

## **Make Women's Health Care More Affordable and Accessible**

### *Enact the Medicaid Family Planning State Option and Help West Virginia 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.

It is time for West Virginia to make health care more affordable and accessible for low-income women through a Medicaid family planning expansion. Unfortunately, implementing such a program requires federal approval, a process that poses significant bureaucratic hurdles.

Congress should enact legislation, known as “the Medicaid Family Planning State Option,” that would make it easier for West Virginia to provide critical preventive health care to low-income women without first having to traverse this cumbersome and discouraging application process. **This common-sense legislation would help states like West Virginia give 32,000 low-income women the care they need, right away, and save millions of dollars that the state 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 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**

- West Virginia should follow the lead of the twenty-seven states that have already received federal permission to expand access to family planning services under the state's Medicaid program.
- 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.

## **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.

## **With a Family Planning Expansion, West Virginia Could Provide Health Care to More Women and Balance Its Budget**

- If West Virginia 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, the program would provide critical health care to an estimated 32,000 women annually by its third year.
- This would result in annual savings of \$6.5 million to the state and \$17.8 million to the federal government by the program's third year.

## **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 West Virginia 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.

*For citations, please contact the National Women's Law Center at: [jkaye@nwlc.org](mailto:jkaye@nwlc.org)*