

Healthcare: Immunization Issues

Position Statement approved by One Voice: November 14, 2008

Issue/Concern: In public health emergencies, it is critically important that immunization information is readily available for children and adults so that resources can be directed to where they are most needed to prevent the devastating effects of infectious diseases. Under existing law, only consented information of children less than 18 years of age is maintained in the Texas registry, ImmTrac, although changes during the last legislative session permit first responders and their families to shelter their records in ImmTrac. For the rest of the population, immunization records must be deleted when a child reaches the age of 19 and no adult records are permitted to be sheltered in ImmTrac. Furthermore, we must be prepared to share immunization information with other states so that Texans and their health care providers have access to immunization histories to administer vaccines in emergency situations and to prevent over-immunization.

Another major issue is that many providers are considering discontinuing their immunization services because it is increasingly expensive for them to offer vaccines due to (1) inadequate reimbursement rates from insurance companies and (2) the business tax on vaccine inventory. If providers do not offer vaccines in the medical home, immunization rates will plummet, leaving our state vulnerable to vaccine-preventable diseases. Also, this will strain the public health sector, requiring additional resources to be allocated for immunizations. Immunizations are a vital component of preventive healthcare and should be administered in a person's medical home to ensure continuity of care and high immunization rates.

Specific Policy Recommendation(s): One Voice supports the following Public Policy Priorities of the Harris County Healthcare Alliance:

- ★ Allow adults and their health care providers the option to shelter immunization information in ImmTrac. Allow children currently in ImmTrac to maintain their records in ImmTrac after they turn 19 years old.
- ★ Permit ImmTrac to link to health information networks in other states, particularly during public health emergencies.
- ★ Mandate higher reimbursement rates from the insurance companies for vaccines.
- ★ Repeal the business tax on vaccine inventory so that providers can afford to continue to offer vaccines in their clinics.

How does this issue/recommendation relate to prevention and early intervention or maximizing federal funds for health and human services?

- ★ Permitting adult information in ImmTrac will help prevent unnecessary administration of vaccines and will help providers ensure that adults are up to date on immunizations to prevent outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases.
- ★ A state-wide immunization registry that has capacity to link to health information systems within Texas and in other states is a critically important component of disaster preparedness.
- ★ Physicians should be adequately compensated by insurance companies for immunizations and should not be taxed on this important public health service so that public health dollars do not have to be expended.

Supporting Facts/Research/Resources:

- ★ During Hurricane Katrina, Louisiana's successful electronic transfer of immunization histories on its children and adults saved millions of public and private dollars in vaccine and administrative cost. (Houston, alone, was able to save over \$3million in vaccine and administrative costs.)
- ★ When children are immunized in their medical home, they receive more comprehensive preventive healthcare and are more likely to be fully immunized and the public and private sectors are less likely to waste additional money on over-immunization.

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