

ADVOCACY

The AACAP relies on the passion of its supporters, members, and staff to fight for improved access to treatment. Our federal and state legislative initiatives address the national shortage of children's mental health professionals, parity for mental illnesses in the health insurance system, improvement of community-based systems of care and increased funding for research into child and adolescent mental health disorders. With grassroots action and work at the national and state level, the AACAP has defined a legislative agenda that aims to eliminate these barriers.

AACAP advocacy in action:

- **AACAP Advocacy Day**

In 2007, AACAP members visited Capitol Hill to educate federal legislators about the need of improving access to mental health care for children and adolescents. More than 100 child and adolescent psychiatrists, accompanied by members of families and youth living with mental illnesses, charged Capitol Hill to press for changes in the mental health delivery system.

- **Taking Our Message to the States**

The AACAP began a new state advocacy initiative to communicate the mental health needs of children and adolescents to state lawmakers. AACAP conducts state Hill days to dispel the myths surrounding childhood mental illnesses and to promote quality mental health care in schools and communities. In addition, the AACAP has created a joint state tool kit to support grassroots organization and action.

- **AACAP Congressional Fellowship**

The AACAP has created a new Congressional Fellowship to support a child and adolescent psychiatrist's work on Capitol Hill for eleven months. Each year, a child and adolescent psychiatrist will be selected to work in a Congressional office and push for policies on child and adolescent psychiatry and children's mental



Representative Patrick Kennedy (D-RI) receives AACAP's first Special Friends of Children Award at 2007's Hill Day Kick Off Reception.

health issues. The AACAP provides the Congressional Fellow a stipend, relocation expenses, and health insurance.

"As advocates, we can become the voice of our patients. Complacency has the same effect as not treating a child with mental illness." Jose Vito, M.D.



Representative Patrick Kennedy and child and adolescent psychiatry delegates of Illinois.

"The skills that I learned (on the Hill) continue to help me everyday as I advocate for my patients and their families."

Harsh Trivedi, M.D.

- **Bill of Rights for Families Living with Mental Illnesses**

The AACAP, with a coalition of consumer representative organizations, has created a Bill of Rights for Children with Mental Health Disorders and Their Families. The coalition includes the Autism Society of America (ASA), the Child and Adolescent Bipolar Foundation (CABF), Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit Disorder (CHADD), the Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health (FFCMH), Mental Health America (MHA) and the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). The bill of rights addresses the inconsistency of mental healthcare services throughout the country.

- **Improving Systems of Care**

The AACAP continues to fight for improved systems of care. In a system of care, mental health, education, child welfare, juvenile justice, and other agencies work together to ensure that children with mental illnesses and their families have access to the services they need to succeed. The AACAP convenes a special program each year at its Annual Meeting where these systems are promoted. Each program focuses on governmental policies, practices, initiatives and the role of advocacy efforts in driving system change.