

Medicaid Well-Child Visits

Comprehensive Exam Guidelines Call for Mental Health Screening

The Medicaid Early and Periodic, Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment (EPSDT) benefit

■ Congress created the EPSDT benefit in 1967 to respond to high rates of preventable illness in children. This benefit outlines required components of a comprehensive Medicaid well-child visit, including a mental health screen, and provides for coverage of any medically necessary follow-up care.

■ The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) *State Medicaid Manual* provides further guidance on the mental health screen component:

- **‘for adolescents, the orientation should encompass such areas of special concern as potential presence of learning disabilities, peer relations, psychological / psychiatric problems, and vocational skills.’**

■ Federal statutes and regulations have clearly established that the EPSDT well-child visit is to be made available to all beneficiaries at intervals meeting reasonable standards of medical practice, as determined by the state after consultation with medical organizations.

- **The consensus recommendation of leading medical professional groups is to provide annual well-visits to youth 10 through 20 years of age.**

Many eligible youth do not receive annual Medicaid well-child visits

■ The EPSDT benefit is a required component of state Medicaid programs, and states are required to report on the rate at which eligible youth receive EPSDT screening and services.

■ In 2007, CMS reports show that more than 23 million young people were eligible for a Medicaid well-child visit, but just 13.3 million well-child screenings took place.

■ CMS reports for 2007 also show that just 15 states had participation rates greater than 50 percent, and 6 states had participation rates of less than 25 percent.

Among adolescents and teens – the ages when the first signs of mental illness often appear – the national participation rate for Medicaid well-child visits was just 39 percent in 2007.

■ Despite consensus guidelines calling for coverage of annual well-child visits for adolescents, several states continue to cover fewer screenings.

Few receive mental health screening as part of the Medicaid well-child visit

Among youth who do receive a well visit, most are not offered all recommended preventive services.

■ CMS does not currently require states to report on the number of mental health screenings provided at well visits, but available data indicate that most youth are not offered this service.

■ A 2010 report from the Department of Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General found that nearly 60 percent of children across nine states who attended a Medicaid well-child visit were not offered a complete screening.

■ One survey of state Medicaid programs found that 23 states did not include a single prompt or question addressing mental health in their EPSDT tools for primary care providers (Semansky et al. 2003).

■ According to a 2001 report from the Government Accountability Office, an external quality review of one state Medicaid program concluded that just 27 percent of youth received a mental health screen.

■ Concrete steps can be taken to improve access to this service. Massachusetts’ Medicaid program has increased mental health screening rates from just 15 percent in 2008 to more than 70 percent in 2010.

