Address the Pediatric Rheumatology Shortage

There is a severe shortage of pediatric rheumatologists in the United States with fewer than 420 board-certified and practicing pediatric rheumatologists to treat young people diagnosed with arthritis. Call on your members of Congress to address this critical shortage facing kids with arthritis.

BACKGROUND | Pediatric Rheumatology Shortage
Like many other pediatric subspecialists, pediatric rheumatologists are primarily clustered in and around large cities. Startlingly, 9 states have no pediatric rheumatologists and 6 states have only one. As a result, the over 300,000 patients with juvenile rheumatic diseases have limited access to needed care:

- Only 25% of children with arthritis are currently able to see a pediatric rheumatologist;
- The workforce is aging, with the average pediatric rheumatologist in his or her early-to-mid 50s;

---

*Data reflects rheumatologists certified through the American Board of Pediatrics and does not account for pediatric rheumatologists with other board certifications or general rheumatologists that also treat juvenile arthritis patients.*
A child with rheumatic disease must travel an average of 57 miles to be seen by a pediatric rheumatologist – more than double the average number of miles for other pediatric subspecialties.

Access to pediatric rheumatologists is important for a variety of reasons:

- Early diagnosis/treatment is critical for disease management, and it can be difficult for providers untrained in pediatric rheumatology to diagnose arthritis
- Pediatricians tend not to be adequately trained to care for children with juvenile arthritis, while adult rheumatologists are not trained to deal with pediatric issues – whether it be the stunted bone growth that can result from arthritis and its treatment, or the special requirements of providing treatment to an adolescent
- Treatment of arthritis is complex and there are many potential co-morbidities and related diseases, such as uveitis and TMJ disorders
- Access to a pediatric rheumatologist increases access to novel therapies, including therapies that are only available in clinical trials

HOW CAN CONGRESS HELP?

Congress is working to address physician shortages that face pediatric communities through:

**S. 1659 | The Ensuring Children’s Access to Specialty Care Act**
- Introduced by Senators Roy Blunt (R-MO) and Jack Reed (D-RI), this bipartisan legislation would make pediatric subspecialists like pediatric rheumatologists eligible to apply for the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) and help ensure children in areas with shortages have access to providers best suited for their needs.

**S. 2443 | Investment in Tomorrow’s Pediatric Health Care Workforce Act**
- Introduced by Senators Bill Cassidy (R-LA) and Jack Reed (D-RI), this bipartisan legislation is identical to a provision in H.R. 2781, which would facilitate efforts to increase the number of pediatric subspecialists who practice in underserved areas by providing pediatric subspecialty loan repayment for health professionals who agree to work at least two years in pediatric medicine. The bill would reauthorize critical funding to ensure a more diverse health care workforce is prepared to meet the needs of the entire patient population.

**H.R. 2781 | EMPOWER for Health Act**
- Introduced by Representatives Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) and Michael Burgess (R-TX), this legislation includes a provision identical to S. 2443, which would facilitate efforts to increase the number of pediatric subspecialists who practice in underserved areas by providing pediatric subspecialty loan repayment for health professionals who agree to work at least two years in pediatric medicine. The bill would reauthorize critical funding to ensure a more diverse health care workforce is prepared to meet the needs of the entire patient population.
HOW CAN I TAKE ACTION?

The Arthritis Foundation is calling on Ambassadors to contact their Senators and Representative to teach them about the pediatric rheumatology shortage and urge them to address it through these important pieces of legislation (S. 1659/S. 2443/H.R. 2781)

Step 1: Do Your Research
Before you write your letter, you want to make sure you target your legislators appropriately. You’ll want to know this key detail:

1. Is my Senator or Representative already a sponsor of the legislation?
   Your Senator may already be a co-sponsor of S. 1659 or S. 2443, or your Representative on H.R. 2781. If they have already pledged their support, you’ll want to send them a thank you note for their support. Taking a minute to conduct some of this very basic research will display your dedication to this cause and help strengthen your relationship with the member’s office.

Step 2: Modify Your Draft Letter to your Senators

Dear Senator [Last Name],

As an Arthritis Ambassador, I am writing on behalf of the more than 300,000 American children with arthritis to [urge/thank] you to address the shortage of specialists that treat pediatric patients.

Pediatric rheumatology is one of many health care specialties facing an extreme shortage of providers. Shortages also threaten to become more severe as fewer medical students choose careers in pediatric mental health care and pediatric subspecialties. For instance, there are fewer than 420 board-certified pediatric rheumatologists across the country; nine states have no practicing pediatric rheumatologist and six states have just one.

A child with arthritis must travel an average of 57 miles to be seen by a pediatric rheumatologist – more than double the average number of miles for other pediatric subspecialties.

[Share your personal story]

As Congress considers legislation that can improve patient lives, I urge you to consider the following two pieces of legislation that impact children with arthritis.

S. 1659 | The Ensuring Children’s Access to Specialty Care Act
Introduced by Senators Roy Blunt (R-MO) and Jack Reed (D-RI) in the U.S. Senate. This bipartisan legislation would make pediatric subspecialists like pediatric rheumatologists eligible for the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) and help ensure children in areas with shortages have access to providers best suited for their needs.

**S. 2443 | Investment in Tomorrow’s Pediatric Health Care Workforce Act**
- Introduced by Senators Bill Cassidy (R-LA) and Jack Reed (D-RI), this bipartisan legislation is identical to a provision in H.R. 2781 and would facilitate efforts to increase the number of pediatric subspecialists who practice in underserved areas by providing pediatric subspecialty loan repayment.

I urge you to pledge your support for these important pieces of legislation to help children around the country access the care they desperately need. Our Junior Ambassadors created a video to share their stories, check it out at bit.ly/Advocate4JA

Sincerely,

[Name]

**Step 3: Modify Your Draft Letter to your Representative**

Dear Representative [Last Name],

As an Arthritis Ambassador, I am writing on behalf of the more than 300,000 American children with arthritis to [urge/thank] you to address the shortage of specialists that treat pediatric patients.

Pediatric rheumatology is one of many health care specialties facing an extreme shortage of providers. Shortages also threaten to become more severe as fewer medical students choose careers in pediatric mental health care and pediatric subspecialties. For instance, there are fewer than 420 board-certified pediatric rheumatologists across the country; nine states have no practicing pediatric rheumatologist and six states have just one.

A child with arthritis must travel an average of 57 miles to be seen by a pediatric rheumatologist – more than double the average number of miles for other pediatric subspecialties.

[Share your personal story]

As Congress considers legislation that can improve patient lives, I urge you to consider the following pieces of legislation that impact children with arthritis.

#AdvocateforArthritis
H.R. 2781 | EMPOWER for Health Act

• Introduced by Representatives Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) and Michael Burgess (R-TX), this legislation would facilitate efforts to increase the number of pediatric subspecialists who practice in underserved areas by providing pediatric subspecialty loan repayment for health professionals who agree to work at least two years in pediatric medicine. The bill would reauthorize critical funding to ensure a more diverse health care workforce is prepared to meet the needs of the entire patient population.

I urge you to pledge your support for these important pieces of legislation to help children around the country access the care they desperately need. Our Junior Ambassadors created a video to share their stories, check it out at bit.ly/Advocate4JA

Sincerely,
[Name]

Step 4: Connect with Your members of Congress

If you have the contact information for the legislative assistants in your members offices, please send the letter directly to them. If you do not currently have contact information for your members of Congress, you can reach out to them using our Action Center. Simply use the legislator look up tool to find your members of Congress.

bit.ly/LegislatorLookUp

By clicking continue, you’ll be able to see all of your elected officials from the President of the United States all the way to your local Assemblyperson.

#AdvocateforArthritis
• Click on your Representative of Congress to learn more about who they are and their background.

• When you’re ready, check off the boxes next to your Senators and click compose message. You will either need to do this two times, once for each legislator, or once combining a message to all of your Senators.

• From there, you’ll be able to send your members of Congress a message asking them to address the pediatric rheumatology shortage.

Step 5: Report Your Activity

Reporting your Ambassador Activities is essential for our team as we track our impact nationwide. Whereas actions taken in our Action Center auto-populate statistics for our team, Ambassador activities are not as easily tracked. When you are reaching out to your legislators and cultivating relationships, we want to hear about it! The more we know, the more we can support you in your mission to break down barriers to care.

Step 6: Amplify Your Impact

Ask your friends and family to take action and make this same ask of Congress in five minutes or less through our pre-formatted action alert. Ask 3 people in your network to send a letter through our Action Center by sharing this short link with them.


#AdvocateforArthritis