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DPH, DDSN and SCDHHS Encourage Support and Services During Birth Defects Awareness Month

COLUMBIA, S.C. – In observance of Birth Defects Awareness Month in January, the South Carolina Department of Public Health (DPH), the South Carolina Department of Disabilities and Special Needs (DDSN) and the South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (SCDHHS) are encouraging residents to embrace and support the families of children in their communities with birth defects and learn about available services, so that every baby born in South Carolina can meet their full potential.

One in every 33 babies in South Carolina is born with a birth defect, which is a condition that affects the structure or function of their body. Birth defects are the leading cause of infant deaths in South Carolina, and people born with a birth defect often face lifelong challenges.

Gov. Henry McMaster issued a [proclamation](#) in recognition of Birth Defects Awareness Month. In part, the proclamation recognizes the partnership between DPH, DDSN and SCDHHS and their efforts to “provide families with early intervention services to help children receive the right care and resources they need to thrive.”

DPH assists families with children who have birth defects through newborn testing for genetic disorders, referrals of infants with birth defects to treatment and care, promotion of preconception care and early access to prenatal care. The agency’s [Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs program](#) also provides services for [specified conditions](#) to qualifying residents ages 18 and under. These services include information and referral, care coordination, and financial assistance with payment for medical services, supplies and equipment.

“Along with our partners across the state, we aim to ensure families have access to resources that will give newborns with birth defects the best chance for a healthy life,” **said Dr. Edward Simmer, Interim DPH Director.** “As we observe Birth Defects Awareness Month, we’d like to thank our state’s birthing hospitals and outpatient providers, who play a vital role in the efforts of the South Carolina Birth Defects Program by providing timely records that allow us to collect important data and connect families to critical services.”

SCDHHS is the state agency that operates South Carolina’s Healthy Connections Medicaid program. Medicaid is a medical assistance program that pays medical bills for people with a disability or whose income is insufficient to meet the cost of necessary medical services. Through the Healthy Connections Medicaid program, SCDHHS covers approximately 60% of births in South Carolina. Children under the

age of 18 who have disabilities may qualify for Medicaid coverage under the Tax Equity and Fiscal Responsibility Act (TEFRA), regardless of their parent's income.

SCDHHS is also the lead agency for the South Carolina Birth Outcomes Initiative (SCBOI), a collaborative effort to improve outcomes for pregnant women and infants in the state that includes more than 100 public, private and non-profit stakeholders, and BabyNet, a program that provides early intervention services to children with developmental delays or conditions associated with developmental delays who are aged 3 years and under at no cost to their families.

"SCDHHS appreciates Governor McMaster's dedication to early intervention services and helping children receive the care they need in the most appropriate setting," said **SCDHHS Interim Director Eunice Medina**. "Through administering the Healthy Connections Medicaid and BabyNet programs and our collaborative work in leading SCBOI, SCDHHS looks forward to working with providers and stakeholders to ensure the healthiest possible start to life for those we serve."

DDSN plans, develops, coordinates and funds services for residents with various severe, lifelong disabilities. DDSN provides various services to people with birth defects and their families, most notably through the agency's Early Intervention Program. The program takes a family-centered approach based on the principles of respecting every family's individuality and aims to support and encourage families in their efforts to independently meet the needs of their child with special needs.

DDSN also offers early intervention services for children ages 3 through 6 years who need continued support. Together, DDSN and SCDHHS serve more than 11,000 infants and young children statewide.

"We are very pleased that our state is recognizing National Birth Defect Awareness Month through this proclamation, and by highlighting the various services and prevention methods available to South Carolina families," said **Joyce Kimrey, DDSN's Early Intervention Director**. "Through our state agencies and partner organizations, there are numerous resources available to families, so we encourage parents to take advantage and give their children the best opportunity to succeed."

Tips and resources for preventing birth defects can be found on [DPH's website](#). For more information on early intervention services, visit DDSN's [Children's Services webpage](#) for links to referral pages. For more information on Healthy Connections Medicaid coverage, visit [SCDHHS' website](#).

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