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Contact: Ashley Pontius | National Strategies Public Relations
Phone: 813-409-4091 | Email: apontius@nspublicrelations.com

**REACH OUT AND READ LAUNCHES PENNSYLVANIA AFFILIATE
TO EXPAND EARLY LITERACY THROUGH PEDIATRIC CARE STATEWIDE**

At a time when the state's youngest children are falling behind, Reach Out and Read Pennsylvania is helping more families build relationships, language, and learning from the very start

PHILADELPHIA (July 15, 2026) – Nearly 30 years after the state's first sites launched at three Children's Hospital of Philadelphia clinics, Reach Out and Read is expanding to bring its evidence-based early literacy model to pediatric practices across Pennsylvania. Already serving more than 232,000 children annually through over 545,000 well-child visits, Reach Out and Read Pennsylvania will build on existing partnerships and programs across Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Central Pennsylvania, and regions across the Commonwealth to strengthen support for families with young children during the first five years of life — a crucial period for brain development, early relationships, and long-term health and learning.

Reach Out and Read Pennsylvania Executive Director Steve Wilmot, MSW, brings more than 25 years of experience in pediatric health care, practice management, and community-based services to his new role. As Associate Vice President for the Primary Care service line at CHOP, Wilmot led operations serving more than 100,000 children and helped advance pediatric literacy initiatives.

"Families want to give their children the strongest possible start, but they can't always access the resources they need early on," Wilmot said. "By expanding our work at Reach Out and Read statewide, we can reach parents and caregivers through a place they already trust — the pediatric exam room — and offer simple, meaningful guidance that deepens connections, nurtures development, and empowers parents and caregivers to support healthy development from the very start."

Reach Out and Read embeds early literacy directly into pediatric care, transforming well-child visits into consistent opportunities to engage families in a young child's development. By pairing caregivers with trusted advice and developmentally appropriate books, the model helps strengthen early relationships, build language foundations, and encourage habits linked to long-term health and educational success.

"Shared reading is one of the most powerful tools we can offer," said Dr. Trude Haecker, Reach Out and Read Pennsylvania Medical Director. "What can look like a very small moment is actually something incredibly important. When a child curls up with a caregiver and a book,

they are not just hearing words — they are feeling comfort, attention, and connection. That’s something we can help nurture in the exam room and something families can continue at home every day, building a foundation for early literacy and lifelong resilience.”

The need is clear. Across the state, only 42.3 percent of parents report reading to their babies every day, and more than half of third-graders are reading below a basic level. Without consistent engagement when children are young, those gaps can grow over time, impacting school readiness, health outcomes, and long-term opportunity.

At the same time, nearly all young children attend regular pediatric checkups, creating a powerful way to reach families consistently and equitably without requiring additional appointments or programs. Dozens of peer-reviewed studies show that Reach Out and Read works — parents in the program are 2.5 times more likely to read with their children, whose language development is ahead of their peers.

“Meeting families where they already are is what makes this model so effective,” Wilmot said. “It allows us to reach children early, guide parents in real time, and share practical strategies and tools, helping to build routines and relationships that will shape a child’s development for years to come.”

Reach Out and Read is already making a measurable impact across Pennsylvania. More than 1,500 clinicians share guidance and 465,900 new books annually with hundreds of thousands of families each year. With this expansion, more children across Pennsylvania will receive that support during routine pediatric visits, helping families build strong reading habits from the start.

To learn more about Reach Out and Read Pennsylvania, visit reachoutandread.org/Pennsylvania.

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About Reach Out and Read: As a 501(c)3 nonprofit, Reach Out and Read leverages the near-universal reach of the pediatric well-child visit to support caregivers in fostering healthy relationships with their young children through shared reading. In FY25, Reach Out and Read served more than 4.8 million children and provided 9 million free books across 11.2 million well-child visits. Around 70 percent of the children Reach Out and Read serves are from low-income families. The only national pediatric literacy model endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics, Reach Out and Read serves children in every state across the U.S.