Children's Hospital of Philadelphia
PolicyLab

The ACA's Impact on Adolescent Access to Preventive Health Care in 200 Words

Population Health Sciences

Date Posted:

Nov 29, 2017

Open enrollment is here, and families are signing up for health insurance via the marketplace exchanges established by the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Adolescent health can be overlooked, so we want to highlight how the ACA, including its expansion to Medicaid, has improved adolescents' access and use of health care services.

Researchers at the University of California-San Francisco recently shed light on this when they found that, following the ACA's passage in 2010, rates of preventive well visits for adolescents increased from 41 to 48 percent. This nearly 20 percent increase is notable, as well visits are a particularly relevant source of care for adolescents who may have limited other contact with the health care system but have important screening and vaccination needs. The research team also found that minority and low-income adolescents saw the highest rates of increase, a compelling finding for those interested in advancing health equity for vulnerable populations. While the study wasn't designed to determine the reason for this change, we can guess that guaranteed preventive services at no cost and Medicaid expansion were key factors.

Here at PolicyLab, we're working to ensure that adolescents have access to comprehensive services that meet the unique health needs, such as vaccination and screening for mental health conditions, of this important stage of development. Yet, we know those services only have their intended impact if adolescents are actually stepping through their physicians' door. This study reveals one example of how certain policies enable better access to health care, and lawmakers should consider this type of evidence when crafting future health reform legislation.

Colette Rector is a former communications associate at PolicyLab.

This post is part of our "____ in 200 Words" series. In this series, we tackle issues related to children's health policy and explain and connect you to resources to help understand them further, all in 200 words. If you have any suggestions for a topic in this series, please send a note to PolicyLab's Communications Manager Lauren Walens.

Meredith Matone
Meredith Matone
DrPH, MHS
Director