



Public policy in the best interest of children

Date: August 10, 2018

To: Michigan Department of Health and Human Services
Bureau of Medicaid Policy and Health System Innovation

From: Matt Gillard, President & CEO
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Re: Healthy Michigan Application Public Comment

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the Healthy Michigan Plan's policy changes. Michigan's Children is the only statewide and independent voice working to ensure that public policies are made in the best interest of children and youth, from cradle to career, and their families, with a focus on policy solutions that improve equitable outcomes for children.

We know from over two decades of work with children, youth, and families; decades of overwhelming research; as well as common sense, that people are more likely to learn, and more likely to earn, when their basic needs are met. Children and youth who receive regular physical and behavioral health care services reap lifelong benefits: they attend school ready to learn, have stronger health outcomes, are more likely to attend college, and generate more tax contributions as adults. Healthy parents are more likely to be able to keep their children healthy, help in their communities and keep a job. We are concerned that the changes to the Healthy Michigan Plan will adversely impact child and family outcomes and do not support the changes.

We are concerned over the potential negative impact the changes could have on children and youth's access to primary health care services, despite exemptions for children and parents of children under age 6. Regardless of whether they themselves are covered, children and youth are far more likely to receive physical and mental health services when their parents have health care coverage. According to Johns Hopkins University researchers, when their parents are covered, kids are always more likely to see a medical professional for preventive care, which reduces both the need for future services and long-term state costs. When parents can go to the doctor, they're more likely to bring their kids, be they age three, seven or seventeen.

If their parents lose health care, not only will children and youth see fewer check-ups, out-of-pocket costs during emergencies may skyrocket, putting their families at financial risk. Medicaid enrollees borrow less money to pay for medical costs, a benefit that kids feel when their parents are more able to afford healthful food or new, safe housing. As a result of the proposed changes, children's health could be compromised not only through lost access to services, but also because their family resources will be spread even thinner.

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The Healthy Michigan changes would also exempt pregnant mothers, but research finds the health of a child depends on pre-conception parental health in addition to the mother's health during pregnancy. About half of pregnancies are unplanned, meaning at any point a young woman's health status could have implications for that of a baby. A parent's young adult years are critical for a baby's health: in Michigan, the average age of a mother at first birth is about 26 years old. Unfortunately, our statewide unemployment rate for young adults aged 20-24 in 2016, a year of robust economic health, was 8.4%. For 18- and 19-year-olds, the rate was closer to 16%. These double during economic recession, when older, more qualified workers compete for lower-paying jobs. Policymakers have already agreed that young adults deserve protection from market forces when it comes to health care: the Affordable Care Act guarantees young adults can remain on their parents' insurance until 26. In the face of economic challenges, rescinding health care coverage would place young adults, and their own future families, in a precarious position.

The policy could also have unintended consequences for youth who are transitioning out of the foster care system and working to establish themselves economically and educationally. Foster-affiliated youth often negotiate trauma and other needs. Current work and education requirements for other programs have been crafted around the unique challenges that these young people face far beyond the age of 21. Existing supports include fewer required hours than exist in this bill, as well as grace periods, recognizing the personal circumstances that might arise to pull young people temporarily off track without compromising services for the longer term. There is a lack of clarity regarding how existing protections for youth transitioning out of foster care will be reconciled with the proposed Healthy Michigan changes, and significant risk for this population.

Finally, Michigan's child care system lacks the capacity to guarantee quality care for every eligible parent or caregiver: state business practices and a history of low investment have driven hundreds of providers out of the system, to the point that 48% of low-income people, including the Healthy Michigan population, live in a child care desert, lacking access to licensed care. While many adults are already subject to work requirements and entitled to child care support, and although the plan exempts sole caretakers of children under 6 from work requirements, eligible two-parent families and families with children over the age of six already fall through the cracks, and they will continue to do so without systemic child care reforms.

A child's health ultimately relies upon the health of those around them. While exemptions from work requirements can protect some people, many will fall through the cracks. Hundreds of working families and young adults who will soon be starting families face barriers that could cost them coverage under the Healthy Michigan Plan changes, putting that cornerstone of a healthy life – regular health care services – in jeopardy for many children and youth.

Sincerely,



Matt Gillard