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Georgetown Center for Children and Families Releases Blueprint for Addressing the Needs of Children in Health Reform

Washington, D.C. -- Children have unique health needs that should be addressed in health reform, according to a new report by the Center for Children and Families at Georgetown University's Health Policy Institute.

"Almost nine million children are uninsured and many more are at risk of not receiving the health care services that they need to develop and grow," said CCF Deputy Director Jocelyn Guyer. "The Children's Health Insurance Program reauthorization (CHIPRA) was a major step forward, but even if it works exactly as envisioned, millions of children will remain uninsured. Whether or not a child receives appropriate health care coverage still can be based on such arbitrary distinctions as whether the child lives in Kansas City, Kansas or Kansas City, Missouri or whether the child's parent works for a school district or a chain retail store."

"The Last Piece of the Puzzle: Providing High-Quality, Affordable Health Coverage to all Children through National Health Reform" report provides a blueprint for building a family-friendly health care system that addresses the unique needs of children.

All children should have access to periodic health screenings to identify physical and mental conditions and timely intervention to support growth and curtail long-term disabilities, according to the CCF report. It recommends providing child-specific health care options for all children whether they are covered by Medicaid, CHIP, or a plan available through a new insurance "Exchange". It also calls for ensuring that coverage is affordable to families through a subsidy program and ensuring that all cost sharing, including premiums and co-payments, are set at a price that families at different income levels can afford.

"A healthy childhood supported by appropriate health care coverage and early detection and treatment services can help launch children onto an upward trajectory toward a successful adulthood," said Dawn Horner, CCF Senior Program Director and co-author of the report. "Health care reform offers an important opportunity to make sure that children have as bright of a future as possible no matter what obstacles they have to overcome."

The report also addresses the need to dramatically transform the way children are enrolled in health insurance. The current patchwork of eligibility rules and paperwork demands can be daunting to families trying to apply for or continue Medicaid or CHIP coverage. In the context of national health reform, it is critical to remove unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles and aggressively pursue use of automatic enrollment.

“Creating family-friendly ways for children to enroll in coverage should be a top priority in health reform,” said Tricia Brooks, CCF Senior Fellow and former New Hampshire CHIP Director. “No baby should leave the hospital without a health card and no family should be denied health coverage because of unnecessary and excessive paperwork.”

Other important strategies for addressing the unique needs of children in health reform include:

Expanding Medicaid to cover everyone up to 150% of the federal poverty level (FPL), expanding CHIP to cover children up to 300% of FPL, and offering affordable coverage options to children in other families through the Exchange;

Assuring the long-term financial stability of the successful Medicaid and CHIP programs by providing financial support to states and stabilizing funding during an economic downturn;

Improving access and quality of care through adequate reimbursement rates and building upon cost-effective and patient-centered medical home models;

Providing children with special health care needs with coverage that will cover the full range of services they need to grow and thrive.

The full report is available at <http://ccf.georgetown.edu>.

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