



INCENTER STRATEGIES

FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF ADOLESCENT HEALTH

HARRIETTE B. FOX
Chief Executive Officer

MARGARET A. McMANUS
President

July 23, 2007

The Honorable John Dingell and the Honorable Charles Rangel
United States House of Representatives

Dear Congressmen:

On behalf of Incenter Strategies, a nonprofit organization devoted to enhancing the physical and emotional well-being of adolescents - especially low-income and minority adolescents, I write in strong support of H.R. 3162, the Children's Health and Medicare Protection Act of 2007 (CHAMP). We are particularly encouraged by the inclusion of the option for states to extend SCHIP eligibility to low-income older adolescents and young adults up to age 25.

Adolescents have higher rates of uninsurance than younger children, and uninsurance rates increase as adolescents get older. According to national data, 40% of 19- and 20-year olds with family incomes below 200% of poverty are uninsured, and nearly half of employed older adolescents with such incomes are uninsured. CHAMP's provision to allow coverage of older adolescents in their SCHIP programs provides a critical tool for states to reduce uninsurance rates among this vulnerable population.

The need for health insurance coverage does not end once an adolescent turns 19. Older adolescence is a time of transition to adulthood, yet many older adolescents - particularly minority adolescents - have no access to care and are in less than optimum health. National data show that 42% of Hispanic older adolescents, and 26% of Blacks have no usual source of health care. Moreover, 37% of Hispanic older adolescents, and 22% of Blacks have gone at least a year without seeing a health professional. As many as 50% of new HIV infections occur among individuals under age 25, with a higher proportion among African American and Latino Youth. In addition, older adolescence is the age of onset for several mental health disorders, including schizophrenia, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and anxiety disorders, including post-traumatic stress disorder, and the suicide rate increases as adolescents get older, peaking at 12.5 per 100,000 for those ages 20 to 24. CHAMP's provision will give older adolescents and young adults much needed access to comprehensive physical and behavioral health benefits.

We applaud your leadership on this issue and urge your support to ensure that this provision is retained in the legislation that ultimately is approved by the House and Senate. If we can be of further assistance on this issue, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Harriette B. Fox
CEO