

Vice President's Column

Nicole Webb, MD, FAAP

As I sit down to write this month's column, I find myself struggling a bit with what to say. First and foremost, I hope you are all well and taking care of yourselves during what continues to be an incredibly difficult time of legislative and judicial infringement on rights, particularly with respect to health and healthcare.



The intended focus of this month was going to be a summary of our resources, both at the chapter and at the national level, for addressing pediatric gun violence. And I will get to that. But I also want to acknowledge that I'm writing this on the day that the Supreme Court voted 6-3 to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, ending 49 years of federally guaranteed right to reproductive choice in this country.

As we all know, this is not something that just affects adult women of menstrual age; it affects anyone of any gender identity who is of menstrual age. And this includes many of our adolescent patients. We are fortunate that in California reproductive choice remains protected. However, there is tremendous inequity in our state with respect to the accessibility of the resources to support, and consequently significant disparities in teen pregnancy, STIs, congenital infections, maternal and child mortality, and many other outcomes. So as we all know, there is much work still to be done to ensure reproductive justice in our state and in the area encompassed by our chapter.

You can read national AAP's statement on the Supreme Court decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* [here](#). You can also read the AAP's statement affirming its commitment to adolescents' right to comprehensive, confidential reproductive health care [here](#). The AAP also published 2 updated policy statements, [Options Counseling for the Pregnant Adolescent Patient](#), and [The Adolescent's Right to Confidential Care When Considering Abortion](#). It's also important to recognize that both of these policy statements reflect longstanding AAP policy and not a reaction to the ruling. Both were in the process of being finalized before the ruling became public and represent updating and reaffirmation of our commitment to comprehensive, equitable, safe reproductive care for adolescents.

As was the original intent of this column, we do want to share resources for addressing pediatric gun violence, which remains the number one cause of death of US children. Just the day before the decision overturning *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court ruled in *New York State Rifle and Pistol Association, Inc. v. Bruen* that requiring those seeking a permit to carry a concealed firearm in public to provide "proper cause" was unconstitutional. While this is understandably overwhelming, particularly in light of California having a similar statute that is now threatened, it is crucial for us to remember that our role is to focus our messaging on safety and common ground.

For those of you who joined us for our chat, "Gun Violence and Kids: What Every Pediatrician Needs to Know" on 6/15, we focused on exactly that. We were honored to be joined by **Samantha Dwyer**, who leads the [Be SMART](#) program for San Francisco, **Alex Navarro**, who is the California City Gun Violence Lead for [Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America](#), **Rudy Corpuz**, the founder and Executive

Director of [United Playaz](#), which is a community youth violence prevention program in San Francisco, and **Dr. Shannon Castle**, a pediatric trauma Surgeon and proud AAP member. For anyone interested in accessing the recording or the resources we shared, you can do so [here](#).

The screenshot shows a Zoom video player interface. The main content is a presentation slide with the following text:

JOIN US FOR OUR CHAPTER CHAT

GUN VIOLENCE AND KIDS: WHAT EVERY PEDIATRICIAN NEEDS TO KNOW

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 15 7:00-8:30 PM

Gun violence is now the number one cause of death of US children. As pediatricians, we know this is our lane, and that we have a role to play in talking about gun safety just as we talk about other forms of injury prevention. Sometimes it can be overwhelming knowing where to start, though. Join us for a panel discussion with experts in pediatric health and gun violence prevention advocacy as we talk about practical ways pediatricians can get involved and make an impact.

MEET OUR SPEAKERS:

Nicole Webb, MD, FAAP (Facilitator)
Pediatric Hospitalist, AAP CA-1 Vice President, Gun Violence Prevention Advocate

Shannon Castle, MD, FACS, FAAP
Pediatric Surgeon and Trauma Medical Director, Valley Children's Healthcare.

Rudy Corpuz
Executive Director, United Playaz

Samantha Dwyer
Be SMART Lead, Moms Demand Action San Francisco

Alex Navarro
City Gun Violence Lead, Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America

Below the text is a photograph of a young child holding a sign that says "NO GUN VIOLENCE".

At the bottom of the slide, it says: "VIRTUAL EVENT VIA ZOOM | REGISTER AT WWW.AAPCAL.ORG/EVENTS"

In the top right corner of the Zoom window, there is a small video feed of a woman, identified as "Nikki Webb (she/her)".

Find the video, slides, and resources for our Chapter Chat, "Gun Violence and Kids: What Every Pediatrician Needs to Know," in our [Past Events Page here](#).

Below are a few specific examples of how you can have an impact in your practice and in our communities.

This is not a comprehensive list and I also know the many resources shared here may be a bit overwhelming. My hope is to give you something to come back to when you need it.

1. Screen for access to firearms and provide safe/secure storage counseling. If you are unfamiliar or uncomfortable, the AAP's free online curriculum [Safer: Storing Firearms Prevents Harm](#) is a great resource. It is easy to navigate, quick to complete, and you can refer to it again and again.
2. Talk to your parents, friends, teachers, faith leaders and other community leaders about [Be SMART](#), which is a national campaign developed with AAP pediatrician input to raise awareness for and provide education regarding safe storage. Their website also has great printable resources, in English and Spanish, for a variety of topics and contexts [here](#).
3. Engage in [lethal means restriction](#) and talk to your adolescent patients and the parents of pre-adolescents and adolescents about the role of guns in suicide. Suicide is the second leading cause of death of US kids aged 10 and up and guns are by far the most fatal means, with the rate of teen firearm suicide skyrocketing in the past 10 years.
4. Familiarize yourselves with California's Gun Violence Restraining Order (Red Flag Law, Extreme Risk Protection Order). While physicians cannot seek a GVRO, families and law enforcement can, due process is followed, and if you have concern for a patient who is showing signs of being in crisis, or children who may be in the middle of a domestic violence situation, you can provide information to trusted caregivers about the existence of our GVRO. This may be a confusing, overwhelming, or new topic. [Speak for Safety](#) is a great resource and a good starting point.

5. Familiarize yourselves with existing CA gun safety laws, as well as those working their way through our state legislature. The [Giffords Law Center](#) is a great resource for the former, and the [AAP-CA legislative bill tracker](#) for the latter.
6. Familiarize yourself with the AAP's [Gun Violence Prevention Advocacy Toolkit](#).
7. Learn about youth violence prevention programs in your communities and support and promote the work they do. United Playaz above is one, but there are many more. Your local City Council may be a good resource for identifying them.
8. Write letters to the editor or Op Eds. [This is an example](#) of a recent one I wrote. Please send us yours if you have any so we can promote them!
9. Volunteer with a gun violence prevention organization if you have the bandwidth. Your voice as a pediatrician is crucial. Donate if you don't have as much time but still want to have impact.
10. Be aware that words and messaging matter tremendously. As stewards of child health, we are focused on safety, both individual and public. We talk about **gun safety** NOT **gun control** because that is what matters in terms of partnering with all parents to keep children safe.

Please also remember to practice self-care and to take the wins where you can. One huge win is the passage of the [Bipartisan Safer Communities Act](#). While this bill, signed into law by President Biden on 6/25/22, will not address all causes of gun violence, it is a critical, meaningful start. It represents the first meaningful gun safety legislation passed by our federal government in nearly 30 years—the first bipartisan collaboration on this issue in over a generation—and the importance of that cannot be overstated.

So I want to leave you on an optimistic note: while there is much to grieve and even fear, there is also much to celebrate. As a longtime gun violence prevention advocate, I am optimistic for the future, and for the power of our collective advocacy. We can and must continue this work because it does make a difference and we will save many children's lives in doing so.