that established national leadership in regulating social media and artificial intelligence technologies affecting children. At the same time, significant progress was made on youth vaping prevention, nitrous oxide restrictions, healthy food access, oral health, maternal-child health, and protections for vulnerable youth. According to CalMatters, Governor Gavin Newsom's technology package was specifically designed to address growing concerns about youth mental health, technology addiction, and the rapid emergence of AI-powered products marketed to children.

Legislative Wins

Child Online Safety, Social Media, and Artificial Intelligence

AAP-CA's most significant advocacy victories came in the area of digital wellness and online safety.

Governor Gavin Newsom signed a package of children's online safety bills on September 10, 2026 that established some of the nation's strongest protections against harmful social media practices and unsafe AI technologies. The legislation reflects growing evidence linking excessive social media use, algorithmic engagement strategies, and AI companion technologies to negative mental health outcomes among children and adolescents.

Among the most important measures:

- **AB 1709 (Lowenthal)** established new protections for minors using online platforms and addressed addictive design features that encourage excessive use among youth.
- **AB 2246 (Wicks)** strengthened protections governing children's access to online services, products, and digital platforms.
- **SB 867 (Padilla)** created safeguards for AI-powered companion chatbots and interactive toys marketed to children, responding to growing concerns regarding children's emotional dependence on AI technologies.
- **SB 1247 (Padilla)** requires social media platforms to provide a clear and conspicuous mechanism by which a child influencer can request a vlogger to delete or edit certain paid content that features the child influencer as a minor.
- **AB 2071 (Hoover)** and **SB 1128 (Stern)** advanced digital wellness education and promoted healthier use of school-issued electronic devices. These measures recognize the role schools can play in helping children build healthy technology habits and media literacy skills.

Collectively, these laws represent an important acknowledgment that protecting children online requires the same public health approach traditionally applied to other environmental risks affecting child development.

Mental Health & Digital Wellness

The youth mental health crisis remained one of AAP-CA's highest priorities throughout 2026.

California policymakers increasingly recognized the relationship between technology use, social isolation, anxiety, depression, and youth well-being. The state's online safety package was explicitly framed as a mental health intervention designed to curb known digital harms affecting children and adolescents. In another report by CalMatters, lawmakers cited growing concerns regarding excessive screen time, addictive platform design, chatbot interactions, and self-harm risks among youth.

Beyond online safety legislation, AAP-CA supported measures that strengthen children's behavioral health services and improve care coordination. **AB 2233 (Ta)**, which was chaptered by the Governor, improves behavioral health treatment planning and supports more effective delivery of mental health services for children and families.

AAP-CA also continued advocating for school-based mental health services, suicide prevention programs, pediatric behavioral health workforce development, and improved access to early intervention and treatment services.

Injury Prevention and Child Safety

Injury prevention remains a cornerstone of pediatric advocacy.

AAP-CA continued supporting efforts to address the rise in pediatric injuries associated with **e-bikes and e-scooters** through education, helmet use promotion, rider safety standards, and local injury prevention initiatives. The Governor signed the following including one of AAP-CA's Tier 1 priority bills:

- **AB 2346 (Wilson & Berman)** adds new consumer and safety requirements for e-bikes.
- **SB 1167 (Blakespear)** strengthens enforcement against high-powered electric motorcycles, mopeds, and similar vehicles being marketed or sold as e-bikes.

AB 1557 (Papan) was not signed and would have proposed tighter technical standards for e-bikes by redefining the 750-watt limit as a peak-power limit and reducing the assisted speed for Class 1 and Class 2 e-bikes from 20 mph to 16 mph.

These bills reflect California's effort to improve e-bike safety, prevent mislabeling of high-powered electric vehicles, provide clearer consumer information, and give local governments more tools to manage e-bike use on public pathways.

Several chaptered measures also advanced child safety more broadly:

- **AB 1628 (Rodriguez)** strengthened California's Safe Surrender protections for vulnerable newborns and families.
- **AB 1586 (Ramos)** expanded access to opioid overdose reversal medications for school resource officers, improving emergency preparedness in schools.
- **SB 1347 (Niello)** expanded access to emergency stock albuterol inhalers, helping schools respond effectively to asthma emergencies.
- **AB 2241 (Boerner)** promoted inclusive school playgrounds that better serve children of all abilities.
- **AB 2047 (Bauer-Kahan)** addressed firearm safety concerns through technological safeguards related to three-dimensional firearm manufacturing.

Together, these measures reflect California's continued commitment to preventing avoidable injuries and protecting children in school and community settings.

Substance Use Prevention

Preventing youth exposure to addictive and harmful substances continued to be a major focus of AAP-CA advocacy.

Vaping and Tobacco

Among the year's most important victories was **AB 762 (Irwin)**, which prohibits disposable battery-embedded vaping products. The measure addresses youth access to nicotine products that have contributed to widespread adolescent vaping while also addressing environmental concerns associated with disposable devices. In addition, **AB 2667 (Hadwick)** strengthens public awareness surrounding vaping products and responsible disposal practices. These measures build on California's longstanding efforts to prevent youth nicotine addiction and reduce exposure to products specifically designed to appeal to young consumers.

Nitrous Oxide

Among AAP-CA's Tier 1 priority bills, **SB 936 (Blakespear)**, was chaptered by Governor Newsom and represents one of the most significant substance use prevention victories of the year. The legislation addresses growing misuse of nitrous oxide among adolescents and young adults by restricting sales and strengthening protections against recreational misuse. Pediatric providers have grown increasingly concerned about serious neurological injuries associated with chronic nitrous oxide exposure, and the enactment of SB 936 establishes California as a leader in addressing this emerging threat. In addition, the Governor signed **AB 2076 (Lowenthal)** which will prohibit an online seller from allowing a purchaser to use a gift card or store credit for specified products or services that are illegal to sell to a minor.

Cannabis

AAP-CA also successfully supported **AB 2249 (Irwin)**, which strengthens cannabis labeling, packaging, and advertising requirements. Improved packaging and marketing restrictions are intended to reduce youth exposure, accidental ingestion, and product appeal among children and adolescents.

Weight Loss Products

Recognizing growing concerns about body image pressures and unsafe weight-loss products marketed to young people, AAP-CA supported **AB 2030 (Lowenthal)**, which establishes protections related to over-the-counter diet pills and weight-loss supplements.

Food Security & Nutrition

Food insecurity remains one of the most important social determinants of child health. AAP-CA continued advocating for policies that improve access to healthy food, reduce childhood hunger, and support family economic stability.

Several significant nutrition measures were chaptered in 2026:

- **AB 1731 (Wilson)** established and strengthened the Healthy Food for California Public Institutions Program, helping expand access to nutritious foods throughout public-serving institutions.
- **AB 2244 (Gabriel)** created a Non-Ultraprocessed Certified Food Standard, supporting healthier food environments and greater consumer awareness regarding highly processed foods.
- **SB 869 (Weber Pierson)** requires added sugar warnings on restaurant menus, providing families with clearer nutritional information and supporting efforts to reduce childhood obesity and chronic disease.

AAP-CA also supported broader efforts to improve food security and reduce child poverty.
AB 1755 (Sharp-Collins) strengthened CalWORKS' support for low-income families, while **AB 1996 (Bonta)** enhanced the work of California's Child Poverty Reduction Advisory
Council. Together, these measures recognize that economic stability, food security, and child health are inextricably linked.

Health Care Access and Maternal-Child Health
AAP-CA achieved several important victories that expand preventive care and improve access to essential health services.

Notable successes included:

- **AB 350 (Bonta)**, which expands coverage for fluoride treatments and strengthens children's preventive oral health services.
- **AB 2160 (Rodriguez)**, which improves access to lactation services under Medi-Cal and supports healthier outcomes for infants and mothers.
- **AB 2756 (Ahrens)**, which enhances accountability and quality measurement for Medi-Cal vision services.
- **SB 331 (Menjivar)** the *Let California Kids Hear Act*, will authorize a large group health care service plan contract or health insurance policy to limit the dollar coverage for each individual hearing aid device to $3,000, as specified.
- **SB 1323 (Rubio)**, which helps ensure patients can access health care services without fear of immigration-related enforcement activities interfering with care.

Unfortunately, not all child-health priorities were enacted. Governor Newsom vetoed **AB 220 (Jackson)**, relating to Medi-Cal subacute care services, and **AB 539 (Schiavo)**,

which sought to improve prior authorization processes. AAP-CA supported both measures because of their potential to improve timely access to medically necessary care for children.

CA State Budget Advocacy

Throughout the 2026-27 State Budget process, AAP-CA advocated for preserving investments that directly affect children's health and well-being.

Priority budget areas included:

- Children's access to Medi-Cal coverage and preventive services.
- School-based and community behavioral health programs.
- Maternal and infant health initiatives.
- Nutrition assistance programs, including CalFresh.
- Child poverty reduction strategies.
- Public health prevention programs.
- Pediatric workforce investments.

AAP-CA consistently emphasized that investments in children's health generate lifelong benefits while reducing future health care costs and improving educational and economic outcomes.

Looking Ahead to 2027

As 2026 comes to a close, California continues to strengthen its role as a national leader in child health policy. From landmark protections against harmful online technologies to significant advances in substance use prevention, nutrition, school health, behavioral health, and preventive care, the Legislature took meaningful steps to create healthier and safer environments for children. AAP-CA remains committed to advocating for policies that place children's health at the center of public decision-making and looks forward to building on these successes in 2027.

All legislative bills tracked by AAP-CA are posted on the website in real-time through our bills tracking system, CapiolTrack. Those that remain currently on the site are the 58 bills that made it to the Governor’s desk, of the nearly 250 bills reviewed at the onset of the year. Bills will be posted for 2027 as they are introduced and reviewed, as well as other legislative resource links on the AAP-CA website.

Recognizing our AAP-CA Legislative Leaders and Chapter Representatives

These accomplishments reflect the leadership of AAP-CA's pediatricians, resident physicians, chapter leaders, and advocacy partners who brought the voice of child health into legislative and budget discussions throughout the year. Together, they helped ensure that the needs of California's children remained at the forefront of public policy decisions:

AAP-CA State Government Affairs Committee (SGA)
Sharon Pham, MD, FAAP, Co-Chair
Nancy Graff, MD, FAAP, Co-Chair
Nora Pfaff, MD, FAAP, Chapter 1
Annie Kaplan, MD, FAAP, Chapter1
Susan Wu, MD, FAAP, Chapter 2
Kimberly Petko, MD, FAAP, Chapter 2
Piper Sandel, MD, FAAP, Chapter 3
Kanani Titchen, MD, FAAP, Chapter 3
Natalie Laub, MD, FAAP, Chapter 3
Dean Jacobs, MD, FAAP, Chapter 4
Ishanee Dighe, MD. FAAP, Chapter 4

Political Solutions, LLC - Lobbying Team in Sacramento
Angela Blanchard
Kelly MacMillan

Appendix: AAP-CA Priority Bills
Major Supported Bills Chaptered by Governor Newsom

- AB 350 (Fluoride Treatments)
- AB 762 (Disposable Vape Devices)
- AB 1607 (Emergency Medical services)
- AB 1626 (Interscholastic Youth Athletics Behavioral & Mental Health Training)
- AB 1628 (Safe Surrender)
- AB 1129 (Birth Conditions Monitoring)
- AB 1709 (Children's Online Safety)
- AB 1731 (Healthy Food for California Public Institutions)
- AB 1755 (CalWORKS)
- AB 1876 (Nondiscrimination Health Care Coverage)
- AB 1985 (Student Health Mental Training, Coaches & Trainers)
- AB 1996 (Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council)
- AB 2030 (Weight-Loss Supplements)
- AB 2047 (Firearms 3-Dimensional Printing Blocking Technology)
- AB 2071 (Digital Wellness)

- AB 2076 (Parent's Accountability & Child Protection Act, Nitrous Oxide Online)
- AB 2160 (Medi-Cal Lactation Services)
- AB 2233 (Behavioral Health Treatment Plans)
- AB 2241 (School Facilities, Inclusive Playgrounds)

- AB 2244 (Non-Ultraprocessed Food Standard)
- AB 2246 (Children's Online Access Protections)
- AB 2249 (Cannabis Labeling and Advertising)
- AB 2346 (Electric Bicycles Speed Limits)
- AB 2448 (Medical Information Confidentiality)
- AB 2667 (Vape Products, Advertising on Household Hazardous Waste)
- AB 2756 (Medi-Cal Vision Services Performance Measures)
- AB 2764 (Extended Foster Care)
- SB 331 (Health Coverage for Hearing Aids)
- SB 626 (Perinatal Health Screenings & Treatment)
- SB 758 (Public Health Nitrous Oxide)
- SB 867 (Companion Chatbots)
- SB 869 (Added Sugar Warnings)
- SB 936 (Nitrous Oxide Restrictions)
- SB 945 (School Curriculum, Cardiopulmonary External Defibrillators)
- SB 1128 (School-Issued Electronic Devices)
- SB 1167 (Electric Bicycles)
- SB 1247 (Social Media Platforms, Child Influencers)
- SB 1323 (Health Care Access)
- SB 1347 (Stock Albuterol Inhalers)

Supported Bills Vetoed by Governor Newsom

- AB 220 (Medi-Cal Subacute Care Services)
- AB 539 (Prior Authorization Reform)
- AB 2066 (Pregnancy Triggering Event)
- SB 608 (Sexual Health)