



American  
Public Health  
Association

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*Protect, Prevent, Live Well*

July 21, 2011

The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Sebelius:

On behalf of the American Public Health Association (APHA), the oldest and most diverse organization of public health professionals and advocates in the world dedicated to promoting and protecting the health of the public and our communities, I write in strong support of the recent Institute of Medicine (IOM) recommendations on women's preventive health services and urge the Department of Health and Human Services to adopt these evidence-based recommendations.

The Affordable Care Act's requirement for insurance companies to cover a range of preventive health care services for women without cost-sharing was an important step forward for women's health. The range of preventive services outlined in the IOM report will begin to move our nation from a sick-care system focused on disease treatment to one that elevates the importance of disease prevention, wellness, and quality of life. APHA strongly supports guaranteed access to prevention and wellness services for all Americans regardless of ability to pay.

The inclusion of FDA-approved contraceptive methods is a landmark moment for women's reproductive health. Access to contraceptive information and services is critical to preventing unintended pregnancies and to enabling women to control the timing and spacing of their pregnancies. According to the IOM, unintended pregnancy can have serious consequences for both women and infants, including late prenatal care, greater risks for the woman of depression and physical abuse, and increased incidence of low birthweight babies leading to higher risks of serious illness and even death in the first year of life.<sup>1</sup> By covering contraception without cost-sharing, preventing unintended pregnancy will no longer be a choice based on financial status.

APHA also supports the IOM's recommended coverage of screening for gestational diabetes and breastfeeding support and counseling. Lack of access to prenatal medical care is a factor in the high rates

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<sup>1</sup> Institute of Medicine. *The Best Intentions*, New York: National Academy Press, 1995, and Brown SS and Eisenberg L, *From the Institute of Medicine*, JAMA 1995;274:1332.

of maternal mortality and morbidity found across the United States.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, wide disparities have been found in breastfeeding knowledge and participation across social and economic boundaries.<sup>3</sup> Increasing access to these services during and after pregnancy recognizes the link between healthy pregnancies and healthy babies and mothers.

Finally, the IOM's recommendations for coverage of screenings for cervical cancer, sexually transmitted infections, and HIV will ensure these diseases are identified and treated early. Early detection allows patients a wider range of treatment options and, in many cases, can lead to increased survival rates.

We thank you for the opportunity to express our support for the IOM's preventive services recommendations and look forward to your positive action on this important public health issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Georges C. Benjamin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial "G".

Georges C. Benjamin, MD, FACP, FACEP (E)

Executive Director

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<sup>2</sup> Florida Department of Health. Pregnancy Associated Mortality Review (PAMR): PAMR Data Report 1997. 1st Quarter 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Shealy K, Li R, Benton-Davis S, Grummer-Strawn L. The CDC Guide to Breastfeeding Interventions. Atlanta, GA: US Department of Health and Human Services, Center for Disease Control and Prevention; 2005.