

March of Dimes

October 2003

Advocacy Update *from the Office of Government Affairs*



Prematurity Bills Introduced In Congress

The March of Dimes Office of Government Affairs worked collaboratively with Members of Congress to develop two bills introduced during the Foundation's National Public Affairs meeting in Washington, DC. The first measure, the "Prematurity Research Expansion and Education for Mothers who deliver Infants Early" (PREEMIE Act) was introduced by Senators Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.) and Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.) and by Representatives Fred Upton (R-Mich.) and Anna Eshoo (D-Calif.). This proposal, if enacted, would authorize expansion of research into the causes and prevention of prematurity and would also increase federal support for education and services related to prematurity. The second bill the "Prevent Prema-

turity and Improve Child Health Act of 2003" was introduced by Senators Blanche Lincoln (D-Ark.) and Richard Lugar (R-Ind.) and by Representen-

maternity services for low-income pregnant women and would strengthen health coverage for children with special health care needs.

The House and Senate version of both bills have bipartisan co-sponsorship.

On Thursday, October 16, Senators Alexander and Dodd—two of the "PREEMIE Act" sponsors—held a press conference at which Dr. Jennifer L. Howse, March of Dimes president, and the Hendersons, March of Dimes 2003 National Ambassador Family, spoke. "Prema-

ture birth is one of the most com-



tative Diana DeGette (D-Colo.). If enacted, this measure would provide states increased flexibility and federal resources to improve and expand

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VLC Hears from Surgeon General and Congressional Leaders

March of Dimes volunteers and staff attending the Foundation's 2003 Volunteer Leadership Conference heard from US Surgeon General Richard Carmona and saw videotaped messages from Senate Majority Leader Frist and Senate Democratic Leader Daschle. At the afternoon plenary session held on Friday, October 17, Dr. Richard H. Carmona, US Surgeon General delivered a speech in which he stated that prematurity is "...a growing public health problem that we must address." He also said, "we must redouble our efforts to find causes of preterm labor." Dr. Carmona discussed the importance of research saying, "Through science and education, we have within our reach the hope of ending

preterm labor."

In his videotaped remarks Senator Frist told VLC attendees that "the March of Dimes has been a major force in promoting children's health." And he noted that the volunteers and staff of the March of Dimes "...continue to demonstrate your commitment to these issues with the launch of a 5-year \$75 million campaign preventing prematurity." Senator Frist expressed his concern about the problem of prematurity, saying that "the growing number of premature births is alarming. We must do more to determine why this rate is so high." He committed his support to "... increase resources for biomedical re-



search including funding for prematurity."

Senator Daschle also told attendees that their "... efforts are recognized anddeeply appreciated on Capitol Hill and throughout our government." Senator Daschle stated that prematurity "... is a serious public health problem that merits attention by both private organizations and the government." He committed to help "... increase federal support of biomedical research including funding for critical work to identify causes of prematurity."

Chapters Receive Awards for Public Affairs Successes

Anna E. Roosevelt, Trustee and Chair of the National Public Affairs committee, and March of Dimes President Dr. Jennifer L. Howse, described 2002 as a "banner year" for Public Affairs. Chapters were given merit awards for successfully completing initiatives that helped advance the three foundation-wide advocacy issue priorities—(1) improving access to health coverage; (2) creating or enhancing birth defects surveillance systems; and (3) expanding newborn screening to meet or exceed the March of Dimes recommendation that all babies have access to at least 10 'core' tests. In addition, Chapters were lauded for effective use of the media in advocacy, and for creative integration of advocacy and

fundraising.

In the issue category pertaining to *Access to Health Coverage*, eight Chapters led advocacy initiatives designed to protect Medicaid and SCHIP coverage for women, infants and children from proposed state budget cuts. In addition, a handful of Chapters led advocacy initiatives to expand coverage for these populations. Awards were given to the following Chapters: Alaska, Colorado, Georgia, Louisiana, Greater Missouri, Greater New York, Upstate New York, and Oklahoma.

During 2002, twelve Chapters had led the advocacy effort to establish, improve or fund a *Birth Defects Surveillance System* in their state. The Chapters recognized for their work included: Northern and South-

ern California, Hawaii, Illinois, Greater Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Vermont, and West Virginia.

Chapters receiving awards in the *Newborn Screening* category used advocacy to move state legislation or regulations to expand their state's newborn screening program. Chapters receiving awards were: Illinois, Indiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Greater and Upstate New York, Greater Oregon, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Louisiana, Mississippi, Greater Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Virginia, National Capital Area,

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New Census Data on Uninsured Women and Children

Each year the March of Dimes Office of Government Affairs commissions the U.S. Census Bureau to prepare the most recent data nationally and by state on the health insurance status of women of childbearing age (15-44) and children under age 19.

It is important to note that these new data supercede the information used previously by the March of Dimes. This includes information on the uninsured from the *Data Book for Policy Makers, 2003* and Perinatal Profiles.

National Findings

The number of uninsured women of childbearing age (15-44) continued to rise in 2002, increas-

ing by more than 650,000 to 12.1 million. Nearly one in five women of childbearing age was uninsured in 2002. Hispanic women in this age group were more than 2.5 times as likely as non-Hispanic whites to be uninsured. Among Hispanics, Mexican and Central/South American women were uninsured at the highest rates.

The number of uninsured children under age 19 showed no improvement between 2001 and 2002. In 2002, 9.3 million of the nation's 77.3 million children under 19 were uninsured. Hispanic children were nearly three times as likely as non-Hispanic whites to be uninsured and as with Hispanic women of child-

bearing age, among Hispanic children, Mexicans and Central/South Americans were uninsured at the highest rate.

State Findings

The rates of uninsured vary by state. For example, New Mexico and Texas had the highest average rates of uninsured for women of childbearing age over the 2000-2002 period, while Wisconsin and Minnesota had the lowest. For children under age 19, Texas and Nevada had the highest rates, and Vermont and Rhode Island had the lowest. The complete chart by state can be found on the March of Dimes web site at marchofdimes.com/files/census2003.pdf.

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Washington, and West Virginia.

Seventeen Chapters were recognized in the fourth category, *Effective Use of Media Coverage to Advance an Advocacy Initiative*. These Chapters secured media coverage mentioning the March of Dimes. The Chapters recognized were: Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Greater Kansas, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Mississippi, North Carolina, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, and West Virginia.

In the final category, *Effective Integration of Public Affairs and Fundraising*, twenty five Chapters received awards for using WalkAmerica to secure signatures on petitions supportive of the "Charity Aid, Recovery and Empower-

ment Act," or for showcasing advocacy initiatives at fundraising events. Chapters receiving awards in this category were: Alaska, Arizona, Florida, Greater and Upstate New York, Iowa, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Dakota, Northern and Southern California, Oklahoma, Puerto Rico, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.

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mon, serious and costly problems facing America's infants, responsible for about half of all infant hospitalization charges," said Dr. Howse at the Capitol Hill press conference. The next step in moving this

bill forward will be to set a date for a hearing on the bill.

March of Dimes volunteers and staff in Washington, DC for the Public Affairs Conference and the Volunteer Leadership Conference spent the afternoon of October 16 on Capitol Hill making more than 300 visits to Members of Congress to urge support of both bills. Initial reports from these visits confirm that there is a significant amount of interest in the problem of preterm birth and that the number of bill co-sponsors will grow as a result of Chapter visits. See future issues of the Advocacy Update for information on whether your Representative or Senator has joined the list of bill co-sponsorship.

2003 National Public Affairs Leadership Award

During the March of Dimes National Public Affairs Conference held October 14-16 in Washington, DC, fifteen Members of Congress were presented the *March of Dimes 2003 Public Affairs Leadership Award*. In its inaugural year, this award recognizes outstanding national leadership by Members of Congress and the Executive Branch in advancing maternal and child health and not-for-profit public policy. The awards were presented on behalf of the Foundation by volunteers and staff from the Members' home state who were in Washington for the National Public Affairs

Conference.

Recipients of the first Leadership awards were Rep. Michael Bilirakis (R-Fla.), Sen. Jeff Bingaman (D-N.M.), Sen. Christopher Bond (R-Mo.), Rep. Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio), Sen. Tom Daschle (D-S.D.), Sen. Mike DeWine (R-Ohio), Rep. John Dingell (D-Mich.), Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.), Sen. William Frist (R-Tenn.), Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.), Sen. Trent Lott (R-Miss.), Rep. Nita Lowey (D-N.Y.), Sen. Richard Lugar (R-Ind.), Rep. Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-Calif.), and Sen. Rick Santorum (R-Penn.).

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

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