

Make Women's Health Care More Affordable and Accessible Enact the Medicaid Family Planning State Option and Help Delaware's 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 sacrificing 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.

Delaware has taken an important step towards expanding health care access for low-income women by applying for and receiving a federal waiver to continue to provide family planning services to women who are otherwise losing Medicaid coverage. It is time, though, for Delaware to expand the program to provide family planning services to even more women in need. Unfortunately, the State will have to overcome considerable bureaucratic hurdles to make changes to, or to even renew, this successful program.

Congress should enact legislation, known as “the Medicaid Family Planning State Option,” that would give Delaware the flexibility it needs to maintain and improve this critical program— which has provided basic health care to nearly 35,000 Delaware women since its inception. 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.

Medicaid Family Planning Expansions Have Bettered Women's Health Across the Country

- Twenty-seven states have already received federal permission to expand access to family planning services under the state's Medicaid program. Delaware is one of six states that have implemented a limited family planning waiver that extends family planning coverage to women who would otherwise be leaving the Medicaid program.

- 3,800 women are currently enrolled in Delaware's program. Since its inception, the program has provided basic health care to nearly 35,000 women.

The Medicaid Family Planning State Option Would Remove Unnecessary Bureaucratic Hurdles and Enable Delaware to Improve Its Program

- 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.
- Delaware's current waiver expires on December 21, 2009. At that time, Delaware may want to change its waiver to establish parity between the Medicaid eligibility level for family planning and the level for pregnancy-related care, as twenty-one other states have done with great success.
- In order to move to an income-based waiver, or even to renew the existing program, Delaware will have to request an extension from 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 the arduous waiver process, give Delaware the flexibility it needs to keep this critical program strong, and protect access to family planning services for millions of low-income Delaware women.

The Medicaid Family Planning State Option Would Help Delaware Provide Health Care to More Women and Balance Its Budget

- For FY09, Delaware is facing a budget gap totaling \$443 million.
- If Delaware took advantage of the Medicaid Family Planning State Option to expand coverage for family planning services to all women up to the income eligibility level for pregnancy-related care, it would reduce the number of unintended pregnancies in the state by 1,500 annually by the program's third year.
- This would result in annual savings of \$3.7 million to the state and \$2.2 million to the federal government by the program's third year.

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@nwl.org