

Enact the Medicaid Family Planning State Option

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

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.

Oregon 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, Oregon's Family Planning Expansion Project is set to expire in October 2009, and the Oregon 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 Oregon the flexibility it needs to maintain and improve this critical program, which has served up to 109,000 low-income women and men in a year. This common-sense measure helps states expand access to health care *and* save millions of dollars that the State 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.

Oregon's Family Planning Expansion Provides Critical Health Care to Low-Income Women and Men

- Oregon's family planning waiver covers uninsured women and men of childbearing age who are ineligible for Medicaid or SCHIP and have an income at or below 185

percent of poverty, the same income eligibility threshold for Medicaid-covered pregnancy-related care in the state.

- In 2005, the program provided critical health care to 109,000 low-income women and men.

Oregon's Family Planning Expansion Helps the State Balance Its Budget

- For FY09, Oregon is facing a budget gap totaling \$442 million.
- The budget crisis is forcing the state to make significant cuts to its Medicaid program, the "Oregon Health Plan." Governor Kulongoski recently proposed to reduce the income eligibility level in the Oregon Health Plan for certain senior citizens and people with disabilities from \$1,991 per month to a mere \$1,300 per month.
- Oregon's family planning waiver is estimated to result in state savings of \$226.1 million.

The Medicaid Family Planning State Option Would Remove Unnecessary Bureaucratic Hurdles and Enable Oregon to Maintain and 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. Even simply renewing the waiver requires federal approval.
- Oregon's current waiver expires on October 31, 2009. In order to continue beyond that date, Oregon 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 this arduous process, give Oregon the flexibility it needs to keep this critical program strong, and protect access to family planning services for millions of low-income Oregon 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