Word from the President:
Eileen Crespo, MD, FAAP

When is the last time you had fun? I mean smiles all around and a real feeling of delight in what you were doing. I wanted to reflect here on the joy that has come from...pickleball. You may have heard about the fastest-growing sport in the U.S. with the funny name. Today, I wanted to focus on the FUN part.

Pickleball began as a pandemic activity for my husband and I; a way to get outside and socially-distance in those dark days of the beginning of COVID where there was nothing but uncertainty. The sport has a dedicated following, and some people take pickleball very seriously. I, however, have found pickleball to be one of the best ways to maintain and rekindle social connections.

Because pickleball has such a low barrier to entry, any age and physical condition can play pickleball if they want to. All you need is a paddle and court shoes. Despite what you might think, it isn’t just middle-aged or older people playing pickleball. I’ve seen parents playing with their kids, as well as a large number of teens and young adults trying pickleball, too.

Most importantly, pickleball has reminded me of the simplicity of the childhood invitation, “do you want to play?” To do something without judgment or the embarrassment that stops us from trying new things. You are a little lost, you learn and you can laugh a little or a lot. It really is the best medicine.

Eileen Crespo, MD, FAAP
MNAAP President
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MNAAP represents Minnesota’s pediatricians and pediatric providers, committed to protecting and advancing the health of every child and adolescent in Minnesota through advocacy, education and special projects.
Statement of Purpose

Minnesota Pediatrician is dedicated to providing balanced, accurate and newsworthy information to Minnesota pediatricians about current issues in pediatrics and the actions of the Minnesota Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. Articles and notices cover organizational, economic, political, legislative, social, and other medical activities as they relate to the specialty of pediatrics. The content is written to challenge, motivate, and assist pediatricians in communicating with parents, colleagues, regulatory agencies, and the public.

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MNAAP Values

Advocate for all children and their families and serve as the resource to child health policy makers so that children and teens of Minnesota achieve their maximum potential of physical, mental and social well-being.

Champion causes that provide opportunities for physician wellness, recognize the value of pediatric medicine, and prevent professional fatigue.

Collaborate and network with others to create a shared vision to guide ongoing improvement of children’s health and serve as a resource for pediatric healthcare.

Act as the statewide resource to connect pediatric healthcare providers, to engage members’ talents and to increase the effectiveness of physicians and staff through advocacy, networking and educational opportunities.

Together, we are stronger!
Legislature Off to Fast Start with Plenty of Road Ahead

Chad Fahning, MNAAP Lobbyist

The new DFL-controlled legislature is off to a fast start in the 2023 legislative session. Legislators are wasting little time as they return to St. Paul for the first fully in-person session since 2020. With buzzwords like reproductive rights, firearm safety, public option, and paid family and medical leave echoing through its halls, the Capitol is once again a beehive of activity.

The House seems to be moving faster than the Senate this year. This is mostly because (1) the House has already passed many of the same bills in previous sessions and (2) their 4 vote DFL majority towers over the Senate DFL’s slim single vote margin. Where the experienced House leadership can push through progressive policies with members generally falling in line, the new Senate leadership needs to check with every member before moving a bill. If any one member is not on board, it is enough to halt a bill in its tracks.

Counting member votes takes time, but the Senate’s deliberate pace will need to quicken as committee deadlines are fast approaching. All bills on track to passing must be heard in at least one committee in either body by March 10 and must be moving in both bodies by March 24.

By those dates, we will have an updated state budget forecast from Minnesota’s Management and Budget, projected to be released on Feb. 27. In December, the surplus was a whopping $17.6 billion. If those numbers are reflected in this month’s forecast, we can likely expect some large figures when budget targets are released.

In his legislative proposal, Gov. Tim Walz pushed for a significant state budget increase, from approximately $50 billion biannual budget to about $65 billion for FY 2024, ‘25. The plan would pour new funding into education, children, and families. In total, about $12 billion of the proposal is dedicated to items such as expanded pre-K, early learning scholarships, mental and behavioral health, a new child tax credit program, an increase in childcare assistance rates, and more. The proposal also creates a new Children, Youth, and Families Department and gives a sizeable bump to the general education funding formula. Referencing his time as a teacher, Walz declared he’s made it his “mission to make Minnesota the best state in the country for kids.”

There’s still a long road ahead this session, and with DFLers in the driver’s seat, we can expect a trunkful of spending initiatives and progressive policies. How much and which ones, however, will be determined in the coming months.
A core function of the Minnesota Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics is to advocate on behalf of the state’s infants, children, and teens.

As a nonpartisan, pro-child organization, the chapter goes to bat during the legislative session to weigh in as child health experts on topics that have a direct impact on child and teen health and wellbeing.

This legislative session, MNAAP has offered support or feedback on a variety of topics including:

- paid family medical leave
- reproductive health care access
- firearm violence prevention
- housing insecurity
- free school lunches
- banning conversion therapy
- early childhood education

Pictured at right, from top to bottom:

MNAAP President Eileen Crespo, MD, FAAP, testified before the Minnesota House Workforce Development Committee in support of paid family medical leave.

MNAAP Treasurer Janna Gewirtz O’Brien, MD, MPH, FAAP, participated in a press conference supporting the PRO Act, which protects reproductive health access in the state.

MNAAP Past President Sheldon Berkowitz, MD, FAAP, addressed the Minnesota House Public Safety Finance and Policy Committee in support of common sense firearm safety measures.
Early childhood education has been a popular term at the legislature this year! As pediatricians know (and most other people, young parents and legislators included, do not know), early childhood education is the same as early childhood life! No classrooms needed. An enormous amount of learning has to take place before any “schooling” or “kindergarten” or even “Pre-K” can succeed. The first thousand days of health, brain development and learning and life are the focus of the MNAAP Early Childhood Work Group.

Brain development occurs more consequentially and rapidly in the first 1,000 days than at any other time of postnatal life. Infants and preschoolers learn an enormous set of skills, but doing so is predicated on a strong foundation of relationships.

Babies must learn to direct their eyes, manipulate their arms and legs, grasp and maneuver objects in their world, and associate the look and feel and scent and taste of literally everything. As they get older, sitting up, rolling over, standing, walking, running, and turning somersaults all must be mastered. And that’s before learning the meaning of hundreds of words and how to say them. And all must be remembered for later use. What a wonderful organism that can accomplish all this in three to four years and in any language. (Sometimes more than one!)

But none of it can be accomplished alone. Early childhood “teachers” are parents and grandparents, and siblings and paid childcare providers—adults with an eye to the child’s developmental stage and needs and a consistent presence throughout. And perhaps more important, the brain cells and synapses that are not assigned a task and used repeatedly begin to be removed, “pruned”, toward the end of that same 1000 days—never to be available again!

Our Early Childhood Work Group wants to support you by collecting the practices, skills and knowledge to better empower families, educators and legislators to do the important work of early childhood support. To this end, we have started a lecture series on early childhood, bringing the newest science and best thinkers on topics such as autism identification, early brain development and trauma response. You can see those lectures on the MNAAP website (mnaap.org). Moreover, we have had a big presence at the legislature that belies the size of our patients, conveying the importance of the following topics:

- We want to support the ability of families to be at baby’s side in the early critical period as well as consequential moments such as times of illness. This is why we have been supportive of Paid Family Medical Leave.
- We have been ardent supporters of programs such as home visiting, Reach out and Read and Early Childhood Family education that promote early learning and interaction.
- Currently, our childcare “system” is lacking about 40 percent of the early childhood educators that it needs. Many families cannot find childcare at an affordable price if at all. And parents are forced to stay home and forgo some of the income they badly need. Advocating for childcare reform is imperative.

The Early Childhood Working Group would like to enlist you—as members of MNAAP, and as educators for the children and parents in your practices. Legislators need to hear your voice. Parents and families need your guidance and advice at every early childhood visit. Your local schools and childcare settings need your attention and support.

Please contact the chairs or members of the group to offer your advice and participation.

Early Childhood Work Group Co-Chairs:
- Nate Chomilo, MD, FAAP (chom0014@umn.edu)
- Krishnan Subrahmanian, MD, MPhil, DTM, FAAP (subrahm2003@gmail.com)
- Roger Sheldon, MD, FAAP (rogeugshe@gmail.com)
The Anti-Racism and Disparities (ARD) workgroup met for a winter retreat this past January. It was a great gathering, full of reflection and discussion.

The purpose of this workgroup is to facilitate a chapter structure for members that is just, diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible; and to promote health equity for children of Minnesota as identified by Minnesota communities and families.

Here is an update on the work that this group wants to do together in 2023:

**WORKGROUP**
- Create safe environment for group work, learning, and growth
- Meet quarterly virtually
- Have two retreats per year

**CHAPTER**
- Assist with Equity Consultant and website redesign
- Provide ARD guidance for board and workgroups when needed
- Work with national AAP & other state chapters on ARD initiatives
- Work with other professional state organizations to collaborate on ARD initiatives.

**MEMBERS**
- Provide efficient ARD resources and communication
- Provide and promote ARD education opportunities

**COMMUNITY**
- Amplify and participate in ARD community organizations’ work
- Promote C&TC access and utilization equity
- Provide resources to improve parent and caregiver literacy levels

We are working on our chapter’s website redesign with the goal to have one page with ARD relevant Community Resources, Healthcare Worker Resources, and Workgroup sections.

We will also find ARD MOC4 projects for chapter members. We hope that this will give members opportunities to access ARD resources in a helpful and meaningful manner to advance this work together.

More news to come. Thank you for all you do for children and families every day!

Valeria Cristiani, MD, MPH, FAAP  
Co-chair MNAAP ARD workgroup  
Cristiani.valeria@mayo.edu
Member Spotlight: M. Jennifer Abuzzahab, MD, FAAP

Jennifer Abuzzahab is a pediatric endocrinologist at Children’s Minnesota and has been a MNAAP member since 2001. Dr. Abuzzahab answered these questions for Minnesota Pediatrician as this issue’s member spotlight.

What made you choose pediatric endocrinology as your specialty?
I like the balance of hormone pathways, the ability to replace (most) deficits with bio-identical hormones, and the opportunity for patient continuity. I really like the Yin/Yang balance of it all. I chose pediatrics because kids are fun to work with and generally make me laugh every day.

What is a typical day like for you?
Every day is different! I have days where I am only in clinic (seeing outpatients), days/weeks where I am on call seeing inpatients, and days with blocked research time for our clinical studies. I love that there is not a “typical” day or week, although I did almost go to the wrong clinic once.

Prader-Willi syndrome (PWS) is a research area of interest for you. What drew you to study this genetic disorder?
It’s a fascinating condition and truly individuals with PWS can manifest many different ways across the spectrum of not only the genetic disorder but the stages of the disorder. I am proud to be part of the care team for several amazing kids (infants, school-age, teens, and young adults) with PWS and they have motivated me to look into ways to improve their lives. I also feel that there is some overlap between people with PWS and people with hypothalamic obesity following brain tumors.

Is there an area of advocacy work that you feel strongly about?
I am a strong advocate for preventive care and healthy lifestyles. I really believe that food is medicine. It is OK to eat candy or (my personal fav) Cheetos every now and then, but they are not every day foods. I promote more vegetables and fruits, or eating a rainbow every day.

What’s the funniest thing a patient has said to you recently?
There are so many to choose from. I think the best one was a 3 year old who was showing off their counting skills by counting their teeth. I am loosely quoting his proud and hysterical proclamation: “1, 2, 3, 4, 5...2, I have 2 teeth”

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The 5th Annual Twin Cities Pediatrics Update is coming up on Sept. 21-22, 2023, at the University of Minnesota M Health Fairview Masonic Children’s Hospital in Minneapolis.

This year’s conference, presented by MNAAP, Children’s Minnesota and the University of Minnesota, is offered in a hybrid format with both in-person and virtual attendance options. (In-person seats are limited.)

Conference topics include:

- Supporting brain development in the first 1,000 days
- An anti-racist approach to pediatric care
- Demystifying the refugee intake process
- Addressing pharmacy shortages
- Reproductive healthcare
- Fertility preservation
- What school nurses want you to know
- And more!

“I am looking forward to sharing space and hugs with some of my favorite pediatricians from across Minnesota. It is empowering and restorative when pediatricians come together to learn from each other. I improve my practice every time I attend and I always leave the conference feeling excited and energized!”

- Janna Gewirtz O’Brien, MD, MPH, FAAP
  MNAAP Board Member and TCPU Organizing Committee Member

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Co-Chairs: Valeria Cristiani, MD, FAAP; Kate Sadak, MD, FAAP

Policy Work Group
Co-Chairs: Sue Berry, MD, FAAP; Hannah Lichtsinn, MD, FAAP

Early Childhood Work Group
Co-Chairs: Nathan Chomilo, MD, FAAP; Roger Sheldon, MD, FAAP; Krishnan Subramanian, MD, FAAP

Pediatric Mental Health Work Group
Co-Chairs: Ria Bardhan, MD, FAAP; Gretchen Karstens, MD, FAAP

Immunization Work Group
Co-Chairs: Garrett Jones, MD, FAAP; Dawn Martin, MD, FAAP

Contact Executive Director Jeff Bauer at bauer@mnaap.org for more details on a specific work group’s upcoming meeting date or activities.
Over the last several years, projects initiated through the AAP’s Community Access to Child Health (CATCH) program have advanced child health for vulnerable populations and connected nearly 2,000 pediatricians and pediatricians-in-training with their communities.

Here in Minnesota, one MNAAP member has had a front row seat to the CATCH project process for more than a decade. Brian Lynch, MD, FAAP, began serving as the chapter’s CATCH facilitator in 2010 after then-MNAAP President Anne Edwards, MD, FAAP, recruited him for the role. Dr. Lynch practices at Mayo Clinic, where he also serves on the faculty as an associate professor of pediatrics.

As a CATCH facilitator, Dr. Lynch helps chapter members prepare for the grant application, as well as review and grade CATCH applications from other chapters. According to the AAP, the CATCH program is a flagship initiative that has, for 30 years, supported pediatricians and residents to collaborate within their communities to advance the health of all children, especially the most vulnerable children.

Through an annual competitive process, CATCH awards seed funding for planning and implementation grants to pediatricians; fellows/fellowship trainees receive $10,000 for planning or implementation projects, while residents are awarded $2,000.

“What’s neat about CATCH grants is they focus on new projects that are pediatrician-led that are in their local community that involve community collaboration and generally serve populations that have demonstrated health disparities,” said Dr. Lynch.

Typically one CATCH project from Minnesota is funded each year, which is a pretty good track record, according to Dr. Lynch. He will often talk through project ideas with eight and 10 people, and of those interested parties three to four will continue on to the process of applying for grant funding. CATCH is a good opportunity for pediatricians or residents who are new to research.

“I really had no research background before coming to Mayo Clinic. Taking on an idea like a CATCH grant would have been very difficult for me when I started. So it’s gratifying to help people who are in that same position move forward with an idea and get a grant application together and implement that idea in their community,” said Dr. Lynch.

The grant cycle typically opens in November with a call for applications and closes in January. Selected projects are announced in April. Work on the project then usually begins the following June. But the work to prepare for a CATCH grant application submission can and should begin earlier to allow for community connections and partnerships to develop, as well as application drafting and refinement. All told, it can take between 10 and 20 hours to prep, but as the chapter CATCH facilitator, Dr. Lynch is ready to help interested applicants.

“One of my goals is that if someone is going to put in that work that they will get funded,” he said. In fact, you get additional points on your application if you work with your chapter CATCH facilitator in the process.

Once funded, CATCH grantees receive technical support from AAP, networking opportunities, and the potential to develop collaborations in their community that extend past the project timeline.

Dr. Lynch was recently joined by a co-facilitator, Chetna Mangat, MD, FAAP, who may eventually take over for him in the role as chapter facilitator. Typically, the chapter facilitator rotates every three years.

“I think it’s important that new people come into this position and bring new energy and new ideas,” he said.

If you are interested in the CATCH grant program, or in a future role as a chapter CATCH facilitator, contact Dr. Lynch at lynch.brian@mayo.edu.

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**Previous Minnesota CATCH Funded Grant Projects**

**2017**
- Irreducible Grace Mental Health First Aid

**2018**
- Dialogue, Diseases and Debunking: Immunization Outreach to Minnesota’s Somali Community
- MMR vaccine perceptions among Somali-Minnesotans

**2019**
- Health and Well-being for Homeless Families
- Somali Mother Infant Lactation Experiences Project
- Increasing LARC Access in Primary Pediatrics

**2020**
- Doctors and Teachers Improving Health Together
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- Supporting Young People Living with HIV: The Youth and AIDS Projects (YAP)
- Resource Educates Families About Accidental Cannabis Consumption
- AAP Forms Pediatric Digital Response Hub to Fight Misinformation
Thank you to our 2022-2023 sponsors

More than 150 pediatricians and pediatricians-in-training participated in MNAAP’s 2023 Pediatricians’ Day at the Capitol advocacy event on March 14.