

March Fall of Dimes 2005

Advocacy Update *from the Office of Government Affairs*



National Youth Conference Attendees Dialogue With Federal Policymakers

On July 29, 2005 students attending the 2005 National Youth Conference had a “Dialogue With Federal Policymakers” in the Hart Senate Office Building in Washington, D.C.

Senators Richard Lugar (R IN) and Kit Bond (R MO) spoke to the group about the importance of



National Youth Conference Attendees in front of the U.S. Capitol

advocacy and the work they do with the March of Dimes. Senator Rick Santorum (R PA) also stopped by for a visit and a picture with conference participants from Pennsylvania.

Following the senators, three experienced participants in the legislative process spoke and then answered questions.

Tamera Stanton Luzzatto, Chief of Staff to Senator Hillary Clinton (D NY), discussed the work of Senate offices and also provided insight into her career, sharing ideas with the students about how they might approach a career in public service. Alexia Levison Poe, Communications Director to Senator Lamar Alexander (R TN), spoke about the central role of the media in advancing legislative initiatives. Lyle B. Dennis, partner in Cavarocchi-Ruscio-Dennis

Associates, spoke about the role of the lobbyist in working with members of Congress on various issues, including federal support of biomedical research.



2005 National Ambassador Visits President George W. Bush at the White House, July 27, 2005



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2004 Chapter of the Year Winners Announced

The 2004 Chapter of the Year Award for Public Affairs was presented to Kansas in the small chapter category and to California and Florida, who tied for the award in the large chapter category.

Kansas Chapter volunteers and staff led two advocacy campaigns in 2004. The first resulted in legislation authorizing a state-wide Birth Defects Surveillance program and the second secured funding for a smoking cessation program for women who are pregnant or contemplating pregnancy. There's an important postscript to this story. It was the legislator whom the March of Dimes recruited to sponsor the Birth Defects Surveillance bill who asked the Chapter to lead the smoking cessation initiative.

In 2004, California Chapter volunteers and staff spearheaded the advocacy effort to enact legislation authorizing newborn screening for over 40 conditions. As its second initiative, the Chapter deflected proposed budget cuts to a number of health programs, including insurance coverage for children through Healthy Families, California's S-CHIP program and the Children's Services Program, through which children with special health needs are cared for.

In 2004, Florida Chapter volunteers and staff drove the advocacy campaign to expand and fund newborn screening. When fully implemented, this expansion will move the state from screening newborns for 5 metabolic conditions to screening for 28. For their second initiative, volunteers and

staff led the advocacy effort to restore Medicaid eligibility for pregnant women with incomes below 185% of the Federal Poverty Level (\$34,873 for a family of 4 in 2004). Had the Chapter not succeeded, an estimated 15,000 pregnant women would have lost their health insurance.

Lack of Health Insurance Remains a Major Problem for Women and Children

The March of Dimes each year commissions the U.S. Census Bureau to prepare a series of tables that show 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. Lack of health insurance continues to be a major problem for these groups according to recently released data for 2004, now available on the March of Dimes website and on *dimension*.

One in five women of childbearing age (12.7 million) was uninsured in 2004 accounting for 28% of all uninsured Americans. In 2004, 9 million (11.6%) of the nation's 78 million children under 19 were uninsured. Neither group showed improvement over 2003.

The data also confirmed that the number who lack health insurance differs among ethnic groups.

39% of Hispanic women in this age group were uninsured compared with 15% of whites. Native American (32%), African-American (25%) and Asian/Pacific Islander women (19%) were also more likely than whites to be uninsured. Hispanic children were nearly three times as likely as non-Hispanic whites to be uninsured. Native American, African-American and Asian children were also more likely than whites to be uninsured.

According to the data, Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (S-CHIP) remain critical sources of health insurance for children, covering 26% of those under age 19 in 2004.

The original source of this data is the *U.S. Census Bureau, 2005 Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement*.

2006 Public Affairs Issues and Advocacy Priorities Set

The March of Dimes Public Affairs Issues and Advocacy Priorities for 2006 are listed on page 3. The list was developed under the guidance of the National Public Affairs Committee of the Board of Trustees. By identifying Foundation-wide advocacy priorities the March of Dimes is better able to speak with one voice about the Foundation's legislative and regulatory agenda.

Chapters and the Office of Government Affairs use this document to help set annual advocacy objectives. Advancing Foundation-wide advocacy priorities helps Chapters qualify for several awards, including chapter of the year and the Public Affairs portion of the President's Team Award.

Public Policy Issues and Year 2006 Advocacy Priorities

The March of Dimes Public Affairs agenda focuses on public policies and programs that relate to the Foundation's mission — improving the health of infants and children by preventing birth defects, premature birth and infant mortality — and on issues that pertain to non-profit organizations. Public affairs supports the March of Dimes priority to reduce racial and ethnic health disparities. Issues are organized into the four general categories listed below (specific examples are given for each category). A star in the left margin indicates that the issue is a Foundation-wide advocacy priority for the year 2006. Federal advocacy on any of the issues list may also require participation by chapters.

I. ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE FOR WOMEN OF CHILDBEARING AGE, INFANTS, AND CHILDREN

- * Federal and state initiatives to expand newborn screening and treatment.
- * Federal and state policies regarding Medicaid, the State Children's Health Insurance (SCHIP) and other publicly-supported coverage and subsidies to protect and improve access to health care.
- Standards of care for mothers and children enrolled in health plans.
- Standards to protect patient privacy and prohibit genetic discrimination.
- Federal and state initiatives to improve maternal and child health care.
- Initiatives to improve the health of preterm and low birthweight infants and children living with birth defects.

II. RESEARCH TO PREVENT PREMATURITY, BIRTH DEFECTS AND INFANT MORTALITY

- * Birth defects surveillance, research and prevention programs at the state, federal, and international level.
- Research funded by the National Institutes of Health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and other Federal agencies to increase knowledge relating to the prevention of birth defects, prematurity and infant mortality.

III. PREVENTION AND TREATMENT PROGRAMS TO IMPROVE MATERNAL, INFANT, AND CHILD HEALTH

- * Smoking prevention and cessation programs affecting women of childbearing age and children.
- Substance abuse prevention and treatment for pregnant women and their infants.
- Programs to improve prematurity risk detection and prevent preterm births.
- Food and nutrition education programs such as WIC - Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children.
- Preconception programs and services including increased use of folic acid.
- Programs to reduce racial and ethnic disparities in health care.
- Programs to immunize infants and children, research to develop new vaccines, and efforts to eradicate polio worldwide.
- Programs to reduce exposure to environmental and reproductive hazards associated with birth defects.

IV. INSTITUTIONAL CONCERNS FOR NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

- * Federal and state laws and regulations related to non-profit organizations.
- Postal reform and rate changes.
- Tax treatment of charitable contributions.

March of Dimes Works With Senators on Hurricane Relief Bill

On September 16, Chairman of the U.S. Senate Finance Committee Charles Grassley (R- IA) and Ranking Member Max Baucus (D-MT) introduced “The Emergency Health Care Relief Act of 2005,” (S. 1716), to extend Medicaid coverage to victims of Hurricane Katrina. If enacted, the bill would provide Medicaid coverage for 5 months for most enrollees and could be extended for another 5 months if the President chooses to do so. The March of Dimes worked with the bill sponsors to ensure that coverage for pregnant women continues for the duration of

their pregnancy plus 60 days post partum. The bill also provides 12 months continuing coverage for newborns. Pregnant women and children with family incomes below 200% of the federal poverty level (\$32,180 for a family of 3 in 2005) would qualify for coverage and the federal government would pay 100% of the cost of health services provided to hurricane survivors during the relief period.

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

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