

## Health Care

### POSITION STATEMENT

Generations United is committed to improving health care access, protections and coverage for children, older adults, their families and caregivers. Generations United places special emphasis on ensuring that the needs of the most vulnerable individuals are met.

Generations United supports efforts to ensure that age-appropriate quality health care services are made available to all Americans. Health care services should address both the physical and mental health of children and adults. Generations United recognizes the important interactions between physical and mental health, as well as the impacts that the health problems of caregivers and care recipients can have on one another.

### IN ADDITION, GENERATIONS UNITED SUPPORTS:

- **Improve State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) to better serve vulnerable children, including proper funding for outreach and enrollment**
- **Maintaining Medicaid as an entitlement program, while ensuring that financing**

**keep pace with growing consumer needs, without imposing artificial caps on spending. Federal minimum standards must be maintained, while block grants and unaffordable increases in cost-sharing should be opposed**

- **Initiatives to expand and improve health care coverage, ensure that coverage is affordable and comprehensive, and improve access to care for all Americans.**
- **Initiatives to expand and improve access to long-term care for all Americans such as: improvements in the Medicare and Medicaid programs to provide better coverage for home and community-based care, and the provision of tax credits for caregivers and persons with disabilities of all ages**
- **Improving funding for outreach and enrollment efforts to better ensure that vulnerable, low-income people actually receive the health care benefits they are eligible for.**

### Background

#### FEDERAL HEALTH PROGRAMS

Generations United supports all federal health programs – including Medicaid, Medicare, State Children's Health Insurance Program, Federal Employee Health Benefit Program, TRICARE, and Veterans Administration programs – that meet quality standards and provide basic patient protections. Generations United will monitor the implementation of such standards within federal programs and support legislation where necessary to enact further patient protections and protect quality of care.

Young and old must work together to find solutions to the problems of coverage, cost, access, quality, and financing integrity facing our entire health care

### Intergenerational Intersection

**G**ood health is important to all generations. At the same time, children, youth, and adults have unique health care needs. Health care programs and services that are age-appropriate and address the different needs of the generations will benefit the health of the entire community and generations to come. Medicaid provides a critical safety net of health care coverage to children, youth, and seniors.

*“The web of mutual obligations between generations is essential for a civilized society.”*

*Thomas Jefferson*

system. We must improve the quality of care for all while at the same time striving to increase access to health care services for the millions who are currently uninsured.

### **FUNDING MEDICAID**

Over the last 40 years, the most vulnerable people in our country have relied on Medicaid to help provide services that they cannot afford themselves and that no other plans provide. Medicaid works where no other plan does. Medicaid is a program serving the health care needs of 40 million people, including low-income seniors, more than 20 million children (including disabled children), and disabled adults. A critical feature of the program is that Medicaid guarantees funding of services for every qualifying beneficiary. Proposals to overhaul this program by changing Medicaid from an entitlement to a block grant to the states, or to impose caps on the federal funding, would pit children, disabled people, and older people against each other and place them at risk of losing their health care coverage. Generations United opposes block granting or imposing federal spending caps on this program because funding would be limited in a way that would likely force states to choose between funding long-term care for older people and doctor visits for children.

In times of economic downturn, state revenues decline, yet the demand for health and social services increases as people lose their jobs. Virtually all states are required to balance their budgets and face difficult choices when revenues are insufficient to meet projected spending needs. Safeguarding and improving the fiscal integrity of health programs in a fashion that protects the beneficiaries of the Medicaid program and the State Children’s Health Insurance

Program is essential at both the federal and state levels.

Medicaid finances health care for over 40 million low-income children and adults including the elderly and individuals with disabilities, and it is critical to the well-being of all those it serves. Almost three-quarters of Medicaid expenditures spent on seniors goes toward long-term care services for low-income older adults. For the lowest income seniors, Medicaid also pays for Medicare’s premiums, deductibles and coinsurance, which would otherwise be unaffordable. Medicaid is the largest single insurer of uninsured children in America and it guarantees coverage of all medically necessary services children need, including preventive care through well-baby visits and screenings for health problems as well as the extensive services severely disabled children need. It is also important to note that, in FY 2006, Medicaid spending rose by only 2.8 percent – the lowest rate in a decade – at the same time state revenues increased by 3.7 percent.

### **ACCESS TO MEDICAID**

From July 1, 2006, Medicaid beneficiaries were at risk of losing their health benefits if they were unable to prove their US citizenship. Although many helpful changes to the requirement were implemented by the Tax Relief and Health Care Act of 2006, onerous identification requirements remain for children who are being raised by relatives with no input from child protective services. Paperwork may be difficult to find, and in some states, relatives do not have automatic permission to obtain copies. Even where relatives are able to request copies, the process can be time-consuming and relatively expensive. Safeguarding access to Medicaid for those in most need should be a priority.

## CHILDREN

There are more than 9 million uninsured children in the United States.<sup>8</sup> While there has been progress in expanding coverage for children, including covering nearly six million children through the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) in 2003,<sup>9</sup> nearly six million uninsured children are eligible for but not enrolled in SCHIP or Medicaid.<sup>10</sup>

There has been no enrollment drive, in large part because the annual federal contribution to SCHIP is capped: it is not adjusted to account for either increases in the cost of health care or increases in the number of children in need of health services. The federal funding cap also means that at least 17 states will not have sufficient funds to maintain their existing SCHIP enrollment in 2007.<sup>11</sup> If funding is not increased, this problem can only get worse. SCHIP is due to be reauthorized in 2007: this would be a perfect opportunity to safeguard the health of America's children by linking federal funding directly to their needs.

## THE INSURANCE GAP

There are also 36 million uninsured adults, including large pockets of uninsured individuals such as low-income working parents and the "near elderly" (persons age 55 to 64). Health insurance makes a substantial difference in the amount and quality of health care that people receive.



Mary Beth Burkholder

The consequences of not getting needed medical care are not trivial and can result in serious health problems or death.

Persons of all ages with disabilities lack basic protection against the costs of chronic and long-term illness, particularly those receiving home and community-based care. Approximately 40 percent of persons who need long-term care are under 65 years of age. Millions of families are also facing enormous emotional, financial, and physical burdens caring for loved ones, and are in need of more support.