



Governor Jim Doyle

Improving the health and well being of Wisconsin's children: The KidsFirst Agenda

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I would like to commend Wisconsin's physicians for their continued interest in the health of the people in Wisconsin, and for their willingness to discuss the difficult health issues facing our state. The health of children and their families is an extremely important issue to me. My new *KidsFirst* initiatives are actions that will be used to improve children's health.

The single most important thing we can do today to ensure a strong, successful future for Wisconsin is to invest in our kids early, because what we do now will determine what kind of state Wisconsin will be 10, 20, or even 50 years from now. Our highest priority should be making sure our children grow up safe, healthy, and successful, supported by strong families. *KidsFirst* represents some specific steps the state can take right away, some efforts that require a partnership between public health and the private health care sector, and some measures that will require legislation.

I believe that physicians and other health care providers are inte-

gral members of the team needed to improve the health of Wisconsin's children. I hope you will embrace the goals set out in *KidsFirst* and work with me in achieving them.

KidsFirst is a comprehensive plan developed by my office in collaboration with First Lady Jessica Doyle, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, and the Secretaries of the Departments of Health and Family Services, Workforce Development, and Corrections. It consists of four initiatives that will invest in Wisconsin's future: *Ready for Success*, *Safe Kids*, *Strong Families*, and *Healthy Kids*.

Ready for Success recognizes that the first years of a child's life exert a strong influence on later development and education, as well as success in adulthood. With this in mind, my goal is to improve access to high-quality learning environments by developing a rating system for childcare providers, investing in 4-year-old kindergarten, and encouraging parents to read to their children. I know many physicians' offices already have magazines for their adult patients. Including children's books, through a waiting-room program such as "Reach Out and Read," can be an important reminder for parents of how crucial it is to read with their children.

Safe Kids works to prevent child abuse and neglect through a coordinated system of home visits, improved foster care and adoption services, and investments to reduce family violence. *Safe Kids* also addresses motor vehicle injury—the leading cause of death among children older than 1 year of age—by focusing on transportation safety. My office and the Legislature have an important role in this area by passing laws that reflect best practice for use of child safety seats. Physicians and other health care providers have an equally important role by asking parents about their use of car seats or booster seats, and offering guidance on what is most appropriate for the child, based on age and weight.

Strong Families recognizes that for a child to be successful, the family must be successful. I think all first-time parents can benefit from a support system, and that's why I'm recommending that all first-time parents be offered a home visit that will provide basic information about nutrition, care, safety, emergency services, and programs for which they may be eligible. I also think we need to improve the child support system and break the cycle of incarceration of which 1 in 7 children are a part.

Note: A complete copy of *KidsFirst: The Governor's Plan to Invest in Wisconsin's Future*, Governor Jim Doyle, Spring 2004 may be viewed or downloaded at www.wisgov.state.wi.us/docs/kidsfirst.pdf.

Healthy Kids offers the greatest opportunity for physician involvement. I congratulate you for your willingness to provide services to all of Wisconsin's children, whether they have insurance or not. Wisconsin is a national leader in health care coverage for children, second only to Rhode Island. My goal is to provide all children in our state with health care coverage. As part of my plan to do so, we will redouble our efforts to identify and enroll low-income, Hispanic, and Hmong families who are eligible for BadgerCare and Medical Assistance.

In addition to providing coverage for all children, other goals of *Healthy Kids* include improving access to oral health care, immunizing children on time, assuring that kids

get a healthy school breakfast, teaching children fitness and nutrition for life, reducing youth smoking, reducing teen pregnancy, reducing exposure to lead paint, helping kids with asthma, expanding prenatal care coverage and services, and promoting early childhood mental health. These are all areas in which physicians can be leaders.

I know many of you agree that our children are our future, and this edition of the *Wisconsin Medical Journal* is a testament to that fact. We have an obligation to ensure that our children have every chance to succeed and enjoy all that this great state has to offer. I look forward to working together to meet that obligation—nothing is more important.



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