



May 6, 2022

Department of Health Services, Division of Medicaid Services

Attn: Wisconsin 1115 Postpartum Coverage Waiver

P.O. Box 309

Madison, WI 53707-0309

Via email: dhspostpartumcoverage1115waiver@dhs.wisconsin.gov

To Division of Medicaid Services:

My name is Mark Rakowski and I write today to share Children's Wisconsin's (Children's) support for this demonstration waiver that would extend postpartum coverage for parents covered by Medicaid from 60 days in length to 90 days. I'll be sharing perspectives on behalf of a number of providers and departments at Children's, including as part of my role as the chief operations officer at Children's Community Health Plan (CCHP), an affiliate of Children's Wisconsin.

Children's Wisconsin's vision is to have Wisconsin kids be the healthiest in the nation and in striving to achieve this ambitious vision, we recognize that most of the drivers of a child's health and well-being are often reflected in the social, cultural and environmental factors that surround a child and their family. Studies continue to reflect the impact of a mother's health on her baby's health and the strong connection between the two. The health and well-being of a mother from pre-pregnancy to postpartum has implications on a child's physical, cognitive and social-emotional development. One of the many ways to promote health among children and their moms is to ensure that families have access to timely and appropriate health care services.

The Medicaid program plays a significant role in maternal health, covering more than one-third of births in Wisconsin in 2019. Health care before and during a pregnancy are, of course, critically important. However the postpartum period is especially vulnerable for moms. Having consistent, reliable access to health care helps ensure a mother can get the physical, mental and emotional health care supports she needs to ensure she and her baby are healthy and thriving. In addition, pregnancy-related complications can surface days to weeks to months after delivery, with maternal morbidity and mortality continuing to be of significant concern across the nation and here in Wisconsin. It's disheartening that women of color and those living in rural areas face significantly higher rates of preventable maternal injury and death resulting in disparities with lasting impacts for families across our state.

We appreciate the increase in length of postpartum Medicaid health care coverage from 60 days to 90 days in Wisconsin's most recent state budget and are supportive of this demonstration waiver. The additional coverage will certainly help promote safety, health and well-being for Wisconsin women and their families. Continuous coverage offers opportunities to streamline administrative functions for the Medicaid program and reduce unnecessary churn for postpartum individuals. However, like other health organizations, Children's is supportive of 12 months of continuous coverage for postpartum individuals which would represent a great step forward in ensuring continuity of coverage so enrollees can avoid disruptions in care and continue to have access to high quality health services. As you know, on the federal level, recent passage of the American Rescue Plan Act provided for continuous Medicaid and CHIP coverage for pregnant and postpartum individuals through twelve months after giving birth on a temporary basis. Yet, Children's is encouraged by this demonstration waiver which represents an important step forward in Wisconsin to offer this coverage to promote health and well-being amongst mothers and their children.

Additionally, Children's provides home visiting services across the state to support at-risk parents, during a pregnancy through the first five years of the child's life, to reduce the likelihood of child maltreatment and to strengthen family functioning. Visits occur in the home on a frequent basis to provide education on topics like pregnancy, reproductive health, child development, safe sleep and offer guidance on navigating the often complex food and child assistance systems.

Family preservation and support programs address the needs of the family as a whole, delivering services in their homes, neighborhoods and communities to help promote positive development and prevent adverse outcomes. Parents and families gain new competencies, make family-community connections and improve child health, well-being and family functioning. In 2021, Children's served nearly 800 families across the state through home visiting.

In addition, Children's, along with a coalition of several community partners, is implementing the Milwaukee County Healthy Start Program which supports maternal-child health for African American women. As part of the five-year federal grant, Children's and our partners are providing maternal community health navigation services, child birth education classes, group-based parenting classes, ensuring access to maternal care providers, including midwives, as well as providing fatherhood-specific programming and other resources.

For moms and families that we serve in our home visiting, Healthy Start and CCHP programs, having continuous access to Medicaid coverage would enable moms to afford the regular medical care they need. One client came to one of our home visiting programs five months postpartum after delivering a beautiful baby girl, no longer having insurance and having developed a few health issues. She had an intrauterine device (IUD) placed after delivery that had shifted causing severe discomfort and pain. After she delivered her daughter, her vision had declined significantly and she desperately needed an eye exam to ensure she could safely care for and support herself and her daughter. If her Medicaid coverage had been extended further, she wouldn't have to endure these health issues and could have addressed them much sooner.

Thank you for the opportunity to share Children's Wisconsin's support for this waiver that takes a step toward improving maternal and infant health outcomes for families across Wisconsin.

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Children's Wisconsin (Children's) serves children and families in every county across the state. We have inpatient hospitals in Milwaukee and the Fox Valley. We care for every part of a child's health, from critical care at one of our hospitals, to routine checkups in our primary care clinics. Children's also provides specialty care, urgent care, emergency care, dental care, school health nurses, foster care and adoption services, family resource centers, child health advocacy, health education, family preservation and support, mental health services, pediatric medical research and the statewide poison hotline.