

South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DHHS Announces Plan to Enhance Treatment of Emotionally Disturbed Children

The South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services will seek approval from the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to provide home and community-based care services for emotionally disturbed children who are eligible for Medicaid. The announcement comes after a unanimous vote of support this week from the agency's Medical Care Advisory Committee.

South Carolina Medicaid now covers treatment for about 4,000 children with emotional and behavioral problems each year. These children are placed in institutional settings, where treatment is often fragmented and results are difficult to measure. The new proposal would set up a pilot program utilizing best practices to achieve higher levels of care for recipients while holding down Medicaid costs. Expenses for the current program totaled about \$58 million in 2005.

The proposal is designed to help most children receive home and community care, using institutional treatment only when necessary. DHHS funds similar programs for thousands of elderly Medicaid recipients under its community long term care project. Under the plan, children would undergo a comprehensive screening process to determine what level of care they need. Expanded services would include, but not be limited to, counseling for children and parents, school support and intervention, and respite care. The plan also calls for independent reassessments of children to determine the effectiveness of treatment and ensure accountability.

In crafting the proposal, DHHS sought input from various state agencies, private health providers and child advocacy groups. DHHS would work with the Department of Social Services, the Department of Juvenile Justice, the Department of Disabilities and Special Needs, the Department of Mental Health and the Governor's Office for Continuum of Care for Emotionally Disturbed Children to administer the program.

Diane Revels Flashnick, executive director of Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health of SC, praised the agency's initiative. "Services that will keep children with behavioral health needs in the community, in school and with their families are

where we need to focus our attention,” she said. “When more prevention and early intervention can be provided, children and families will receive the help that they need with the potential to prevent more intensive and restrictive services which come with very high price tags.”

The proposal is a companion to South Carolina Healthy Connections, the state’s comprehensive Medicaid reform plan designed to improve the quality of life of Medicaid recipients while curbing the program’s growth.

DHHS has sent the basic concepts of its plan for children with emotional and behavioral problems to CMS, the first step in gaining approval for the program. A complete copy of the concept paper is available upon request.

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