



# What Docs Should Know About...Child Advocacy

www.DocsForTots.org

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## **Doctors are particularly effective messengers on a range of early childhood issues because they are not seen as having ulterior motives.**

- Since children are not able to speak for themselves it is important to advocate for policies and services that improve their well-being. Although the early years represent a particularly critical period of development for children, many do not receive the services they need.
- Given the proper tools for advocacy and support, doctors can do a better job of leveraging public opinion and policy on the local, state, and national levels.
- Advocacy for young children should go beyond clinical practice walls, promoting policies that improve the overall well-being of the child and not simply those issues that directly pertain to physical health. For example, child care and early education, poverty, foster care, paid family and medical leave, special needs care, and social and emotional development are issues that affect the overall well-being of children but are not traditionally seen as being specifically health related and therefore are often the advocacy arenas where few children's doctors are heard from.

## **Doctors can use their unique experiences to effectively make a point.**

- Stories from clinical work are particularly compelling, and can help doctors effectively frame messages on early childhood issues.
- Connecting the influence of one facet of development to another allows doctors to focus on children's total development.
- Effectively framing issues includes having a clear message, appropriately targeting an audience, focusing on the needs of the child, avoiding negative stereotypes, highlighting impact on a diversity of individuals and groups, basing your message on research and data, and providing examples of policies and programs that work.

## **There are many different ways doctors can advocate on behalf of children.**

- Partnering with state and local child advocacy organizations allows doctors to use the experiences, resources, and contacts of these organizations to easily develop advocacy work and participate in ongoing efforts.
- Generating media coverage on children's issues through op-eds, letters to the editor, articles for community papers and newsletters, interviews, and sharing stories from local families with the media.
- Contacting elected officials to educate them on issues and to share your perspective. To find out where to write, call or visit your Congressional, state and local elected officials and the White House, visit <http://www.capwiz.com/cdf/dbq/officials>.
- Staying informed and educating other doctors and medical professionals about social policy issues.

## **Child advocacy can be simple with the right support.**

- Docs For Tots (DFT) links doctors with local child advocacy organizations and specific advocacy opportunities that match their interests. These activities may include speaking at community meetings, roundtable discussions and conferences, writing op-eds and letters to the editor, and/or testifying at public and legislative hearings.
  - DFT provides the necessary resources, guidance, and support to ensure that a doctor's advocacy work is not time consuming or confusing (see below for a list of resources).
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## **Please visit the DFT web site ([www.DocsForTots.org](http://www.DocsForTots.org)) for the following resources:**

- *Advocacy Toolkit For Doctors*, a toolkit geared toward doctors, containing a list of ways doctors can advocate for young children and their families including tips for working with the media, how to contact your legislators, and additional resources and links to helpful organizations.
- *What Docs Should Know About...* a talking points series on a range of topics including quality child care, poverty, welfare, and infant mental health, among others.
- PowerPoint Presentations
- *Docs In Action* profiles of doctors doing interesting and innovative advocacy work to help guide you in your efforts.
- A list of links to other advocacy, research, and policy organizations.