



CONTACT: Elizabeth Kenney, Center for Children and Families,
202-687-0886 or at ehk6@georgetown.edu

May 31, 2006

Three Out of Four of the People Put at Risk Under West Virginia's Medicaid Changes are Children

Children will be put at risk of losing basic and essential health services under a new West Virginia Medicaid initiative, according to an analysis released today by the Center for Children and Families at Georgetown University's Health Policy Institute. West Virginia is one of the first states in the country to make significant changes to its Medicaid program under the recently enacted federal Deficit Reduction Act.

The initiative would reduce Medicaid beneficiaries' access to medical services –including mental health services, diabetes care, and some prescription drugs – if they are judged to be out of compliance with a range of behavioral requirements.

"West Virginia has entered uncharted territory by seeking to encourage healthy behaviors using the "stick" of cutting coverage for needed health services when someone does not live up to the government's expectations," explains Cindy Mann, Executive Director of CCF. "The implications of this kind of strategy are worrisome for all people who might have trouble following a diet or keeping appointments. They are particularly troubling under the West Virginia approach because this plan primarily affects children."

The West Virginia plan was approved quickly by the Administration and touted as empowering patients to make educated, consumer-driven health care decisions related to their own treatment, but the CCF report explains that three out of four of the people affected are children. "Children are not in the driver's seat when it comes to their health care," said Joan Alker, Senior Researcher at the Center for Children and Families and co-author of the report. "Three-year olds cannot direct their own care, and yet, they are the ones who will lose coverage if their parents have difficulty meeting the requirements."

* * *

ABOUT CCF: The Center for Children and Families is an independent, nonpartisan organization led by experts in the area of health coverage for children and families, with extensive experience in policy analysis and program implementation at both the federal and state level. CCF is based at Georgetown University's Health Policy Institute. For additional information about the Center for Children and Families and children's health care coverage please visit the website at: www.ccfgeorgetown.org.