



2012 LEGISLATIVE & POLICY AGENDA

- **Support State licensure for qualified breastfeeding consultants.** In response to the US Surgeon General's 2011 "Call to Action to Support Breastfeeding," the overwhelming evidence of the health benefits of breastfeeding to both mother and baby (including the protective effect against childhood obesity, among other health benefits), and the proven direct dollar cost savings that it provides to families, businesses, and taxpayers; HMHB supports the Surgeon General's request for the licensing of lactation consultants in Georgia. Currently, less than 10% of Georgia's babies are exclusively being breastfed at six months of age, whereas nearly 70% of babies leave the hospital being exclusively breastfed. These numbers indicate that Georgia's moms want to breastfeed their babies, but they do not have the support, know-how or resources to make it happen long term. HMHB supports increasing the public's access to appropriately trained, credentialed and licensed lactation consultants in order to protect the consumer, with the ultimate goal of improving breastfeeding success rates in Georgia.
- **Improve access to prenatal care for all women in Georgia,** including low income pregnant women who do not qualify for Medicaid. Access to prenatal care has been impacted by the loss of the Babies Born Healthy (BBH) Program, which was shut down in 2010. BBH served low-income pregnant women who did not qualify for Medicaid. Finding prenatal care for this population remains a problem. Pregnant women who are unable to find affordable health care usually end up appearing at a hospital to deliver their baby having had no prenatal care. When these babies are Medicaid eligible, Medicaid bears the cost of any disabilities or health conditions that these babies may have. HMHB strongly recommends that funding sources be found to provide affordable, accessible prenatal care for all pregnant women.
- **Monitor legislation and policy changes that impact services for Medicaid and PeachCare clients.** In recent years legislation that would reduce benefits for PeachCare has been introduced and the economic downturn threatens adequate funding for the Medicaid program as well. Medicaid and PeachCare ensure access to health care for many low income Georgians. HMHB opposes changes to Medicaid and PeachCare that have a negative impact on accessibility and service to clients. A policy change that HMHB supports would be to require 12 month instead of the current DCH practice of requiring 6 month reviews for Medicaid clients. Thousands of people, mainly children, lost their Medicaid at the 6 month review because of paperwork. Although most still meet eligibility requirements, these interruptions in coverage compromise medical care and cause problems for providers and CMOs.

The Medicaid Planning for Healthy Babies (P4HB) Waiver program was implemented in January 2011. P4HB enhances services to Medicaid eligible women who are able to have a baby by providing basic women's health exams and family planning. Difficulties with the application process have created barriers to enrollment in P4HB for some women and these problems need to be addressed if the program is to meet the goals of improving Georgia's very low birth weight (VLBW) and low birth weight (LBW) rates.

- **Oppose legislation that threatens health insurance benefits such as mammograms, pap smears, and childhood immunizations.** Many of the current state mandates are for services that ensure prevention and early detection of disease. Bills have been introduced in recent years that would allow health insurance to be sold in Georgia without covering such services. Legislation passed in 2011 that allows insurance companies in Georgia to sell individual policies approved in other states regardless of whether the policies include minimum services required by Georgia law such as well-child visits, after childbirth hospital stays and preventive measures such as mammograms and pap smears. Advocates anticipate that there will be attempts to pass additional legislation that would further erode current Georgia law requiring health insurance to include these important health care protections. HMHB continues to oppose such legislation.
- **Support an increase in the tobacco tax.** Increasing the state tobacco tax would save lives and reduce teen smoking. Georgia has one of the lowest tobacco tax rates in the nation. Currently, the Georgia tobacco tax is only .37 cents a pack compared to the national average of \$1.46 a pack.