

The Federal Employee Health Benefit Plan Model: Inadequate to Meet All Children's Needs

It is the position of the American Academy of Pediatrics that health care reform should:

- ★ Include a benefits package for children based on the well-established Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment (EPSDT) standard used by Medicaid.
- ★ Remove barriers to care, such as co-payments and deductibles for preventive health services.
- ★ Couple private sector payment rates with pediatric-appropriate benefits.
- ★ Recognize that the "Standard Benefit" option under the Federal Employee Health Benefit Plan (FEHBP) does not adequately address the specific health needs of the pediatric population.

The Issue

Most health care plans offer coverage to treat illness or injury. Children, however, require health care coverage for preventive services to promote their healthy development and allow physicians to tailor services to their needs. Failure to treat those needs in childhood can result in deficits or disabilities that have lifelong implications. The federal government has long recognized the special needs of children by establishing a unique standard for Medicaid's benefits for children, known as the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment (EPSDT) standard. Under EPSDT, state Medicaid programs must cover all medically necessary services for children.

Current Status

Some have suggested using the Blue Cross/Blue Shield basic option under FEHBP as the model for a national health care reform benefits package. Advocates often claim that health reform should provide benefits "as good as Members of Congress get." For many children, however, this package will be inadequate to meet their needs. For example, this package:

- ★ would **not** cover many forms of outpatient physical, speech and related therapies;
- ★ would **not** cover most hearing aids or eyeglasses, or the associated tests and fittings; and
- ★ would **not** cover many forms of durable medical equipment needed by children with chronic diseases such as spina bifida or cerebral palsy.

Since 1967, Medicaid has required states to provide all medically necessary services to children under the EPSDT standard. This critically important standard has given millions of children access to services that have improved or maintained their health and functioning. EPSDT should be retained, as it is vital to the optimal health and outcomes of children in any health care reform proposal.