

# The promise of advancing health care for children.

## Executive Summary

*Child Health and Healthcare Quality in Florida* is a comprehensive report on the quality of health care received by children and youth in Florida in the context of their health care needs and overall health status. This report, and its companion website ([www.flchartbook.childhealthdata.org](http://www.flchartbook.childhealthdata.org)), provide descriptive information on child health status, health behaviors, utilization of health services and the quality of those services, comparing Florida results to national benchmarks. The report explores how these findings vary based on a child and family's characteristics (such as race, ethnicity or income), the presence and type of health insurance a child has, and the child's place of residence.

The report is the result of a two year effort by the Florida Initiative for Children's Healthcare Quality and the Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative, working with a statewide advisory committee. Seven different datasets provided information for this report and wherever possible, the report refers the reader back to other data sources for additional information on the topics covered. In addition, the report includes highlights from seven exemplary programs that were selected by an advisory committee in Fall 2006 from nominations submitted in response to a call for programs, providers, or services that demonstrated high quality, or significant quality improvement efforts.

Our findings point to a few key conclusions with potential implications for opportunities to improve the health and wellbeing of children in Florida. These opportunities could, and indeed should, be addressed by both the public and private sectors.

- First, far too many children continue to experience fair or poor health, fail to gain access to the services their parents feel they need, and often experience sub-optimal quality.
- Second, worse health status and sub-optimal health care experiences tend to occur more frequently, but certainly not exclusively, among low income, publicly insured, or racial/ethnic minority children and youth.

- Third, children and youth with special health care needs who depend the most on a high functioning health care system to enable them to optimize their health often experience the greatest challenges in access to the high quality services they need.
- Finally, nearly two-thirds of children and youth in the state enjoy excellent health using broad measures. Over nine in ten have health insurance and the quality of health care services they experience are comparable to the nation, with some notable exceptions.

## Findings

Highlights of the numerous findings in this report include:

- Nearly one in three (32.5% or over 550,000) children and youth ages 10 to 17 living in Florida are overweight or are at risk of overweight.
- An estimated 13.4 percent to 18.1 percent\* of children in Florida ages 0 to 17 years have special health care needs (about 551,263 to 709,059 children).<sup>1</sup> These children are more often male, low-income and publicly insured.
- Among Florida's high school students, 30.1 percent report having symptoms of depression daily for 2 or more weeks.
- Disparities by race/ethnicity and place of residence exist in the level of uninsurance among Florida children. Hispanic children and children living in Charlotte, Collier and Lee counties are the most likely to be uninsured.
- Slightly more than half (51.8%) of all hospitalized children in Florida had their stays charged to Medicaid, accounting for almost \$1.3 billion in hospital charges in 2003.

- While six in ten children (61%) reportedly have a personal doctor or nurse and were most often able to get needed medical advice by telephone or urgent care after hours, only four in ten children received care that met the American Academy of Pediatrics model of a medical home and high quality health care, and this varied by age.
- While most children and youth in Florida receive at least some preventive health care, far fewer have preventive dental care and this proportion varies dramatically by family income and a child's type of insurance.
- There were over 20,000 potentially avoidable hospitalizations of children and youth in Florida, pointing to possible problems in accessing high quality primary health care.
- Children and youth with special health care needs experience many challenges in receiving high quality health care that meets their needs:
  - Despite their increased needs for high quality health care, more than one-half of children and youth with special health care needs (58.1%) do not have care that meets the medical home standards established by the American Academy of Pediatrics. This standard calls for care to be comprehensive, accessible, coordinated, culturally sensitive and family-centered.
  - Having a child with a special health care need greatly affects a family's functioning: depending on income, between 20 percent and 40 percent of CYSHCN have family members who cut back or stopped working due to the health needs of their child.

*\*Due to methods differences, there is a range found for estimates of CYSHCN prevalence between the National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH) and the National Survey of Children with Special Health Care Needs (NS-CSHCN). It appears that children across a wider range of health needs are identified through the NSCH, leading to a higher prevalence rate for this survey. For more information see reference number 1.*

## Implications

These findings are descriptive and while they do not answer the key questions about why these patterns exist, or more importantly, how we can address the challenges identified, they begin to show us the way forward. We hope that these findings will spur additional research, discussion, debate and stakeholder engagement in addressing child health and health care in Florida.

To begin this dialogue, we offer up the following implications as starting points for making progress in our shared mission to improve the health and wellbeing of children and youth living in Florida.

- Health insurance coverage is an essential component of any strategy to promote high quality care for children. Every effort should be made to enroll all eligible children in existing public insurance programs and the opportunity exists to expand eligibility for the State Child Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) at the national level.
- Childhood overweight and obesity continue to grow as an urgent public health priority and health care system strategies need to be developed that support comprehensive, community based programs.
- Given the vital role that Medicaid plays in the care of hospitalized children in Florida, close monitoring and evaluation of the impact of Medicaid reforms on hospital care should be part of any reform strategy.
- Overall, there is much room for improvement in access to and delivery of high quality care to children. Improvement efforts currently underway by pediatric leaders in the state should be expanded.
- While most children are receiving the primary care they need, access to specialists and/or specialized services is often poor and requires additional attention from policy makers.
- Access to oral health services for children and youth continues to be a major public health challenge and should receive far greater attention from policy makers.
- Policy and program attention should be directed at improving the availability of medical homes for children and youth with special health care needs (CYSHCN), particularly publicly insured CYSHCN. Particular attention should be paid to improving access to specialized services and equipment and sub-specialty care for CYSHCN.
- Demonstrations and initiatives to reduce the burden of potentially avoidable hospitalizations could be supported as part of current Medicaid reform efforts.

*As this report makes clear, we must continue to prioritize the health and health care needs of children in Florida. Addressing those needs will require the concerted actions of the public and private sectors, purchasers, payers, providers, families and children themselves.*