

March Summer 2005 of Dimes

Advocacy Update *from the Office of Government Affairs*



“PREEMIE” Bills and “Start Healthy, Stay Healthy Act” Re-introduced in 109th Congress

The March of Dimes worked collaboratively with Members of Congress to develop three bills that have been re-introduced in the 109th Congress.

On April 5, the “Prematurity Research Expansion and Education for Mothers who deliver Infants Early Act” S 707 (PREEMIE Act) was re-introduced by Senators Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.) and Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.). Representatives Fred Upton (R-Mich.) and Anna Eshoo (D-Calif.) are expected to re-introduce the House version prior to the Memorial Day recess. If enacted, this bill would authorize expansion of research into the causes and prevention of prematurity and also calls for increased federal funding of education and services related to prematurity.

In addition, the “Prevent Prematurity and Improve Child Health Act of 2005” S 710, was re-introduced on April 5 by Senators Blanche Lincoln (D-Ark.), Richard Lugar (R-Ind.) and Jeff Bingaman (D-NM). Representatives Diana DeGette (D-Colo.) and Ray LaHood (R-Ill.) are expected to re-introduce the House version within the next few weeks. If enacted, this measure would provide states increased flexibility and federal funding to improve and expand maternity services for low-income pregnant women and would also improve health coverage for children with special health care needs.

The above bills are also supported by Prematurity Campaign partners the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), the

American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the Association of Women’s Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses (AWHONN).

On April 7 the “Start Healthy, Stay Healthy Act” (S. 740) was reintroduced by Senators Jeff Bingaman (D-NM) and Richard Lugar (R-Ind.). Co-sponsors were Senators Blanche Lincoln (D-Ark.), Patty Murray (D-Was.), John Kerry (D-Mass.), Maria Cantwell (D-Was.), Herbert Kohl (D-Wis.), Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ), Barbara Boxer (D-Cal.), and Jon Corzine (D-NJ). If enacted, this bill would make it possible for states to cover pregnant women under the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) without having to obtain a waiver from the US Department of Health and Human Services.



Inside

- March of Dimes Chapter News (page 2)
- Congressional Directory Sent (page 2)
- Dr. Howse Meets HHS Secretary Leavitt (page 2)
- Public Policy Advisory Council Meets (page 3)
- Federal Budget Resolution Looks for Savings in Medicaid (page 3)
- Advocacy Bits and Pieces (page 4)

March of Dimes Chapters Working to Advance Mission Agenda

March of Dimes Chapters continue to advance the Foundation's advocacy agenda.

In addition to addressing Medicaid Reform issues in many states, during the 2005 legislative session, the Colorado and Oregon Chapters led advocacy initiatives that will benefit thousands of pregnant women and children by expanding access to health coverage.

On April 25, 2005, Governor Bill Owens (R) of Colorado signed into law a bill that reinstates presumptive eligibility for pregnant women who rely on Medicaid for their health insurance. In the summer of 2004, presumptive eligibility was abolished. In the aftermath of this regulatory change, approval of

applications for Medicaid coverage took up to 5 months.

The Colorado Chapter led the initiative by working with the sponsors to develop the bill, providing testimony, placing an op-ed, and obtaining media coverage for the issue through a *Denver Post* interview with the State Public Affairs Chair.

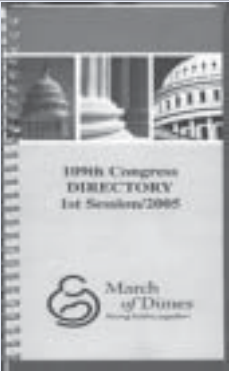
This year the Oregon Chapter has focused its advocacy efforts on making permanent the requirement that health insurance policies sold in the state must cover pregnancy and childbirth related expenses. On May 3, the bill was approved by the Senate and signed into law by Governor Ted Kulongoski (D) on May 18. The bill also ensures that all dependents enrolled in private health plans are covered for

pregnancy and childbirth related expenses. Dependent teens cannot be excluded if they are covered for other health services.

The Chapter is an active participant in the Oregon Women's Health and Wellness Alliance (OWHWA), a coalition of bi-partisan legislators, state agency representatives, non-profit organizations, and lobbyists who collaborate on initiatives designed to improve women's health. The March of Dimes led the coalition initiative by testifying before the House Health and Human Services Committee, meeting with legislators during lobby day, initiating statewide action alerts, generating support for a postcard campaign launched at the annual Team Walk luncheon for business leaders, and obtaining statewide Public Radio coverage.



March of Dimes President Dr. Jennifer L. Howse with HHS Secretary Mike Leavitt and his wife Jacalyn and House Majority Whip Roy Blunt (R-MO) and his wife Abigail at the National Capital Area Chapter's 2005 Gourmet Gala.



Copies of the March of Dimes edition of the 109th Congress Directory, 1st Session 2005 have been sent to all regional, chapter, and division offices. The Directory provides useful information on state Congressional delegations by district, and also includes maps, committee assignments and color pictures of US Senators and members of Congress as well as key telephone numbers, web sites, and the location of their district offices.

Public Policy Advisory Council Meets

The March of Dimes Public Policy Advisory Council, which provides guidance on March of Dimes public policy research and advocacy activities, met on April 30th in Washington, D.C. The 25-member Council is co-chaired by trustee Bruce Vladeck, Ph.D., who also serves as the council's liaison to the National Public Affairs Committee, and Janet Shikles, a widely respected health policy expert. The Council is made up of individuals with public policy expertise who offer a broad range of perspectives including public policy research, health care delivery, and advocacy. Several Council members have held elective office or served

as presidential or gubernatorial appointees.

Dr. Jennifer L. Howse, President of the March of Dimes, brought Council members up to date on the Foundation's mission agenda. Her presentation highlighted the advocacy elements of the Prematurity Campaign as well as the goals and objectives of the 2010 strategic plan.

Scott Berns, MD, MPH and vice president for Chapter Affairs, gave a presentation on the March of Dimes NICU Family Support Project being rolled out in chapters around the country.

The council spent much of the meeting discussing

the legislative and regulatory challenges facing Medicaid. They worked to develop advocacy guidelines and strategies for dealing with the challenges on both the state and federal levels. A guest speaker, Rodney Whitlock of the Senate Finance Committee majority staff, provided perspective on how the Committee is likely to tackle just-approved budget reconciliation instructions requiring enactment of \$10 billion in entitlement program spending reductions later this year.

Federal Budget Resolution Looks for Savings in Medicaid

On April 28 Congress approved a budget resolution setting federal spending guidelines for FY 2006. The resolution instructs the Senate Committee on Finance and the House Energy and Commerce Committee to find \$10 billion in 5 year savings from entitlement programs under their jurisdiction. Medicaid is one of the programs that is likely to be impacted.

On May 10, HHS Secretary Mike Leavitt signed a charter establishing a Medicaid Commission that is charged with developing recommendations for achieving the \$10 billion in savings as well as long term program reform. The

Commission's initial report is due by September 1.

Members of the National Governors Association are also working to develop proposals to restructure Medicaid and thereby make it possible for states to achieve significant program savings. The NGA proposal, still in draft form, is entitled "Medicaid Reform: A Comprehensive Approach". Among proposals being circulated as part of the draft are:

- Giving states broad discretion to set premiums,

co-payments, and deductibles (this section includes a requirement that family cost sharing would be limited to no more than 5 percent of total income and a proposal to allow states to impose co-payments on families with higher incomes);

- Providing protection for Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT) services by requiring that states treat any health problems discovered during clinical examinations of children under 21; and

- Creating tax credits to help individuals and small businesses buy private health insurance.

Advocacy Bits and Pieces

- The March of Dimes was a national supporter of Cover the Uninsured Week. During the week (May 1 to May 8) there were over 21,000 events held across the country. On Friday, May 6, the organizers of the week ran an ad in USA Today listing and thanking supporting organizations, including the March of Dimes.

- The Nebraska and Texas Chapters participated in Cover the Uninsured Week events. In Nebraska, the Chapter participated in a town hall meeting. The Texas Chapter participated in a YWCA sponsored press conference during the week.

- July is the scheduled release month for the next Newborn Screening Report

Card. Look for details of the Report Card in the next issue.

- The new edition of the March of Dimes Data Book for Policy makers was expected to be available by now. However, because the CDC will soon release final natality data for 2003, publication has been delayed so this timely information can be included in the new Data Book.

- OGA will have displays at the summer staff meeting in Orlando and Volunteer Leadership Conference in San Diego. Visit the displays for the latest look at what is happening in advocacy.

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

Editor:
Joseph A. Luchok

If you have questions or comments about the *Advocacy Update*, contact:

**March of Dimes
Birth Defects Foundation
Office of Government Affairs
1146 19th Street, N.W.
6th Floor
Washington, D.C. 20036
Telephone: (202) 659-1800
Fax: (202) 296-2964**

copyright © March of Dimes



Office of Government Affairs
1146 19th Street, N.W., 6th
Floor
Washington, D.C. 20036