

Enact the Medicaid Family Planning State Option

Protect Access to Affordable Health Care for Women and Families in Arkansas

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.

Arkansas has taken an important step toward improving women's health by applying for a federal waiver to expand access to basic health services under the state's Medicaid program. Unfortunately, Arkansas' 'Women's Health Waiver' is set to expire in March 2011, and the Arkansas Medicaid department—already facing increased demand for its resources as a result of the economic crisis—will have to overcome considerable bureaucratic hurdles to renew this successful program.

Congress should enact legislation, known as “the Medicaid Family Planning State Option,” that would give Arkansas the flexibility it needs to maintain and improve this critical program, which provides basic care to 93,000 women. 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.
- In difficult economic times, it is especially important for women to be able to plan their families.

Arkansas' Family Planning Expansion Provides Critical Health Care to Women

- Arkansas' family planning waiver, one of the oldest in the country, covers women 14 – 44 with an income up to 200 percent of poverty, the same level used to determine eligibility for Medicaid-covered pregnancy-related care.
- Between October 2007 and September 2008, more than 93,000 women were enrolled in the waiver program.

Arkansas' Family Planning Expansion Helps the State Balance Its Budget

- For FY09, Arkansas is facing a budget gap of \$107 million.
- A 2003 study by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) found that states as diverse as Arkansas, Oregon and South Carolina each saved at least \$15 million a year as a result of their family planning waivers.
- Indeed, the study found that in 1998-1999, only its second year in operation, Arkansas' family planning expansion resulted in savings of \$29.7 million, including \$9.4 million to the state government and \$20.3 million to the federal government.

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. Even simply renewing the waiver requires federal approval.
- Arkansas' waiver expired on January 31, 2009, and it has received a two-month temporary extension. In order to renew the program for another three years, Arkansas will have to submit an application for renewal to CMS, which involves a significant investment of staff time and can take months to be approved.
- The Medicaid family planning state option would obviate the need for this arduous process, give Arkansas the flexibility it needs to keep this critical program strong, and protect access to family planning services for millions of low-income Arkansas women.

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.

For citations, please contact the National Women's Law Center at: jkaye@nwlc.org