



OHIO RISING TO THE CHALLENGE: ECONOMIC & PANDEMIC CRISES



Summer is a time normally reserved for vacations, picnics, and days at the pool, but plans are on hold as many families face continued and new economic challenges. There are signs of hope as our economy begins to reopen with June revenues up from May, as reported by Ohio's Office of Budget and Management.

However, Ohio is experiencing a spike in infections in seven counties. These challenges will test our state until a vaccine is developed and available.

Children's Defense Fund-Ohio (CDF-Ohio) acknowledges that much has been done on the state and federal level to address both the health crisis and economic downturn, but there are still much more needed.

Federal Reaction to the Pandemic Crisis

In March, Congress passed the **Families First Coronavirus Response Act** which is intended to

help families stay healthy and protect themselves against the pandemic. The Act:

- ❖ Provides Ohio a temporary increase in the federal Medicaid matching rate (FMAP) of 6.2% which could mean up to \$1.2 billion by the end of 2020.
- ❖ Requires Ohio to cover COVID-19 testing in Medicaid/CHIP without cost-sharing.
- ❖ Continues a strong Maintenance of Effort provision which prohibited Ohio from dis-enrolling any from the Medicaid program on or after March 18, 2020.

The **CARES Act** was the next stimulus bill passed by Congress. This bill addressed many of the economic issues facing our country by focusing on families facing unemployment. The

CARES Act:

- ❖ Provides paid sick days and family and medical leave.
- ❖ Supports access to testing, treatment and prevention.
- ❖ Funds community health centers.
- ❖ Provides aid to state and local governments.

Ohio Acts to Aid Families

In the wake of the coronavirus the state of Ohio took several measures to alleviate the devastating effects on the health of Ohio families.

Ohio applied for an **1135 Waiver** which allowed the state to waive or modify Medicaid requirements standing in the way of providing services to enrollees during pandemic.

Ohio's approved waiver requests include the following:

- ❖ Allows hospitals and the Medicaid Department to make presumptive eligibility determinations.
- ❖ Suspends cost-sharing.
- ❖ Expands providers eligible to provide telehealth services.
- ❖ Establishes automatic renewal of prior authorization for medicine and services.
- ❖ Loosens redetermination requirements through the end of the month when the public health emergency ends.



PROTECTING FAMILIES & CHILDREN

As the Coronavirus spreads across the country and businesses, restaurants, and schools began to close, Congress passed two emergency stimulus packages, Families First Coronavirus Response Act, and the CARES Act to address the impending healthcare and economic crisis. Ohio also took steps to support families during the pandemic through legislation and Medicaid waivers, but there is still much work that needs to be accomplished.

Steps that will protect Ohio Families and Children

Increase the FMAP to 14% The most important action the federal government could take right now to protect the health and economic recovery of states is to increase enhanced FMAP to 14%. The increase should be automatically adjusted to meet need based on the

depth of the economic downturn, and should continue until the labor market and state budgets have truly recovered by tying it to pre-pandemic unemployment rates. This increase will provide budget relief, support Ohio's economy, and ensure access to care.

The enhanced FMAP should include the Medicaid expansion population and a strong maintenance of effort (MOE) protections for beneficiaries, so that services and eligibility are not reduced.

Expand presumptive eligibility for Medicaid Currently, only hospitals, the Medicaid department, and some medical providers have this authority, but it should be expanded to other providers to assure that when parents seek medical attention for their children they are informed of their eligibility to enroll in Medicaid.

Make permanent the telehealth expansion. The telehealth provision that was expanded by the 1135 waiver has been one of the most successful changes. It allows health providers to maintain contact with their patients during the stay-at-home order. The telehealth expansion should be made permanent to address many issues that Medicaid enrollees face such as transportation and provider shortages.

The pandemic has shown us the importance of a robust healthcare system. That means funding community health centers that are located in underserved areas all over the state. It means supporting telehealth and better technology and connectivity in every corner of the state. In order for Ohio to recover fully from this pandemic, all Ohioans must have access to quality healthcare. We have the tools to accomplish this, we just need our leaders in Ohio to make these tools available to everyone.

The provisions of the federal stimulus bills are temporary and we must explore the needs that will exist in our state as we go forward.

Please visit our website to download Ohio's 2020 Child Well-being Profile. County Profiles will be available in early August.

