

Enact the Medicaid Family Planning State Option

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

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.

Washington 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, the waiver for Washington's "Take Charge" program is set to expire in June 2009, and the Washington 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 Washington the flexibility it needs to maintain and improve this critical program, which has provided critical health care to over 400,000 women and men since it was first implemented. This common-sense measure helps states expand access to health care *and* save millions of dollars that they can then put towards other pressing health care needs.

Family Planning Services Improve the Health of Women and Children

- A typical family planning visit includes: a general and gynecological check-up; screenings for breast and cervical cancer and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV; and a prescription for contraception.
- 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.

Washington's Family Planning Expansion Provides Critical Health Care to Women

- Washington's family planning waiver covers uninsured women and men of childbearing age with an income up to 200 percent of poverty, slightly higher than the eligibility threshold for Medicaid-covered pregnancy-related care.
- Since its implementation in July 2001, over 400,000 women and men have received key health services through the program.

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

- For FY09, Washington is facing a budget gap totaling \$509 million.
- According to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), "Take Charge" generated \$86.6 million in savings to the federal government during its initial four years of operation and is expected to result in federal savings of \$91.6 million over the three-year extension period.

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.
- Washington's current waiver expires on June 30, 2009. In order to continue beyond that date, Washington 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 Washington the flexibility it needs to keep this critical program strong, and protect access to family planning services for millions of low-income Washington 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 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