

Despite burdens most pediatricians very supportive of national vaccination program

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Despite bureaucratic hurdles, the vast majority of pediatricians want to keep participating in a national program that provides vaccinations at no cost to children who are on Medicaid, uninsured, or who are American

Indian/Alaska Native, according to researchers at the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus.

The Vaccine For Children (VFC) Program was created in 1993 to keep children from contracting [vaccine-preventable diseases](#) due to an inability to pay for the drugs. Since then, it has increased [vaccination rates](#), decreased vaccine-preventable illnesses and reduced social and racial disparities among those inoculated.

"While it is likely that much of the burden reported by pediatricians related to the VFC program is in response to...tightened requirements, it is reassuring that providers seem to have remained with the program," said the study's first author Sean O'Leary, MD, associate professor of pediatrics at the University of Colorado School of Medicine.

The study, published online today in the journal *Pediatrics*, examined [pediatrician](#) participation in the program.

"We sought to explore pediatricians' current attitudes and experiences with the program and how these attitudes and experiences are affecting participation," said O'Leary, who is also spokesman for the American Academy of Pediatrics and practices at Children's Hospital Colorado.

They researchers sent surveys to 471 pediatricians with 372 responding. They asked how many of the doctors participated in the program, the perceived burdens of taking part, their experiences and practices in stocking the vaccines and their views on a bigger reimbursement for giving the vaccine to Medicaid patients.

Yet when asked if they considered quitting the program in the past year, 85% said they had never seriously considered or discussed it. Another 10% said they had considered it but not seriously and 5% reported seriously considering it.

Those who seriously considered opting out, said the chief culprit was difficulty in record keeping requirements. Other reasons included unpredictable vaccine supplies, inadequate payment for vaccine administration fees and keeping separate stocks of vaccines, requiring separate storage facilities.

But nearly all pediatricians surveyed said the [program](#) was valuable because they could give vaccines regardless of the patients' ability to pay, children could get the vaccinations at their own medical provider's office and it improved overall vaccination rates.

O'Leary recommended alleviating burdens where possible. That could include increasing payments for vaccine administration, uniform rules that allow borrowing between private and VFC [vaccine](#) stocks and creating incentive to buy proper storage and monitoring equipment.

"In order to maintain and increase vaccination rates," O'Leary said. "It will be important to keep monitoring these attitudes."

More information: Sean T. O'Leary et al, Pediatricians' Experiences With and Perceptions of the Vaccines for Children Program, *Pediatrics* (2020). [DOI: 10.1542/peds.2019-1207](https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2019-1207)

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