Give children access to timely health care

The Washington Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics supports ensuring timely access to care for all children in Washington by providing adequate funding for Medicaid payment for pediatric care equivalent to Medicare rates.

Issue

In Washington, one out of every two children have Apple Health for Kids insurance coverage, but in many communities, coverage does not lead to access. Currently Medicaid payment for pediatric care is two-thirds of Medicare rates and does not cover the cost to provide care. As a result, clinics throughout the state limit or no longer accept Apple Health for Kids. This makes it difficult for families to access care when their children need it. Bringing Medicaid payment to parity with Medicare rates would yield significant health benefits and cost savings for our Medicaid plan:

- Access to a medical home as a usual source of care for children costs less in the near term and is a sound preventive investment against chronic disease.
- Lack of timely preventive care leads parents to rely on expensive, episodic care in urgent care and emergency rooms, or to delay treatment as their child’s condition worsens.
- A child with untreated health problems is more likely to experience cognitive, behavioral or physical disabilities during childhood and to develop chronic health problems as an adult.
- A child with access to a medical home and regular care is more likely to go on to graduate from high school, attend college, and have a higher income as an adult.
- Kids make up half of Medicaid enrollees but account for only 19% of the costs. Preventive primary care keeps kids out of expensive emergency departments and urgent care clinics, and prevents them from developing costly chronic diseases in adulthood.

Legislative Ask

Today, children with private insurance have timely access to cost-effective medical care and children enrolled in Medicaid do not. We can advance health equity and position all of Washington’s children for a lifetime of health by investing in Medicaid payment for pediatric care that meets Medicare payment levels. $24m GFS/year.
We contacted 57 pediatric clinics in 9 counties in Washington to assess wait times for children on Apple Health for Kids.

In 8 of the 9 counties, sick children on Apple Health face a wait of **4-59 days** to receive care.

Most clinics report waits of over a week for an acute visit.

Only Skagit County has timely access to care for kids with acute illnesses.

In Thurston County, **only 1 of 8 clinics** called is accepting new Medicaid patients.

Thurston and South King County had the highest proportion of clinics not accepting new Medicaid patients.

According to a 2018 national study, pediatric primary care **Medicaid participation increased** with the ACA rate increase.

- Clinics accepting all new Medicaid patients: **increased 5.9%**
- Clinics accepting Medicaid patients at least as often as new privately insured patients: **increased 5.7%**


To learn more, or to receive the full WCAAP study, contact Sarah Rafton at srafton@wcaap.org/206-293-3540 or Amber Ulvenes at amber@ulvenesconsulting.com/360-280-0384