

MEDICAID AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH CARE

Medicaid is a critical source of reproductive health care funding for low-income women.

Medicaid covers four out of ten births in America today and is the nation's largest source of public funding for family planning care. More than five million women of childbearing age rely on Medicaid for access to basic gynecologic care, contraception, and a range of other services. Without a strong Medicaid program, recent progress in lowering our nation's high unintended pregnancy rate, combating STD's, and improving access to preventive care, like breast and cervical cancer screening, will be eroded.

Today, federal Medicaid law requires states to cover family planning care. In order for states to receive federal Medicaid dollars, they must provide coverage for family planning care. Recognizing the importance of providing access to birth control services, the federal government provides 90 cents of every Medicaid family planning dollar to help states meet women's needs.

Medicaid covers a wide-range of family planning services. The federal government establishes general guidelines, giving states latitude to determine which family planning services they will cover. Most states cover all major prescription birth control methods. However, states can restrict Medicaid coverage of family planning services. For example, only 28 states have opted to cover emergency contraception.

Medicaid pays for some abortion care. Since 1977, the Hyde Amendment has denied the use of federal Medicaid funds for abortion, except in cases of rape, incest or when the woman's life is in danger. While states are required to cover abortion in these circumstances, in some states women encounter obstacles preventing them from obtaining this federally-mandated coverage. Seventeen states use state-only Medicaid funds to provide abortion coverage beyond the federal restrictions.

When states invest in family planning, women's health is improved and states save money. By preventing unintended pregnancy, treating sexually transmitted disease early, and maintaining women's reproductive health, investments in family planning save money. For every dollar spent on family planning services for low-income women, states avoid spending three dollars for pregnancy-related and newborn care.

According to the Alan Guttmacher Institute, a Medicaid family expansion program in California prevented over 100,000 unintended pregnancies in 1999, including 24,000 teen pregnancies.

States have opted to expand access to family planning services for low-income women. To meet women's health needs and save money, 18 states have programs providing coverage for family planning care for low-income women who are not otherwise eligible for Medicaid. These family planning "Medicaid waivers" (Medicaid expansion programs that require the federal government to waive federal law and approve state expansion plans) extend family planning services for new mothers, expand eligibility for family planning beyond Medicaid income eligibility levels, or provide family planning to women who have recently lost Medicaid coverage.

How is reproductive health care threatened under proposed changes to Medicaid?

Low-income women relying on Medicaid for reproductive health are facing grave threats. In state capitols and in Washington, D.C., plans are underway to fundamentally change the Medicaid program, leaving women at great risk of losing access to critical family planning services that have been guaranteed under Medicaid for more than three decades.

President Bush's Medicaid plan could remove family planning care from Medicaid. The Bush Medicaid Plan gives states increased flexibility to design their Medicaid program, in return for accepting a block-grant from the federal government. Currently, states receive matching funds from the federal government to help pay state Medicaid costs. Federal contributions to Medicaid increase as state spending increases. Under the Bush block-grant, states would receive a set amount of federal Medicaid funding each year. The grant would not rise as states spend more. In return, states would be given greater latitude over Medicaid. The Bush Medicaid Plan would allow states to remove family planning care completely from the benefit package for millions of women. They could also impose new cost-sharing requirements that would burden already financially impoverished women with new costs, such as co-payments, that could interfere with their access to contraceptives and gynecological care.

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The Bush Medicaid Plan would make it harder for states to expand Medicaid coverage.

According to current rules, states receive higher federal Medicaid reimbursement for family planning care, giving them a financial incentive to maintain and expand these services. Under the Bush block grant, states would no longer receive extra funding, making family planning care a primary target for Medicaid cuts.

State officials are already slashing Medicaid programs. Medicaid is the largest expenditure for state governments, second only to education. Rising health care costs and a stagnant economy are putting Medicaid under the budget axe of state officials. Almost every state has acted to contain Medicaid costs by cutting eligibility, ending or limiting coverage for essential services or lowering Medicaid reimbursement to health providers.

States Slash Medicaid, Women Suffer

Pregnant Women Lose Coverage in Texas

In Texas' 2004-2005 budget, legislators reduced Medicaid eligibility for pregnant women from 185% (\$16,400) to 158% (\$14,000) of the federal poverty level.

Missouri Cuts Family Planning Program

A Medicaid family planning program that provided women with two-years of postpartum family planning care, was reduced to one year, leaving 160,000 women with no birth control coverage.

SOURCES:

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Center for Budget & Policy Priorities. Proposed State Medicaid Cuts Would Jeopardize Health Insurance Coverage for 1.7 Million People: An Update. March 2003.

The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. Medicaid Coverage of Family Planning Services: Results of a National Survey. October 2001.

Medicaid Works: Protects Women's Health, Saves Money

Medicaid successfully provides women with critical health services that help prevent unintended pregnancy, reduce the likelihood of abortion, diagnose and treat STD's, and maintain women's reproductive health. Efforts by state and federal lawmakers to weaken Medicaid will undermine our nation's most important women's health program. Join a growing campaign to protect Medicaid and low-income women's health.



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Protect Women, Protect Medicaid

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