

03-06

# **STATEMENT OF POLICY Coverage for Preventive Services**

### **Policy**

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) supports the provision of comprehensive preventive coverage by all public and private health insurers and healthcare plans. These benefits include screening and counseling in primary care settings, prevention of dental caries in young children, and tobacco-cessation counseling. NACCHO urges the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, state and local governments, and private insurance health plans to retain or increase preventive services consistent with the recommendations of the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF). NACCHO supports the addition by Congress of the word "prevention" into the Medicare-enabling legislation so that it would authorize coverage of items or services that are "reasonable and necessary for the *prevention*, diagnosis, or treatment of illness or injury." NACCHO continues to support public and private initiatives at the federal, state, and local levels that aim to continue or increase preventive services offered, increase access to these services, and reduce disparities in access to and use of preventive services.

## **Justification**

It is crucial to cover preventive services for all populations; many future medical problems and diseases can be prevented if adequate coverage for these preventive services is provided. In fact, 50 percent of all medical problems and diseases are associated with modifiable health risk factors. The majority of these preventable diseases can be addressed and reduced through preventive services that reduce injury and save thousands of lives per year.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, research has demonstrated that coverage of USPSTF-recommended preventive services can reduce absenteeism, increase productivity, and potentially moderate future healthcare cost increases because many illnesses and injuries are preventable.<sup>3</sup>

If available, health insurance, originally designed to cover care for catastrophic illness, greatly varies as a third-party payment for preventive services. Medicare coverage policy, which sets a standard followed by many other payers, is a case in point. Medicare covers only a small number of USPSTF-recommended services, including influenza and pneumococcal immunization, screening for osteoporosis and breast and colorectal cancer, and tobacco-cessation counseling. A specific act of Congress required Medicare to pay for those services. To promote prevention and treatment as equally important parts of medical care, Congress should give the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services clear authority to cover all USPSTF-recommended preventive services.

Currently, many recommended preventive services are provided at lower rates to people who are low income, less educated, or members of racial and ethnic minorities. These populations are at higher risk for some preventable illnesses, including cancers, heart disease, stroke, most infectious diseases, and both intentional and unintentional injuries.<sup>5</sup>



However, many preventive services currently covered by Medicaid, Medicare, and private healthcare insurance plans are inconsistent among states. State Medicaid and Medicare policies vary in which USPSTF-recommendations they cover. To ensure access to quality care, states' Medicaid coverage should include all USPSTF-recommended preventive services. Without such inclusion, program beneficiaries will lose access to such services as immunizations, screening for sexually transmitted infections and chronic diseases and other preventive health services, which affects their health status. Some states are cutting Medicaid preventive services such as dental and vision. Changes in public policies relating to Medicaid, Medicare, and private insurance that are being considered can result in a decline in preventive services. Any changes to policies need to maintain an emphasis on prevention, ultimately improving health outcomes and saving money.

#### Record of Action

Proposed by Community Health and Prevention Advisory Committee Adopted by NACCHO Board of Directors September 9, 2003 Updated January 2008

#### References

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- <sup>3</sup> Society for Human Resource Management. (2002). *The importance of prevention in reducing employee health care costs: Lessons from the HERO Study*. Retrieved from <a href="https://www.shrm.org">www.shrm.org</a>
- <sup>4</sup> Davis, R. (October 22–29, 2007). Delivering an ounce (or more) of prevention in your office. *American Medical News*.
- <sup>5</sup> Partnerships for Prevention. (2003). *Preventive services: Helping employers expand Coverage*. (2003). Retrieved from www.prevent.org/publications/Preventive\_Services\_Helping\_Employers\_Expand\_Coverage.pdf.
- <sup>6</sup> American Public Health Association. (August 2005). *Medicaid, prevention and public health: Invest today for a healthier tomorrow*, .
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