

March Spring 2005 of Dimes

Advocacy Update *from the Office of Government Affairs*



March of Dimes Has Mixed Reaction to the Administration's FY 06 Budget Proposal

On February 7, the Administration released its proposed 2006 federal budget blueprint. This is the first step in a long deliberatory process during which Congress will debate and decide upon federal funding levels for the coming fiscal year. Dr. Jennifer Howse, president of the March of Dimes, voiced several concerns as well as mentioning some positive aspects of the Administration's budget recommendations.

In brief, the budget proposal opens the door to the elimination of critical health services for women, infants, and children. In particular, the March of Dimes is deeply concerned about

features of the document that suggest the Administration will work with states to narrow Medicaid benefits for these at risk groups.

Although the Administration proposes increased funding for community health centers, the Medicaid changes could undermine the viability of these centers, making access to care more difficult for women and children. Nationally, Medicaid constitutes more than half of community health center funding.

While the Administration's budget proposal recognizes the importance of investing in research through the National Institutes of Health

(NIH), the recommended increase of less than 1% will make it very difficult, if not impossible, to fund scientific investigations to address a broad array of critical research questions concerning maternal and newborn disease and disability.

The Administration also proposes eliminating all funding earmarked for newborn screening. Every day about 11,000 babies are born in the United States, two-thirds of whom are born in states that do not require the full panel of simple and lifesaving tests recommended by the March of Dimes. Increased federal support for these state programs is central to the future health of the nation's children.



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Budget, cont.

On a positive note, the Foundation is pleased that the Administration's budget proposal includes a series of tax provisions designed to encourage charitable giving. Tax incentives hold promise as a stimulus for increasing the resources that charities, including the March of Dimes, can devote to strengthening communities and improving the health of children and families.

FDA Supports March of Dimes Position on Lovastatins

On January 14, 2005 the FDA Nonprescription Drugs and Endocrinologic Advisory and Metabolic Drugs Advisory Committees rejected, by a vote of 20 to 3, an application from Merck & Co., Inc., a global pharmaceutical company, to sell Mevacor over-the-counter (OTC). Mevacor is a cholesterol-lowering statin.

Nancy Green, M.D., Medical Director of the March of Dimes, issued a statement about the application. Dr. Green said, "The March of Dimes is very concerned about the prospect of over-the-counter status for Mevacor (lovastatin). As a Category X drug, lovastatin use is contraindicated in pregnancy. Some published data suggest that lovastatin may be teratogenic. Changing lovastatin to OTC would reduce the ability

of pregnant women to receive appropriate medical counseling on the potential risks of fetal exposure to this drug. No drug should be permitted to go from prescription to OTC until adequate data are available regarding the teratogenic safety or risk of use in human pregnancy, so that the FDA may make informed decisions about the safety of its availability, as well as proper package labeling."

Merck's previous application for OTC status for Mevacor was rejected in 2000.

March of Dimes Announces 2005 Public Affairs Grants

Members of the National Public Affairs Committee and the Office of Government Affairs congratulate MOD Chapters that have been awarded 2005 Public Affairs grants. This year, 33 Chapters – including 3 first time applicants — will be funded. Grants will be used to support contracts with consultants who work with Chapter volunteers and staff to advance the Foundation's advocacy agenda. Chapter recipients are: **Northern Region**-Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Wisconsin.

Southern Region-Alabama, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Missouri, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. **Western Region**-Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Oklahoma, Utah, and Texas.



Dr. Jennifer Howse, president of the March of Dimes and Governor Jim Doyle (D) of Wisconsin

Dr. Howse, visiting the Wisconsin Chapter, met with Governor Doyle in January at the Madison WalkAmerica kickoff. Governor Doyle has made expanding access to health care a priority of his administration.

Governors Speak at Lobby Days

On February 1, Governor Ernie Fletcher (R) of Kentucky announced that he would fund expansion of Kentucky's newborn screening program to meet March of Dimes Standards. Fletcher made the announcement at a Chapter press conference called to highlight the importance of newborn screening. Senator Julie Denton (R) and Representative Kathy Stein (D), who are sponsoring newborn screening expansion bills, spoke about the bipartisan effort being undertaken on behalf of Kentucky's newborns.

In Kentucky currently infants are screened for 4 conditions but Governor Fletcher said his proposed

funding would allow the state to screen for 29 disorders. The Governor repeated his commitment to expand newborn screening that evening in his State of the Commonwealth address, where he also mentioned the March of Dimes.

On February 15, Governor Phil Bredesen (D) of Tennessee spoke at the State Chapter's legislative reception. In his remarks, the Governor announced that he would work to protect and improve coverage for pregnant women and children as TennCare, the state's Medicaid/SCHIP program, undergoes reform.

Specifically, Governor Bredesen said that his reform plan would retain full coverage for all children enrolled in the program, that prenatal vitamins and folic acid supplements would be covered, and that all pregnancy-related physician visits would count only once against any visit limits.

109th Congress: A Little Old and A Little New

There are new faces and familiar faces among the leadership of Congressional Committees key to furthering the March of Dimes mission agenda. Senator Mike Enzi (R-WY) will chair the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee. Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA) will continue as ranking member. Former HELP chairman Judd Gregg (R-NH) will now lead the Budget Committee. The Senate Appropriations Committee also has a new chairman, Senator Thad Cochran (R-MS). Senator Robert Bryd (D-WV) will continue as ranking member. The Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,

Health and Human Services, and Education will continue to have Senator Arlen Specter (R-PA) as chair and Tom Harkin (D-IA) as ranking member.

On the House side, the Energy and Commerce Committee, which has jurisdiction over NIH, CDC, HRSA and other federal public health agencies, will be chaired by Rep. Joe Barton (R-TX). Representative John Dingell (D-MI) will continue as ranking member. The Subcommittee on Health will have a new chairman, Representative Nathan Deal (R-GA), who replaces Representative Michael Bilirakis (R-FL).

Representative Sherrod Brown (D-OH) will continue as ranking member. The House Appropriations Committee has a new chairman, Representative Jerry Lewis (R-CA). Representative David Obey (D-WI) will continue as ranking member. The House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education will continue to have Representatives Ralph Regula (R-OH) and David Obey (D-WI) as chairman and ranking member, respectively.

A complete list of the committee rosters will be included in the March of Dimes 109th Congress Congressional Directory, which is scheduled to be sent to Chapters and Divisions in April.

U.S. Surgeon General and March of Dimes Join Forces to Bring Attention to Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

On February 21, speaking at a news conference before an audience of doctors, nurses, and reporters at Sharp Mary Birch Hospital for Women in San Diego, Dr. Richard Carmona, U.S. Surgeon General, warned pregnant women and women who may become pregnant to abstain from alcohol consumption. The Surgeon General also issued an advisory on alcohol use during pregnancy.

The March of Dimes issued a statement at the news conference in which medical director Dr. Nancy S. Green, M.D. echoed the Surgeon

General's warning. She said, "For many years now the March of Dimes has said there is no 'safe' level of alcohol use for pregnant women."

The news conference was held in conjunction with the Discovery Health Channel's Birthday Live!, which broadcast live births from hospitals in San Diego, California, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and Silver Spring, Maryland.

The *Advocacy Update* delivers legislative news about March of Dimes issues on a quarterly basis.

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