

Health Care Reform Action Needed Now American Academy of Pediatrics

The debate about how to reform health care is happening now in Washington, DC. Children and adolescents need your voice to make sure that reforms meet their unique needs.

What is happening now?

Bills have been introduced in each chamber of Congress and are being debated and amended. The current bills include many important improvements for children's health, but they do not yet guarantee comprehensive, age-appropriate benefits for all infants, children and youth. The common refrain that insurance coverage should be "as good as your member of Congress" is not good enough for children. Members of Congress have access to the Federal Employee Health Benefit Plan (FEHBP).

- FEHBP covers many appropriate services for adults, but the standard plan does not provide a comprehensive, age-appropriate benefit package for children.
 - For example, a child visits the pediatrician 8 times in the first year of life, but many adults see their physician only once a year. As a result, any benefits package designed solely for adults will cut needed benefits for children.
 - A majority of pediatric care focuses on preventive services, immunizations and developmental screenings, not treatment of multiple adult chronic conditions. Benefits packages designed solely for adult conditions will leave children behind.

Minimum benefit standards currently included in health reform legislation do not guarantee medically necessary services for children.

- AAP believes that preventive services should be covered for all children without cost sharing and copays. Prevention services described in *Bright Futures* should be available to all children in private and public plans at no cost. The Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee bill includes coverage for *Bright Futures*!
- Congress has proposed the creation of an independent commission to evaluate and determine appropriate benefits packages. While the "Medical Advisory Council" proposed by the HELP Committee specifically references pediatric benefits as a mandatory component of any minimum benefit standard, the legislation does not require the Commission to recommend a pediatric benefit that includes all medically necessary services.
- Benefits are further stratified in the bills with different package levels, commonly referred to as gold, silver or bronze. These levels reflect different cost sharing contributions through co-pays, deductibles and coinsurance.

We must protect and strengthen what works.

- Medicaid and CHIP have made great strides in covering our most vulnerable children, providing families with the peace of mind that their children can access what they need.
- To improve upon this track record, Medicaid and CHIP payment also must be improved to help guarantee real access. The increase in Medicaid payment, specifically the 100%

of Medicare guaranteed under the House bill, will ensure that pediatricians can treat Medicaid beneficiaries and continue to run their practices.

An investment in children is an investment in our nation's future.

- Currently, the US does not fare well when compared to other countries; a recent UNICEF ranked the US 21st out of the 22 developed countries surveyed in child well-being.
- Studies show that providing children with comprehensive services early in life can prevent costly, chronic illnesses such as cardiac disease, diabetes and osteoporosis and lead to long-term cost savings.

**Now is the time to ensure that all children have access to the care they need and deserve.
The life success of every child should be our highest national priority.**