



**March
of Dimes**
Saving babies, together

*March of Dimes
Birth Defects Foundation*

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Press Statement

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March of Dimes Says Medicaid and SCHIP Are Critical To the Health and Well Being of Women and Children

Washington, D.C., March 12, 2003— The following is a statement by Dr. Jennifer L. Howse (pronounced HOUSE), president of the March of Dimes, on the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Energy and Commerce, Subcommittee on Health hearing entitled, "Medicaid Today: The States' Perspective."

"On behalf of the March of Dimes, I commend Subcommittee Chairman, Michael Bilirakis (R-Fla.) and Ranking Member Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio), for holding today's hearing to consider changes in the Medicaid and State Children's Health Insurance Programs (SCHIP) proposed by the Administration.

"We at the Foundation believe that Congress must weigh in to help States facing serious fiscal challenges. But because of the critical role Medicaid and SCHIP play in providing coverage to women of childbearing age—particularly those who are pregnant—as well as to their infants and children, it is important to follow the spirit of the Hippocratic Oath, 'first do no harm.'

"As major sources of health care financing for women and children, Medicaid and SCHIP are critical to the health and well being of some of the most vulnerable members of society. In 2000, almost 22 million children and more than one-third of births that occurred in hospitals (1.4 million) were insured by Medicaid. And in 2001, almost 5 million children relied on SCHIP as their source of health insurance.

"These programs are particularly important when families face major medical expenses. In fact, data from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality show that about 50% of hospital stays for preterm and low birthweight infants and 40% of infant and child hospital stays due to birth defects—the leading cause of infant mortality—were covered by Medicaid in 2000.

"Because Medicaid and SCHIP are vital sources of coverage for women, infants and children, changing the structure or financing of these programs should be done only if careful deliberations demonstrate that improvements are needed. Moreover, any program modifications should be designed to ensure that services for these highly vulnerable populations are not put at risk.

"The 3 million volunteers and 1500 staff of the March of Dimes located in every state, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico look forward to working with Members of Congress and the Administration as well as with Governors and State legislators to improve the effectiveness of both of these important health programs."

The March of Dimes is a national voluntary health agency whose mission is to improve the health of children by preventing birth defects and infant mortality. Founded in 1938, the March of Dimes funds programs of research, community services, education, and advocacy. For more information, visit the March of Dimes Web site at www.marchofdimes.com, its Spanish Web site at www.nacersano.org, or call 1-888-MODIMES.

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