Does CHIP Coverage Affect Asthma Outcomes in Alabama?

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“Yes,” say several Lister Hill scholars and their colleagues. “Children with asthma who were enrolled in ALL Kids, the Alabama Child Health Insurance Program (CHIP), for three years continuously, had more asthma-related hospitalizations and emergency department visits in the first year of enrollment compared to subsequent years. Outpatient visits and prescriptions related to the disease also decreased in subsequent years resulting in a lower average cost of treatment per child.”

Successful management of asthma requires ongoing and stable access to care. Previous studies of public insurance coverage find that enrollment in CHIP or Medicaid programs are associated with more use of physician services and fewer unmet healthcare needs. Asthma affects 6% of U.S. children and complications from the disease can harm quality of life for parents and children as well as disrupt children’s education. The results of this study show the impact of a public insurance program on a vulnerable population—low income children with a chronic disease living in a relatively poor state.

Using ALL Kids claims data from 1998 to 2009, the researchers examined the impact of coverage on children enrolled for at least a three-year period. About 2,000 individuals were continuously enrolled and met the definition for asthma at enrollment. For these children, asthma-related costs for care were lower in the second and third years of ALL Kids coverage. Non-asthma inpatient and outpatient costs were also lower presumably because when enrollees access services for asthma-related purposes they often receive care and advice on non-asthma issues as well.

“Our findings suggest that ongoing coverage and access to outpatient services may help educate individuals about their asthma and make them better able to self-manage their disease,” say the researchers. “Children with asthma who are eligible for CHIP should be encouraged to maintain coverage in order to reduce asthma-related costs and improve the quality of asthma care.”

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