



Highlights of [GAO-09-578](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on Finance, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

Medicaid, a federal-state program that finances health care for certain low-income populations, can play a critical role in the provision of preventive services, which help prevent, diagnose, and manage health conditions. GAO examined available data to assess (1) the extent to which Medicaid children and adults have certain health conditions and receive certain preventive services, (2) for Medicaid children, state monitoring and promotion of the provision of preventive services, (3) for Medicaid adults, state coverage of preventive services, and (4) federal oversight by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). GAO analyzed data from nationally representative surveys: the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), which includes physical examinations of participants, and the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS). GAO also surveyed state Medicaid directors and interviewed federal officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that CMS (1) ensure that state Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT) programs are regularly reviewed, and (2) expedite its efforts to provide guidance to states on coverage of obesity-related services for Medicaid children, and consider the need to provide similar guidance regarding coverage of obesity screening and counseling, and other recommended services, for adults. CMS concurred with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-09-578](#) or [key components](#). For more information, contact Alicia Puente Cackley at (202) 512-7114 or cackleya@gao.gov.

MEDICAID PREVENTIVE SERVICES

Concerted Efforts Needed to Ensure Beneficiaries Receive Services

What GAO Found

Nationally representative data suggest that a large proportion of children and adults in Medicaid have certain health conditions, particularly obesity, that can be identified or managed by preventive services, and adults' receipt of preventive services varies widely. For Medicaid children, NHANES data from 1999 through 2006 suggest that 18 percent of children aged 2 through 20 were obese, 4 percent of children aged 8 through 20 had high blood pressure, and 10 percent of children aged 6 through 20 had high cholesterol. Furthermore, MEPS data from 2003 through 2006 suggest that many Medicaid children were not receiving well-child check ups. For Medicaid adults aged 21 through 64, NHANES data suggest that more than half were obese or had diabetes, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, or a combination. MEPS data suggest that receipt of preventive services varied widely by service: receipt of some services, such as blood pressure tests, was high, but receipt of several other services was low. MEPS data also suggest that a lower percentage of Medicaid adults received preventive services compared to privately insured adults.

For children in Medicaid, who generally are entitled to coverage of comprehensive health screenings, including well-child check ups, as part of the federally required EPSDT benefit, most but not all states reported to GAO that they monitored or set goals related to children's utilization of preventive services and had undertaken initiatives to promote their provision. Nine states reported that they did not monitor children's utilization of specific preventive services. Forty-seven states reported having multiple initiatives to improve the provision of preventive services to children.

For adults in Medicaid, for whom states' Medicaid coverage of preventive services is generally not required, most states reported to GAO that they covered most but not all of eight recommended preventive services that GAO reviewed. Nearly all state Medicaid programs, 49 and 48 respectively, reported covering cervical cancer screening and mammography, and three-quarters or more states reported covering four other preventive services. Two additional recommended services—intensive counseling to address obesity or to address high cholesterol—were reported as covered by fewer than one-third of states.

For children in Medicaid, CMS oversees the provision of preventive services through state EPSDT reports and reviews of EPSDT programs, but gaps in oversight remain; for adults, oversight is more limited. For children, state reports showed that, on average, 58 percent of Medicaid children who were eligible for an EPSDT service in 2007 received one; far below the federal goal of 80 percent. CMS reviewed only 11 state EPSDT programs between April 2001 and June 2009. Few states reporting low rates of service provision were reviewed. CMS guidance to states may also have gaps: a 2006 study raised concerns that providers may not be aware of coverage of obesity-related services for Medicaid children. CMS has recognized the need for but has not yet begun drafting guidance on such coverage. For adults, CMS has provided some related guidance to states, but not on the reviewed preventive services.