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New coalition urges Legislature to invest in women's preventive care to save lives and money

AUSTIN, TEXAS--A new coalition has taken up the banner for women's healthcare in Texas, urging lawmakers to address the critical and growing need for women's preventive services by restoring funding to women's healthcare programs, ensuring ample provider capacity, and rebuilding Texas' women's healthcare safety net.

The Texas Women's Healthcare Coalition—a statewide partnership of 32 healthcare, public policy, and faith-based organizations—is dedicated to improving the health and well-being of Texas women, babies, and families by ensuring all Texas women have access to basic wellness and preventive services.

Following the 2011 Texas Legislature, the women's healthcare safety net has been hit hard by severe funding cuts and a loss of providers to its essential programs. Lawmakers cut the Department of State Health Services Family Planning program by 66 percent, blocking access to preventive care, including well-woman examinations, breast and cervical cancer screenings, and contraception for 147,000 low-income women.

“The member organizations of the TWHC understand the need for prudent investment of limited taxpayer dollars,” said Janet Realini, M.D., M.P.H., TWHC steering committee chair. “Fortunately, by investing in women's preventive healthcare, Texas can actually reduce the state's Medicaid costs while also promoting healthier families and communities. In an era when lawmakers are looking to constrain Medicaid costs, improving preventive healthcare for women is one of the single best strategies the state has.”

“Because of the loss of basic preventive and wellness care, Texas taxpayers will pay an extra \$136 million for maternal and infant care in 2013-2015 due to increased Medicaid caseloads and costs,” said José E. Camacho, executive director and general counsel for the Texas Association of Community Health Centers, a TWHC coalition member organization. “We have the chance to turn this around.”

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The Texas Women's Healthcare Coalition advocates for:

- Adequate funding for state programs to provide access to preventive healthcare and birth control for low- and moderate-income women in Texas; and
- Policies that assure broad availability of providers in the Texas Women's Health Program and other state programs that provide health screenings, preconception assessment and counseling, contraception, and other preventive healthcare.

As the economic consequences threaten our state's fiscal stability, public health consequences impact women's and children's health.

An estimated 1 million women ages 20-44 in Texas are in need of preventive care and family planning services. One in three Texas women of childbearing age has no health insurance—more than any other state. Loss of access to preventive and preconception care means too many pregnancies without prenatal care and too many babies born preterm. Lack of access to contraception means more unplanned pregnancies, higher risks of child abuse and neglect, and higher Medicaid costs.

Texas must quickly rebuild its women's health safety net to forestall a progression of undetected breast and cervical cancer, prevent complications of undetected diabetes and high blood pressure, reduce the occurrence of unplanned pregnancy, and improve the health of women and their families.

To ensure a robust safety net and save taxpayer dollars, Texas must restore DSHS family planning funding to at least 2010-2011 levels, fully fund the Texas Women's Health Program, and ensure ample provider capacity for the Women's Health Program.

Together we can achieve these goals. The bottom line is: Women's preventive care saves lives and money.

The Texas Women's Healthcare Coalition is a coalition of organizations promoting access to preventive healthcare for all Texas women. TWHC is working toward the vision of a state where every woman has access to the preventive and preconception care that will help her stay healthy and prepare for healthy, planned pregnancies. For more information about TWHC, a list of coalition members, our mission, and our legislative priorities, visit www.TexasWHC.org.