

Dental Coverage Improved Under Children's Health Insurance

Dental care is an important health issue for children but it can be neglected if parents can't afford services. Oral health is integral to the physical, social-emotional and intellectual development of children. Children with painful and disfigured teeth suffer from many problems, including, the inability to eat food, inability to concentrate in school, increased absences due to illness and low self-esteem.

The report *Oral Health in America*, released by the Surgeon General in 2000, found that caries (tooth decay) is the most common chronic disease of childhood – even more common than asthma. Dental disease is now often linked to poverty. Low-income children, in New York and across the country, suffer from twice as much tooth decay as children from higher-income households.

The new The Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act of 2009 (CHIPRA), signed by President Obama in February, included many new dental components and a mandate that states cover dental benefits. Fortunately, New York State Child Health Plus has always covered dental care.

However, there are many barriers to receiving dental care even for those with coverage. For example, there are often not enough providers available in the community or families can't travel the distance to services. Also, many parents don't know that dental care should begin as soon as children start to get their baby teeth. The new provisions help to bring oral health benefits in line with what is expected for the provision of good health care.

One of the most significant benefit changes in CHIPRA is a provision that will allow states to create a dental "wrap around" benefit. This "wrap around" benefit will provide stand-alone dental coverage for children who have private insurance that does not cover dental but who are otherwise eligible for Child Health Plus.

Other dental provisions included in CHIPRA:

- State Reports on Performance

Requires states to conduct reports on the dental programs' performance and give relevant dental healthcare statistics about children treated under CHIP coverage.

- Federal Reports on Quality

Requires that federal reports are conducted on the quality of children's health care; dental experts are to be included in the drafting of these reports.

- Education for Parents of Newborns

Requires that the parents of newborns be given a minimum level of educational materials regarding early childhood health.

- Legality of public-private contracting

Clarifies and reinforces the legality of federally qualified health centers to contract with private dental providers.

- Accessibility study

Requires the Governmental Accountability Office to conduct a study analyzing children's access to dental services and the willingness and capability of midlevel dental providers to serve children.

- Availability of Oral Healthcare Information

Requires that people enrolled in Medicaid and CHIP be given relevant information about dental health providers and the dental health benefits contained in their health plan.

It will take some time for the federal Department of Health and Human Services to develop regulations around these provisions but the New York State Oral Health Coalition has already begun to explore what these changes can mean to improved access to dental services in New York.

For more information on oral health for children visit the following websites:

[New York State Oral Health Coalition](#)

[Children's Dental Health Project](#)

[New York State Department of Health, Oral Health Programs](#)

[Child Health USA 2006, Oral Health](#)

[Maternal and Child Health Library: Oral Health](#)