

Health Care Reform Advances Children's Dental Health

The excitement that children's health advocates felt about the new dental provisions in the federal Child Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act (CHIPRA) carried through to the new Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (health care reform). Like CHIPRA, health care reform contains new opportunities to expand dental coverage to more children and improve access to services. The law also supports public health dental efforts and promotes expansion of the dental workforce.

Under the new law:

- Insurance plans offered in state health insurance exchanges will have to include oral care for children. Plans will not be able to charge out-of-pocket expenses for pediatric oral health services.
- Dental-only plans will be allowed in the exchanges, allowing families with medical insurance that does not cover dental services to purchase coverage.
- Grants will be available to school-based health centers to expand oral health services.
- There will be a public education campaign to promote oral health, including early childhood caries, prevention, oral health of pregnant women and oral health of at-risk populations.
- Grants will be available to demonstrate the effectiveness of research-based dental caries disease management.
- All states will receive grants for school-based dental sealant programs.
- There will be new grants and programs to expand the supply of dental providers.

Unfortunately, some of the grant and educational programs, including school-based grants, sealant grants and the national education program, were not funded in the law. Additional appropriations will be needed to implement these provisions soon. Advocacy efforts are underway to either secure funding in the 2011 federal budget or to allocate money from some of the new public health programs also authorized in the health care reform bill. These programs must be operational soon to meet the demand for services that will be created by the expansions in insurance coverage through health care reform and through the recent reauthorization of the Child Health Insurance Program.

Finally, children's dental needs are being recognized as an important part of their overall health. But dental insurance will only help children if there are providers and services available in communities. Additional funding is vital to secure providers and services.

View a presentation on what is at stake and how to get involved on the [webpage of the Pew Children's Dental Initiative](#). A detailed list of all the dental initiatives is available from the Children's Dental Health Project [health reform toolbox](#).