POLICY &

Physical Activity Bill Introduced

U.S. Rep. Zach Wamp (R-Tenn.), Rep. Ron Kind (D-Wis.), and Rep. Jay Inslee (D-Wash.) have introduced a bill to mandate more physical activity for schoolchildren. The Fitness Integrated With Teaching Kids (FIT Kids) Act would add physical education to the ways of determining accountability under the No Child Left Behind Act. States would be graded on how well they worked to meet a target for required physical education of 150 minutes per week in elementary schools and 225 minutes per week for middle- and highschool students. Schools would be required to report their progress, including details on the amount of time students spend in required physical education and the percentage of elementary and secondary school physical education teachers who are state licensed or certified in physical education. "The statistics on childhood obesity are staggering, and we need to get them going in the other direction," Rep. Wamp said in a statement. "Research shows that healthy children learn more effectively and achieve more academically. The FIT Kids Act would ensure a strong emphasis on physical education to help bolster academic performance and provide students with the physical activity and education to lead healthy lifestyles."

Proposed Imaging Cuts Decried

The Access to Medical Imaging Coalition, a group that includes the American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists, has

PRACTICE

asked House members to change a section of the Children's Health and Medicare Protection (CHAMP) Act of 2007 that would impose further cuts on Medicare reimbursement for medical imaging procedures. The proposed cuts would be in addition to a \$13 billion cut in imaging payments under the Deficit Reduction Act that went into effect last January. Under those cuts, "access to imaging services, particularly in rural areas, is being limited," the coalition said in a letter to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.). For example, "the Community Women's Health Clinic in Charleston, W.Va., has stopped performing osteoporosis screening and treatment services altogether because they can no longer afford to do the procedures. These additional CHAMP Act proposed cuts would also have a harsh impact on underserved populations who have little or no insurance or cannot afford to pay out of pocket for imaging services." The proposed cuts include a 50% reduction in the technical component for certain imaging services. The House and Senate both passed legislation to reauthorize children's health care in August; a conference committee is expected to reconcile the different bills this month.

Small Practices Decline

Physicians are shying away from solo and two-physician practices, according to a new report from the Center for Studying Health System Change. Although these small practices are still the most common practice arrangements, between 1996-1997 and 2004-2005 researchers saw a shift from solo and 2-person practices to mid-sized, single-specialty groups of 6-50 physicians. The percentage of physicians who practiced in solo and two-person practices fell from 41% in 1996-1997 to 33% in 2004-2005. During the same time period, the percentage of physicians practicing in midsized groups rose from 13% to 18%. The biggest declines in physicians who choose small practices have come from medical specialists and surgical specialists, whereas the proportion of primary care physicians in small practices has remained steady at about 36%. "Physicians appear to be organizing in larger, single-specialty practices that present enhanced opportunities to offer more profitable ancillary services rather than organizing in ways that support coordination of care," Paul B. Ginsburg, president of the Center for Studying Health System Change, said in a statement. The report's findings are based on the group's nationally representative Community Tracking Study Physician Survey.

FDA, DoD to Share Data

The Department of Defense will share data and expertise with the Food and Drug Administration related to the review and use of FDA-regulated drugs, biologics, and medical devices in an effort to identify potential concerns and recognize benefits of products, the two agencies said. The DoD will share general patient data from military health system records with the FDA, although the agencies will

protect all personal health information exchanged under the agreement. Among the DoD programs involved in the agreement is TRICARE, which serves 9.1 million members of the uniformed services, military retirees, and their families, and TRICARE prescription data likely will be the first information shared as part of the project. The partnership between the DoD and FDA is part of the FDA's Sentinel Network, a project intended to explore linking private sector and public sector information to create an integrated electronic network.

GAO Finds Medicaid Decline

A law requiring most U.S. citizens applying for Medicaid coverage to document their citizenship has caused eligible citizens to lose Medicaid coverage, and the law costs far more to administer than it saves, according to two government analyses. The law went into effect on July 1, 2006, and affects 30 million children and 16 million parents currently enrolled in Medicaid, as well as millions of new applicants. The first analysis, from the Government Accountability Office, found that half the states are reporting declines in Medicaid coverage because of the requirement, and many of those losing coverage appear to be U.S. citizens. The second analysis, produced by the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, found that for every \$100 spent by federal taxpayers to implement the documentation requirements in six states, only 14 cents in Medicaid savings can be documented.

-Joyce Frieden

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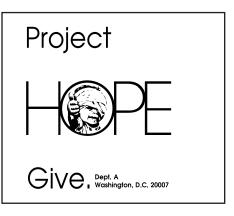
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