

## **Enact the Medicaid Family Planning State Option**

*Protect and Expand Access to Affordable Health Care for Women and Families*

During these difficult economic times, families may choose to forego a number of regular health expenses, including the often monthly expense of contraceptives, to help make ends meet. Yet foregoing this basic health care need—and the many other key preventive health services provided during a family planning visit—could have serious, harmful health and economic consequences for women and their families.

Twenty-seven states have taken an important step towards improving women's health by receiving a federal waiver to expand access to critical health services under the state's Medicaid program. It is time for the rest of the states to join them in making health care more affordable and accessible for low-income women and men. Unfortunately, implementing a Medicaid family planning expansion requires federal approval, a process that poses significant bureaucratic hurdles.

**Congress should enact legislation, known as “the Medicaid Family Planning State Option,” that gives states the flexibility they need to adopt a Medicaid family planning expansion or improve their current program.** This common-sense measure helps states expand access to health care *and* save millions of dollars that they can then put towards other pressing needs.

### **Family Planning Services Improve the Health of Women and Children**

- A typical family planning visit includes: A pelvic exam; screenings for breast and reproductive cancers, high blood pressure, and diabetes; tests for sexually transmitted infections, including HIV; counseling about a woman's plans for pregnancy, and, if appropriate, a prescription for contraception; and referrals to other health care providers when necessary.
- Access to contraception is critical to preventing unintended pregnancies and to enabling women to control the timing and spacing of their pregnancies, which in turn reduces the incidence of maternal death, low birth weight babies, and infant mortality.

### **Medicaid Family Planning Expansion Provides Critical Health Care to Women and Men**

- A 2003 study of six family planning expansions, funded by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), found that the programs expanded access to care and improved the availability of services.
- If every state took advantage of the Medicaid Family Planning State Option to expand coverage for family planning services under Medicaid to all women who would be eligible for prenatal care, it would make an additional 3 million women eligible for these critical health services.

## **In Difficult Economic Times, It Is Especially Important for Women to Be Able to Plan Their Families**

- Rates of unintended pregnancies are increasingly concentrated among low-income women. Between 1994 and 2001, the rate of unintended pregnancies for affluent women fell by 20%, while the rate of unintended pregnancies for women living below the poverty level rose by 29%.
- A poor woman in the United States is now almost four times as likely as a more affluent woman to have an unplanned pregnancy.

## **Expanding Access to Family Planning Services under Medicaid Also Save States Money**

- Family planning expansions allow states to serve more low-income individuals *and* save money. CMS's 2003 study found that states as diverse as Arkansas, South Carolina, Alabama, and Oregon each saved at least \$15 million a year as a result of their family planning waivers.
- The Congressional Budget Office determined that the Medicaid Family Planning State Option saves the federal government \$200 million over 5 years and \$700 million over 10 years.

## **The Medicaid Family Planning State Option Would Remove Unnecessary Bureaucratic Hurdles**

- Despite the overwhelming success of these programs in more than half of all states, Medicaid family planning expansions are still implemented as “Research and Demonstration” projects, requiring special permission from the federal government in the form of an §1115 waiver.
- Unfortunately, the process to secure and maintain a family planning waiver has become increasingly difficult, involving a significant investment of staff resources and taking an average of *two years*.
- The Medicaid family planning state option would obviate the need for this arduous process—and enable states to get more women covered now.

## **The Medicaid Family Planning State Option Has Strong Public Support**

- A new survey by the National Women's Law Center and YWCA USA found that a majority (63 percent) of *Republicans and Independents* favor legislation that would give states the flexibility to expand insurance coverage for contraceptives under Medicaid.
- In addition, a survey sponsored by the National Women's Law Center and Planned Parenthood Federation of America found that the vast majority (73 percent) of all voters strongly favor making it easier for women at all income levels to obtain contraceptives.