

525 Clinton Street
Bow, NH 03304
Voice: 603-228-2830
Fax: 603-228-2464



61 Elm Street
Montpelier, VT 05602
Voice: 802-229-0002
Fax: 802-223-2336

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OP ED Submission

By: Tess Stack Kuenning, CNS, MS, RN
President/CEO, Bi-State Primary Care Association
525 Clinton Street, Bow, NH 03304
603-228-2830 x 112
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NEW MOTHERS AT RISK WITHOUT ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE COVERAGE

Over the last year, the New Hampshire Legislature has heard about the significant impact of the New Hampshire Health Protection Program on our state's opioid crisis. It is a monumental program for individuals in need of behavioral health services and in the first year of its existence, over 6,000 individuals with substance use disorder accessed those services. Community Health Centers provide services to this population on a daily basis. However, there are additional populations that benefit from this program that are also important to the future prosperity of New Hampshire. At a recent community conversation about the Health Protection Program at Manchester Community Health Center, the panel was asked which patient population is being seen more as a result of Health Protection Program coverage. The answer: new moms.

In New Hampshire, standard Medicaid coverage for pregnant women ends 60 days after giving birth. Historically, this has meant that new mothers chose to discontinue care for themselves due to the cost after losing coverage. This is not a surprising choice given the costs associated with raising a child. Since the start of the Health Protection Program, however, Community Health Centers have seen mothers return for preventive health care well after 60 days postpartum.

For women of childbearing age, continuous and comprehensive medical care is crucial to their health and wellbeing. Prevention of unwanted pregnancies has a significant health and financial impact for new mothers, but not the only one: new mothers are at risk of developing postpartum depression and other chronic illnesses. Postpartum care is also essential to helping families plan subsequent pregnancies, preventing diabetes, accessing screenings for cancer and dysplasia, breast health, immunizations, and smoking cessation.

In the coming month, our Legislature will decide the fate of the Health Protection Program and the nearly 50,000 individuals who have health care coverage and access to primary and preventive care because of it. This program is a unique New Hampshire solution to our health care crisis and continues to be a program with bipartisan support because of its success. The federal government will pay 100 percent of the costs of the Health Protection Program from 2014-2016. In 2017, the state share of the program will be 5 percent with the federal government contributing 95 percent to the program. This percentage will gradually decrease to 90 percent by 2020. New Hampshire's proposed legislation terminates the program should the federal government change their financial contribution. The hospitals and insurers in our state have agreed to pay the state's portion of program because they have seen firsthand how successful the program is.

What reauthorization of the Health Protection Program means for New Hampshire is more than just access to health care for our low-income families. It means that millions of federal dollars will flow through our economy. We know that the decision to continue this program is good for our state. It is good for our economy because it keeps our workforce healthy. It is good for our health

care providers because it reduces uncompensated care. It is good because we are taking care of our friends and neighbors.

New Hampshire is regularly recognized as one of the best places to live and raise a family. We take care of our own, we cherish our children, and we must do better for the mothers that are raising the Granite Staters of the future. Reauthorization of the New Hampshire Health Protection Program will do just that.

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About Bi-State Primary Care Association

Established in 1986, Bi-State Primary Care Association, serving Vermont and New Hampshire, is a nonprofit 501 (c) (3) charitable organization that promotes access to effective and affordable primary care and preventive services for all, with special emphasis on underserved populations in New Hampshire and Vermont.