



HEALTHIER KIDS through public policy

2017 CHILD HEALTH ADVOCACY PREVIEW

Following the November election results, this year the balance of power in Colorado will remain the same, with Republicans retaining control of the State Senate and Democrats maintaining the majority in the State House. This year will be anything but status quo, however, as it promises to be a busy and potentially turbulent year in healthcare policy. While Children's Hospital Colorado will maintain our commitment to influence state level policies that benefit kids and families, our efforts will be heavily focused on Washington, D.C. As the new Congress and the incoming administration of President-elect Donald Trump begin work on major policy changes to the healthcare system, we will work to ensure that, first, those changes do not harm kids' access to healthcare and, second, that we improve on advances we have made where possible.

Federal Advocacy

Repealing the Affordable Care Act

Passed in 2010, the Affordable Care Act has ensured that children have access to preventive services like well-child visits and immunizations, and it has guaranteed health insurance coverage for children with pre-existing conditions, while also protecting families from lifetime and annual caps on benefits. It is anticipated that Congress will repeal the Affordable Care Act in early 2017, though it is unclear when a comprehensive replacement policy will be developed. Child health advocates are concerned about the potential disruptions to the healthcare marketplace. We will be working hard to ensure that a replacement policy upholds protections that support children and families, and we believe Congress should repeal the Affordable Care Act only with a clearly identified and carefully considered replacement plan.

Sweeping Changes to Medicaid

Republican congressional leadership intends to pursue drastic changes to Medicaid, the shared state-federal program that provides comprehensive health insurance for low-income individuals. More than 30 percent of Colorado kids rely on Medicaid, and nationwide it is the single largest insurer of children, so any changes to the program will have far-reaching consequences for kids and families. While the details of this overhaul are unclear, it is likely that Congressional leaders will pursue "block granting" Medicaid, which would severely restrict the federal government's current commitment to the program. If this policy passes, states like Colorado would probably be unable to maintain Medicaid's current benefits, coverage, and eligibility—meaning children and others could lose access to the care they need.

State Advocacy

Addressing Youth Substance Use in Schools

The Governor's budget proposal includes a request to allocate \$9.7 million in marijuana taxes toward hiring more than 100 school health professionals. From school nurses to social workers, these vital healthcare professionals have been shown to help teens make healthy choices and reduce youth substance use, and expanding their presence at schools across Colorado will ensure more teens have access to behavioral health and substance use services.

Keeping Kids Safe

The Transportation Legislation Review Committee has drafted legislation to update state law related to [autocycles](#), a three-wheeled vehicle that is now being driven on the roads. Autocycles contain features of both motorcycles and cars, so we will be working to ensure appropriate safeguards for children are included in any new law.



Strengthening the Mental Health System

It is no secret that Colorado currently has big gaps to close in the mental health system for those experiencing a mental health crisis. In 2016, the Governor vetoed legislation to make changes to the 72-hour mental health hold process for those at risk of harming themselves or others. Over the summer, a mental health task force met for several months to seek consensus on [additional and alternative policy options](#). A total of \$4 million has been set aside in the Governor's budget proposal to support the capacity-building efforts from the task force's recommendations.

Improving Access to Primary Care

We believe all kids should have access to the care they need when they need it—and enhanced Medicaid reimbursement rates for primary care services can help Colorado reach this goal. This year, the state is requesting continued funding for vital primary care services that target specific primary care services, including office visits, preventive services, and immunizations.

Family Friendly Workplace Policies

For several years, state legislators have attempted to pass legislation to support family friendly workplace policies. One proposal would have required employers to offer paid family leave to employees, and last year lawmakers proposed a recognition program for businesses that provide family friendly benefits such as child care assistance. While we do not yet have policy details, we anticipate that another version of this family friendly legislation will be back again this year.

State Budget Pressures

Legislators will have more obligations to fund this year than the amount of available revenue to spend. This unfortunate budget situation has led to a proposal that would include slashing the Hospital Provider Fee. Since its creation in 2009, the Hospital Provider Fee has ensured access to health care for over 400,000 Coloradans who lacked it before, and it has helped provide financial stability for small rural hospitals and safety net hospitals, allowing all Coloradans better access to care closer to home. With a proposed cut of \$390 million in state and matching federal funds, this massive cut would have detrimental impacts on healthcare providers and patients alike.

Increasing Maternal Mental Health Screenings

One in eight women experience pregnancy-related depression, which can occur at any time during pregnancy and up to one year postpartum. Screening for maternal depression can help promote a healthy start for the whole family, and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends maternal mental health screenings three times during the child's first year at well child office visits with the pediatric healthcare provider. Currently, Colorado is the only state where Medicaid reimburses providers for only one screening in the child's first year. Advocates hope to align with the AAP recommendation by making sure that providers can be reimbursed by Medicaid for three screenings in the child's first year.

Transportation Funding Solutions that Include Active Living Options

In Colorado, more than 10 percent of kids are overweight or obese. Safe and accessible active living options can help support healthy choices for kids and families. Because transportation and infrastructure funding is perennially squeezed in Colorado, an effort is underway to send a referred tax increase measure to voters that would make significant investments in transportation and infrastructure projects. If this measure moves forward, it will be important that the ballot measure provide municipalities with the flexibility to use the funding to support active living infrastructure projects such as bike paths, sidewalks, and mass transit options.

Questions:

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