



Opportunities to Expand Access to Guidelines-Based Asthma Care in Schools Through Medicaid

Asthma and School-Age Children

Asthma currently affects 4 million school-age children in the US,¹ and accounts for more than 7.9 million missed school days annually.² The burden of asthma disproportionately falls upon lower-income individuals, with higher rates of asthma among those enrolled in Medicaid.³ Quality measures for asthma care also show that Medicaid enrollees struggle more with asthma control when compared to those with commercial health insurance.⁴ Ensuring that all school-age children have consistent access to guidelines-based asthma care can help combat these disparities.

Medicaid In Schools

In 2014, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) reversed the “free care rule,” which had limited access to Medicaid-covered health services for children in schools, only allowing reimbursement if children were enrolled in Medicaid and the services were covered in their Individualized Education Program (IEP). States could now submit State Plan Amendments (SPAs) to CMS enabling schools to receive reimbursement for any Medicaid-covered services provided in schools, allowing children enrolled in the program to receive a greater range of physical, behavioral, and mental health services in school. As of 2023, 17 states have expanded opportunities for schools to receive Medicaid reimbursement through SPAs, and an additional 8 states have enabled this option through other policy or administrative updates. These SPAs and policies differ by state, however, and some states limit the types of students that can access services or the type of services that can be provided.⁵ Among states that limit their school-based services to only physical or only behavioral health, the option remains to submit SPAs or make policy changes that broaden reimbursable Medicaid services.

In 2022, Congress passed the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, directing CMS to improve use of Medicaid in schools by reinforcing the 2014 reversal of the “free care rule.” Following this, CMS released a comprehensive guide to [Delivering Medicaid in Schools-Based Settings](#) and an accompanying [Informational Bulletin](#), describing how states can improve access to Medicaid-covered services provided in schools. State Medicaid agencies are encouraged to collaborate with state education agencies to review current practices for accessing Medicaid services in schools and identify student health needs before drafting and submitting a SPA to CMS. The Bipartisan Safer Communities Act also awarded \$50 million for grants to assist states in implementation (including states that have already passed school-based Medicaid



SPAs). Looking forward, CMS continues to work with states to draft and submit SPAs providing Medicaid services in schools.

Asthma Guidelines-Based Care in Schools

States that opt to broaden access to include Medicaid-covered health services in school could improve access to guidelines-based care for children with asthma, such as asthma self-management education. The Lung Association [tracks state Medicaid coverage](#) of asthma care based on the National Heart Lung and Blood Institute's National Asthma Education and Prevention Program's guidelines, which identify the best practices for managing asthma. Bringing asthma care to low-income students through Medicaid can help to bridge gaps in asthma care and improve collaboration between schools and the healthcare system.



Additional Resources

- [Delivering Services in School-Based Settings: A Comprehensive Guide to Medicaid Services and Administrative Claiming](#). CMS' detailed 2023 guidelines for state Medicaid agencies to enable Medicaid reimbursement in schools.
- [Information on School-Based Services](#). CMS' briefer informational bulletin summarizing the Comprehensive Guide to Delivering Services in School-Based Settings.
- [Status of School Medicaid Expansion: How \(and How Many\) States Have Taken Action to Increase School Health Access and Funding](#). Healthy Schools Campaign policy brief on the current status of states that have broadened their school Medicaid programs.
- [Asthma Care Coverage Initiative | American Lung Association](#). Information on the American Lung Association's Asthma Guidelines-Based Care Coverage Project on Medicaid coverage of asthma medications and services.

This issue brief was supported by Grant Number 6NU38OT000292, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention or the Department of Health and Human Services.

References

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