



Rx: Health Care FYI #23

Subject: *Prenatal Care Saves Lives and Money*
From: *Rep. Tim Murphy (PA-18)*

The problem: Timely prenatal care or medical care for women before pregnancy can save up to \$300,000 per at risk child by detecting and preventing low-birth weight, premature birth and birth defects.⁵

A lack of prenatal care costs lives:

- One million American women deliver babies annually without receiving prenatal care.¹
- Psychologically depressed pregnant women are more likely to deliver premature, low-birth weight infants.²
- In the United States, more than 250,000 low-birth-weight infants are born each year. Low-birth-weight infants are more likely to suffer from handicaps, heart defects and respiratory illnesses and are four times more likely to prematurely die than infants with a normal birth weight.³
- Women with poorly controlled diabetes in the early weeks of pregnancy are two to four times more likely than women without diabetes to have a baby with serious birth defects. The complication of diabetes requires need frequent prenatal visits to adjust their diet and insulin during pregnancy.⁴

A lack of prenatal care can increase health care costs:

- Newborn intensive care costs up to \$2,500 per day for an infant in a neonatal intensive care unit, with an average length of stay of fourteen days, totaling \$35,000.⁵
- Hospital charges for babies with a primary diagnosis of low birth weight/premature delivery average \$75,000 per child and Medicaid pays for 50% of the low birth weight/premature births.⁶
- Smoking, drinking alcohol, or using drugs, even in small amounts during pregnancy increases health care costs. For example:
 - Direct neonatal health care costs attributable to maternal smoking that were paid by Medicaid are estimated to be more than \$227 million annually.⁷
 - Annual costs of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) are over \$2 billion with estimates of over \$2 million in lifetime health care costs for one individual with FAS.⁸

¹ Health Resources and Services Administration. Maternal and Child Health Bureau. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2005.

² Field, Tiffany. Et. al. Prenatal depression effects on the fetus and the newborn. *Infant Behavior and Development*. Volume 27 Issue 2. May 2004.

³ Lu M, Lin Y, Prietto N, Garite T. *A cost/benefit analysis*. *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology* 2000; 181 (1 part 1):233-239.

⁴ March of Dimes. Preexisting Diabetes. 2005.

⁵ Children's Alliance. Prenatal Care. April 2003. Tennessee Kids Count Project: U.S. Office of Technology Assessment. 2002.

⁶ O'Neill, Cassandra. Healthy Babies: Efforts to Improve Birth Outcomes and Reduce High Risk Births NGA Center for Best Practices 2004.

⁷ The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Smoking Cessation for Pregnant Women. July 2002.

⁸ U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Frequently Asked Questions. April 2005.

Prenatal care saves money:

- For every dollar spent on prenatal care, \$1.70 to \$3.38 is saved in future health care costs. This does not include costs to the educational system to meet the needs of children born who may have learning disabilities, secondary to preventable prenatal complications.⁹
- Prenatal care costs approximately \$5,000 vs. \$300,000 in future medical costs from a complicated birth.⁵
- An employer's active management of prenatal and antenatal care can result in lowered pregnancy-related short-term disability days (before management implementation - 34.4days/event v. after implementation - 28.2days/event).¹⁰
- Medicaid could save almost \$3.50 in averted neonatal medical expenditures for every \$1 spent on counseling pregnant smokers to quit.⁷

An example of success:

- The National Nurse Family Partnership, a public-private nonprofit with over 700 nurses delivering in home prenatal and early infant care to more than 13,000 low-income families returned \$4.00 for every \$1.00 invested in these services by the time children reached the age of 15 by reducing expenditures for special education services and emergency room visits.¹¹

The Federal Government's Role:

- The U.S. Department of Agriculture Women, Infants and Children (WIC) nutrition and health care program provides prenatal care for at-risk, low-income pregnant women and new mothers, saving federal and state governments \$20 billion annually in reduced treatments of medical problems.¹² Information available at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/>.
- Early Head Start (EHS) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services promotes healthy prenatal outcomes, enhances the development of infants and toddlers, and promotes healthy family functioning. Information available at: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/hsb/programs/#ehs>.
- The Maternal and Child Health Bureau of HHS administers the Federal Maternal and Child Health Block Grant and Health Start program or federally supported programs that provide prenatal health services 2 million women. Information available at: <http://mchb.hrsa.gov/about/default.htm>

Recommendations:

- Encourage more private-public partnerships to increase the amount of prenatal care delivered to low-income families.
- Measure the cost savings of federal and private prenatal programs to determine their effectiveness at reducing health care costs.
- Encourage personal responsibility of pregnant mothers including good nutrition, healthy lifestyles and reducing the use of harmful substances including tobacco, alcohol and drugs to improve the number of healthy births.

⁹ National Conference of State Legislatures. 2005.

¹⁰ Burton WN and Conti DJ. Disability Management: Corporate Medical Department Management of Employee Health and Productivity. Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine 2000, Oct;42(10):1006-12.

¹¹ Karoly, L. Et. al. *Investing in Our Children: What We Know and Don't Know About the Costs and Benefits of Early Childhood Interventions. RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, CA, 1998.

¹² U.S. Department of Agriculture. USDA Celebrates 25 years of Healthier Moms and Babies Through WIC. 1999.