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ABCD News Brief

What do parents think?

Findings from a survey of parents assessing the quality of preventive and developmental services for young children enrolled in Medicaid¹

Brain development, social development, physical well-being, readiness for school, and ultimately, a child's success in life are all linked to his or her critical first years of life. For children to flourish, families and their communities must work together to support the achievement of the cognitive, social, emotional, behavioral, and physical milestones essential to the healthy development of children.

Physicians and other health care providers are among the most important partners for parents of young children. Guidelines recommend that children see a pediatric clinician approximately 12 times during the first three years of life for routine well-child care services. Given the frequent contact that pediatric providers have with most parents, they are in a unique position to ensure that young children get the healthy start they deserve.

The Foundation for Accountability (FACCT) conducted a survey of parents of children under age four who were covered by Medicaid to learn more about how preventive and developmental services are provided to low-income children and how parents feel about the care that their children are receiving. The Promoting Healthy Development Survey PLUS (PHDS-PLUS) was administered in three states participating in The Commonwealth Fund's Assuring Better Child Health and Development (ABCD) Program: North Carolina, Vermont, and Washington. The ABCD Program supports selected state Medicaid agencies' efforts to improve preventive and developmental services for young children and their families.

The FACCT report analyzes responses from a core sample of 1,900 parents (approximately 630 per state). Among its **key findings**:

- **A significant number of children are at risk for developmental, behavioral, and/or social delays.** Two of five parents reported at least one concern about their child's social, emotional, behavioral, and/or cognitive development.
- **Few children receive recommended comprehensive preventive and developmental services.** Only about one of five children received preventive and developmental services that met a basic threshold of quality. Of the preventive and developmental services the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends pediatric

¹ This news brief is excerpted from *Partnering with Parents to Promote the Healthy Development of Young Children Enrolled in Medicaid: Results from a Survey Assessing the Quality of Preventive and Developmental Services for Young Children Enrolled in Medicaid in Three States*, a September 2002 publication of the Commonwealth Fund, prepared by C. Bethell, Colleen Peck, Melinda Abrams, et al.

clinicians provide, a basic level of assessment was least likely to be provided in the areas of psychosocial well-being and safety within the family.

- **Parents have concerns that are not addressed by pediatric clinicians.** Two of five parents reported that their child's pediatric clinician did not routinely ask whether they had concerns about their child's development and well-being. Less than half of parents who reported potentially serious concerns also reported getting the information they needed to address these concerns.
- **Having a personal pediatric clinician or nurse makes a difference.** Nearly one of five children lacked a personal provider who knew the child well. Children with a personal pediatric clinician or nurse were one- and-a-half times more likely to receive a basic level of comprehensive care than children without such a provider. Parents of children with a personal pediatric provider were also more likely to report being asked about their own health and the health of their family, compared with children without a personal pediatric provider.

Implications for State Medicaid Agencies

Results from the PHDS-PLUS survey reveal areas where state Medicaid agencies can improve the health of low-income young children enrolled in Medicaid. While recent expansions in benefit coverage for children are critical, findings suggest that this access to coverage is not sufficient to ensure that children receive a basic level of preventive and developmental services.

- State Medicaid agencies can implement policies to monitor and improve quality of care for young children. Preventive and developmental services are the most basic aspects of health care for all children. State Medicaid agencies are in the position to routinely monitor the care that children receive, set performance expectations for health plans and providers, and work collaboratively with both plans and providers in efforts to improve the care that is delivered.
- States can influence key factors that support quality care. Medicaid agencies can promote quality preventive and developmental services for young children through:
 - The availability and distribution of pediatric clinicians and community-based developmental services;
 - Reimbursement policies and the use of performance incentives for health plans and pediatric clinicians; and
 - Strategies to inform parents about their child's need for preventive and developmental services.