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Oregon's family planning waiver prevents unintended pregnancies

A recent study finds that an Oregon family planning program prevents more unintended pregnancies than similar programs in other states, generating millions of dollars a year in health care savings.

The Medicaid family planning program, called the Family Planning Expansion Project (FPEP), is part of the Oregon Department of Human Services Public Health Division. The program involves a federal waiver which extends benefits to people who would not ordinarily be eligible for them.

The study, conducted by Dr. Richard C. Lindrooth, director of the Center for Health Economics and Policy Studies at the Medical University of South Carolina, found that family planning waivers bring an average annual decrease of 1.5 births per 1,000 women in states where they're in effect. Oregon's waiver exceeded this average, reducing the birth rate by 4 births per 1,000 women in 2005.

The waiver has helped thousands of Oregonians avoid unintended pregnancies, allowing them to have children only when they're ready. The resulting decline in the birth rate is estimated to have saved the state over \$9 million in health care costs for women and infants in 2005 alone.

"We know that helping women and their families avoid unintended pregnancy is good for them and good for public health," says Rian Frachele, manager of FPEP. "This analysis confirms that efforts to prevent unintended pregnancy are good for the state's budget as well. We are especially proud that FPEP is one of the more effective family planning waivers in the country."

Twenty-seven states have family planning waivers, which expand eligibility for family planning services to low-income individuals who do not meet the eligibility requirements for regular Medicaid. Using data from all 50 states from 1991 to 2005, the study compared birth rates in states that have family planning waivers to rates in states without waivers, controlling for a variety of economic and demographic characteristics.

Family planning and other Medicaid waivers, such as the Oregon Health Plan, are authorized by the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and approval must be renewed regularly. FPEP will be up for renewal in fall 2009.

FPEP provides family planning services through a network of 160 local clinics across the state. Oregonians who are U.S citizens or Lawful Permanent Residents and under 185 percent of the federal poverty level are eligible. Interested persons should call 1-800-SAFENET to find an FPEP provider in their area.

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