

July 26, 2001

The Honorable John Dingell  
House Energy & Commerce Committee  
2322 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington DC 20515

Dear Congressman Dingell:

The National Women's Law Center strongly supports the "FamilyCare Act of 2001." This important legislation will help many uninsured women and their families receive critical health care services through Medicaid and CHIP. By helping to move millions of low-income Americans out of the ranks of the uninsured, when enacted this legislation will be an important step forward in promoting women's health.

In our recent publication, *Making the Grade on Women's Health: A National and State-by-State Report Card*, co-authored by the National Women's Law Center with FOCUS on Women's Health & Leadership at the University of Pennsylvania Medical Center and The Lewin Group, neither the nation nor a single state received a satisfactory grade measured against the nation's own Healthy People 2000 goals. In particular, we also found that women's access to health care services is seriously compromised by inadequate health insurance coverage.

- Nationwide, approximately 14 percent of women are uninsured, falling seriously short of the national goal that every person should have health insurance. The variation among the states was substantial. Hawaii had the lowest percentage of women without insurance, 7.5 percent. Texas ranked last, with 28 percent of women age 18 - 64 without insurance.
- State policy could do much more to extend health insurance to a greater number of their residents. For example, no state had raised the income levels at which (a) pregnant women, (b) single parents and (c) aged and disabled adults qualify for Medicaid to 200 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL), 200 percent of FPL and 100 percent of FPL, respectively. Only 11 states and the District of Columbia had made significant steps towards reaching these goals. Six states did not raise their income eligibility levels above the federal minimums at all, even though five of those six ranked in the bottom third of states in the number of female residents uninsured.
- Only seven states made significant efforts to fill the gaps left by Medicaid and Medicare by providing comprehensive health coverage to otherwise uninsured adults at or below 100 percent of the federal poverty level.

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- States have not been doing all that they can to streamline the Medicaid application process and conduct outreach efforts – which is especially important given that many low-income women leaving welfare do not know that they may still be Medicaid-eligible. For example, only three states (Delaware, Massachusetts and Missouri) and the District of Columbia have dropped the 100 hour work disqualifier for two-parent families, enacted presumptive eligibility for pregnant women, provide a simplified mail-in application for parents and children, and dropped the assets test.

The “FamilyCare Act of 2001” would address many of the problems that we found in the *Report Card* by providing new federal funding, incentives and authority for states to expand health insurance coverage to parents of children enrolled in Medicaid and CHIP. The other provisions in the bill -- including those that allow states to extend Medicaid coverage to pregnant legal immigrants and that would simplify the application process for Medicaid and CHIP and provide new options for outreach, presumptive eligibility, streamlined enrollment and coordination of services – would also make critical health care services far more accessible for women and their families.

By making more women eligible for Medicaid and CHIP, the “FamilyCare Act” will give these women access to a comprehensive set of health care services. The enactment of the “FamilyCare Act” is an important step in promoting women’s health, and will bring this nation closer to actually making the grade on women’s health. We look forward to working with you on getting this critical piece of women’s health legislation enacted.

Sincerely,

  
Marcia D. Greenberger  
Co-President

  
Sharon Levin  
Senior Counsel