

CHILD HEALTH

For many children and their families, each new day is an opportunity for further enhancement of good health and development. For others, however, the future holds little promise when their health status is poor, the risks to their health are many, and the prospects for them to successfully overcome these problems are limited. All children deserve the attention, encouragement, and intervention of care providers from many disciplines to ensure that they develop healthy bodies, minds, emotions, and attitudes to prepare them to be competent and contributing adults. Health policy must address the preventive and health promotion needs of infants, children, and adolescents in addition to access to care in order to assure that they receive the best possible start in life and become responsible for good health habits.



Children require a medical home that provides access to coordinated, comprehensive, preventive, health-promoting, therapeutic, and rehabilitative medical, mental health, and dental care. Such care should begin during the prenatal period and is best provided through a continuing relationship with a primary health professional and ready access to specialty care as needed. The medical home not only cares for them when they are ill, but also assures that developmental milestones are monitored and appropriate interventions are available when milestones are not met. Such interventions are most effective and least costly when provided in a timely manner.

Louisiana must take steps to assure that children have access to a medical home that provides them the best possible opportunity to develop and thrive. The medical home should be provided by a pediatrician or other physician specially trained to care for children. The Louisiana Medicaid program and the LaCHIP program can provide that care to children whose family income is under 200% of poverty if the following steps are taken to assure provision of:

- aggressive outreach to enroll all eligible children
- health literacy programs to assure that families understand how to use the system
- adequate provider reimbursement to assure that all children have access to care
- attention to both physical and mental health needs

For uninsured children whose family income is 200 to 300% of poverty, the new Louisiana Children and Youth Health Insurance Program, when fully implemented, can provide premium assistance for a private insurance benefit. For these children and those whose families have private health insurance, the benefits must include:

Louisiana's
Infant
Mortality Rate
(an indicator of
child well
being) is **10.5**
per **1,000** live
births —
the highest in
the U.S.

The Department
of Health and
Hospitals
estimates that
90,000
children in
Louisiana are
uninsured

CHILD HEALTH (continued)

- no co-pay or deductible requirement for well child care and immunizations
- access to therapies required to address developmental delays
- mental health and dental care on par with physical health coverage

For children without health benefits whose family income exceeds 300% of poverty, Louisiana must explore options to assure that parents make provision of health coverage a priority. Just as drivers are required to have auto insurance, parents could be required to provide health coverage for their children. Such a mandate would assist in the enrollment process for the public programs and assure that all children in the state have access to health care.

In addition to health benefits provided children through Medicaid, LaCHIP and private insurance, the state has additional opportunities to provide access to needed care. Louisiana must carefully invest in programs that are evidence-based and cost-effective, including the following:

- provide support for smoking cessation and substance abuse screening and treatment for pregnant women
- focus attention of appropriate weight gain during pregnancy
- provide access to dental care for pregnant women to address low birth weight births related to gum disease
- expand the Nurse Family Partnership program that provides trained nurses to work with high-risk first time mothers throughout their pregnancy and continue to follow the children until age 2 to assure that all eligible families have the option to receive this effective service
- promote policies that encourage new mothers to give their babies the best possible start in life by breastfeeding
- require the full range of newborn screening in order to identify and intervene appropriately as required
- expand school-based health clinics which are a proven way to reach underserved children, address their mental and physical health needs, and keep them in school
- institute disease management programs that provide asthma education and reduce hospitalization in public clinics and facilities
- develop programs that address childhood obesity, which is now at epidemic proportions, to prevent onset of adult chronic diseases
- require schools to provide healthy breakfasts and lunches and assure that children receive active physical education

For additional information please go to www.lapartnership.org.

Fifty-two percent
of
Louisiana children are enrolled in Medicaid/ LaCHIP

Ninety percent
of these
children have
never had
health care
coverage from
any other
source, private
or public