



Written Testimony
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On Behalf of March of Dimes
Before New York State Insurance Department
Public Forum on Health Insurance Exchange
Monday, May 16, 2011
Albany, New York

Distinguished members of the panel:

On behalf of the 3 million volunteers and 1400 staff members of the March of Dimes, thank you for you for hosting this public forum to discuss the important issue of the state's development of the Health Insurance Exchange.

As you know, the March of Dimes is a national voluntary health agency founded in 1938 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to support research and services related to polio. Today, the Foundation works to improve the health of women, infants and children by preventing birth defects, premature birth and infant mortality through research, community services, education and advocacy. The March of Dimes is a unique partnership of scientists, clinicians, parents, members of the business community and other volunteers affiliated with 51 chapters and 213 divisions in every state, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

It has been a long standing March of Dimes policy that every woman of childbearing age, infant and child have access to comprehensive affordable health insurance. According to the Institute of Medicine (IOM), health insurance status is the most important factor in determining whether a child receives health services when they are needed. In addition, the IOM has also found that health insurance plays a key role in access to maternity care for pregnant women. A Health Insurance Exchange is one important tool that can help address the health insurance needs of women of child bearing age, infants and children.

New York is in the process of developing the state's Health Insurance Exchange that will make significant changes to the process by which certain consumers will purchase their health insurance and how individuals eligible for publically funded programs are enrolled. March of Dimes urges the Legislature and Governor to make certain the Exchange provides women and children with access to quality and affordable health care coverage. As such, the March of Dimes requests that the issues listed below be addressed as the Exchange is being established.

- The March of Dimes believes the governing board of the Exchange should include representatives with expertise in the area of maternal and child health in order to address the unique insurance needs of pregnant women, infants and children. Should the State to opt for the creation of an Advisory Council, maternal and child health experts should also be included among the stakeholders.

- The exchange should coordinate with Medicaid and Child Health Plus (CHP) to ensure that individuals are enrolled in the programs for which they are eligible and that no person falls through the cracks. This is particularly important for children in families whose annual income fluctuations may shift their source of coverage from year to year, and for families in which different members are eligible for different sources of coverage.
- Plans offered in the Exchange, should collect and report on the same pediatric and perinatal quality performance measures used by New York’s Medicaid, CHP and commercial plans. This will expand the state’s data set, allow for comparisons of quality and allow policymakers to identify best practices and areas of improvements.
- There should be a robust “navigator” support system containing experts in the area of maternal child health issues to facilitate enrollment.
- Materials regarding health plan options should clearly identify items pertinent to women of child bearing age, infants, and children (e.g. family planning, maternity care, pediatric benefits, and dependent coverage), to be included on the Exchange.
- Hotline personnel should have information relevant to maternal and child health issues.

On behalf of the March of Dimes, we appreciate the opportunity to present this testimony.