

# NBCH action brief

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## The Importance of Supporting Child Health

In 2010, roughly one quarter of the U.S. population was under the age of 18.<sup>1</sup> Considering that over half (55%) of this population is covered by employer-sponsored health insurance, it is critically important for employers to focus on wellness and prevention initiatives not only for adult workers but also for dependent children.<sup>2</sup> This Action Brief outlines the business case for improved child health as well as how health plans are supporting the health of children based on data from eValue8™—a resource used by purchasers to assess health plan performance. Lastly, the brief offers evidence-based resources and actions employers can take to implement a family health strategy in the workplace.

### WHAT'S THE ISSUE?

**IN 2010, \$88 BILLION WERE SPENT ON CHILD HEALTH CARE, UP NEARLY 12% COMPARED TO 2007 AND AT A HIGHER GROWTH RATE THAN FOR ADULTS.<sup>3</sup>**

#### INFANTS & TODDLERS

- ▶ In 2006, more than one in ten (13%) live births in the U.S. were preterm (infants born before 37 weeks of pregnancy).<sup>4</sup>
  - Preterm babies have a higher risk of infant mortality as well as life-long morbidity, including breathing and intestinal problems; bleeding in the brain; intellectual disabilities; behavioral issues; and vision and hearing loss.<sup>5</sup>
- ▶ Toddlers under 3 years of age make up 17% of the covered child population but disproportionately represent nearly one third (33%) of total health care dollars spent.<sup>6</sup>

#### CHILDREN

- ▶ Childhood obesity is the number one health concern among parents in the United States.<sup>7</sup>
  - Two out of ten (20%) children ages 6–11 are obese, a figure that has tripled in the last 30 years.<sup>8</sup>
  - The financial impact of childhood obesity tips the scales at a staggering \$3 billion annually.<sup>9</sup>

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### WHY EMPLOYERS SHOULD CARE

While children may not be your employees, they are dependents who impact your health care bottom line, and the health of dependent children can negatively affect employee productivity.<sup>14</sup> For example, the 9% of children who suffer from asthma<sup>15</sup> accumulate a total of 6.3 million school absence days per year, accounting for \$719 million in lost productivity for parents.<sup>16</sup> Employers that make investments in improving health through preventive services help to foster a healthier, more productive workforce which broadly benefits individuals, the business itself, and the community at large.<sup>17</sup>

### MEASURING UP

**eValue 8 IS A RESOURCE USED BY PURHASERS TO ASSESS HEALTH PLAN PERFORMANCE IN THE MANAGEMENT AND IMPROVEMENT OF HEALTH AND THE VALUE OF HEALTH CARE SERVICES. THE BELOW 2011 RESULTS HIGHLIGHT CHILD HEALTH TRENDS FROM PARTICIPATING PLANS.**

- ▶ Newborn screenings identify harmful or potentially fatal conditions not apparent at birth. 85% of plans cover screenings for newborns for all 29 disorders endorsed by March of Dimes and the American Academy of Pediatrics, and 84% cover screenings for an additional 25 conditions recommended by March of Dimes and the American College of Medical Genetics.
- ▶ Comprehensive and timely screenings are critical opportunities for health promotion, prevention, and care. 79% of children receive well child visits in the first 15 months; 73% receive well child visits at ages 3 through 6; and nearly 41% receive well care visits in adolescence.
- ▶ Immunizations are a critical component to prevention, yet nearly half (43%) of responding plans do not provide member-specific reminders for childhood immunizations, and while all plans (100%) provide general education to members on childhood immunization, less than 7% provide community/ employer immunization events.
- ▶ Obese children and adolescents are at greater risk for developing chronic conditions, yet less than half (40%) of plans educate providers about the importance of screening children for obesity.
- ▶ Among plans offering specific obesity counseling strategies, only half the HMO plans and less than one in three PPO plans have counseling for physical activity (50.6% HMO and 29% PPO); and even fewer have counseling for nutrition (42% HMO and 26.7% PPO).

## WHAT'S THE ISSUE? CONTINUED

### ADOLESCENTS & TEENS

- ▶ Reports show teens with the highest rate of per capita spending growth (22% between 2007–2010).<sup>10</sup>
  - A multitude of societal and behavioral influences can adversely affect adolescents and teens leading to alcohol, tobacco, and drug use; unplanned pregnancy; STDs; unintentional injuries; and obesity.<sup>11</sup>

### YOUNG ADULTS

- ▶ The employer cost estimate for coverage of young adult dependents is \$3,380.<sup>12</sup>
  - As a result of health care reform the number of young adults aged 19 to 25 covered as dependents under employer-sponsored health care increased by nearly 1 million between 2009 and 2010.<sup>13</sup>

## TAKE ACTION

### ACTION ITEM #1: Prevention, Prevention, Prevention!

- ▶ Under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, plans are required to cover certain recommended preventive services, including recommendations from Bright Futures—comprehensive prevention guidelines and resources for infants, children, and adolescents.
- ▶ Ensure that your employee population is aware of wellness visit recommendations as an important means to preventive care.
- ▶ Immunizations are a safe and effective way to keep your family safe. Encourage your employees and their dependents to stay up to date on recommended immunizations.

### ACTION ITEM #2: Hold Your Health Plan Accountable

- ▶ Discuss with your health plan the capability to monitor and report preterm births, developmental screenings, and well-child visits.
- ▶ Partner with your plan to develop benefit design incentives for employees and dependents to encourage the use of preventive services such as immunizations, the proper treatment of chronic conditions such as asthma and pre-diabetes, and the use of high performing pregnancy care centers and providers.

### ACTION ITEM #3: Assess, Support, and Engage Your Workforce

- ▶ Assess your dependent population, including demographics data and use this information to tailor your family health strategy accordingly.

- ▶ Support your employees and their dependents with child health resources as part of a larger wellness program. CDC provides a wealth of tools pertaining to the health of infants, children, and teens, and many wellness topics can benefit the entire family.
- ▶ Engage your employees in a variety of different ways (e.g., web, print, newsletter, social media, face to face) to ensure that they get the information they need. Health care communication is a critical—and sometimes overlooked—component to effective health care improvement efforts.

### ACTION ITEM #4: Consider Joining Your Local Business Health Care Coalition

- ▶ The coalition movement can be a vehicle for meaningful change at the local level. Many coalitions leverage the voice and power of their employer purchaser members, often through public-private partnerships, by serving as community leaders working to advance change.
- ▶ In fact, some coalitions are already involved in maternal and child health care improvement efforts and can likely support your interests in assessing and implementing a workplace family health strategy. The Florida Health Care Coalition's 'Open Airways' program is a good example of employers engaging the public sector (and others) through an employer-led coalition.

## ENDNOTES

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