Medicaid in Early Childhood: Why Coverage Is Important and How Innovation in Care Delivery, Payment and Policy Can Set Kids Up to Thrive

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Children's early years are a vital period of development. Access to health care in early childhood is especially important given the critical need for vaccinations and developmental screenings during this period. Health care coverage is closely tied to health care access. Yet, children under the age of 6 are more likely than older children to be uninsured.

Medicaid is a primary source of health care coverage for children and enables effective health care access for youth, among other positive short-term outcomes. However, cycling on and off Medicaid, or churn, is common, and children experience high rates of churn. While focused primarily on adults, research shows that individuals with inconsistent Medicaid access are more likely to delay care, receive less preventive care, refill prescriptions less often and have more emergency department visits.

In the context of an evolving policy and funding environment for health and social service systems, it is essential to reduce unnecessary administrative costs, maximize available resources, and effectively align care and systems to meet the needs of families. This brief provides policy recommendations that prioritize preventive care and cost-effective early intervention for young children and their families through payment and primary care delivery models.

Authors: Radha Pennotti, Rebecka Rosenquist

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