



Statement for Hearing on

“Vaccines Save Lives: What Is Driving Preventable Disease Outbreaks?”

Submitted to the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee

March 5, 2019

America’s Health Insurance Plans (AHIP) is the national association whose members provide coverage for health care and related services to millions of Americans every day. Through these offerings, we improve and protect the health and financial security of consumers, families, businesses, communities, and the nation. We are committed to market-based solutions and public-private partnerships that improve affordability, value, access, and well-being for consumers.

When Americans do better, we all do better. That’s why health insurance providers are committed to helping people get better when they’re sick and stay healthy when they’re well. It’s why we work together with doctors, nurses, and hospitals to break down barriers and find real solutions, so that people get the care they need, when they need it, without hassle. And it’s why we believe every American should have comprehensive coverage that includes preventive care and helps them manage their chronic health conditions.

With this commitment in mind, we thank the Committee for focusing on the important role played by vaccines in achieving immunity against preventable diseases. Our health insurance provider members are strongly committed to providing coverage for recommended vaccines and increasing awareness about the importance of immunizations among both children and adults.

Why Vaccines Are Important

Vaccinations are an important and cost-effective way to prevent disease. When an individual receives a vaccination and is immunized against a specific disease, that person is protected

against catching the disease before any potential exposure. More broadly, society gains a collective immunization as more and more people become immune to a particular disease through the concept of “community immunity,” or herd immunity. When community immunity has been established, once-dangerous diseases can be eradicated. Polio, for example, was eliminated in the United States in 1979 after the polio vaccine became widespread.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has published data showing both the health benefits and economic value of vaccinations.¹ Vaccinations save lives: The CDC estimates that 21 million hospitalizations and 732,000 deaths will be avoided among children born over a 20-year period (1994-2013) because of vaccines. Vaccinations help reduce health care costs: The CDC estimates that vaccinations will save nearly \$295 billion in direct costs and \$1.38 trillion in total costs to society as a result of vaccines provided to children born over the same 20-year period. That’s a win-win for everyone.

Health insurance providers recognize the importance of vaccines and are actively working to increase vaccination rates in children and adults and to stop vaccine-preventable disease outbreaks, such as the spring 2017 measles outbreak in Hennepin County, Minnesota.

Building on Robust Coverage of Vaccines to Increase Awareness and Improve Vaccination Rates

Health insurance providers are proud to cover vaccinations based on recommendations by the CDC’s Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) for their indicated population. All health plans—including coverage offered in the individual market, on the ACA exchanges, small group, large group and self-insured plans²—are required to cover ACIP-recommended vaccines without cost sharing. Additionally, most adults with Medicaid coverage have access to most recommended vaccines without cost sharing, though it varies by state, and Medicare provides coverage for many adult vaccines through Part B and Part D.

Child and adolescent vaccines are covered through private health insurance providers or the CDC’s Vaccines for Children program, which provides vaccines at no cost to children who are Medicaid- and CHIP-eligible, uninsured, underinsured, American Indian or Alaska Native, and

¹ *Report shows 20-year US immunization program spares millions of children from diseases*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, April 2014. <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2014/p0424-immunization-program.html>

² Plans with “grandfathered” status and in existence prior to enactment of the ACA are excepted.

those covered by certain plans (e.g., certain “grandfathered” plans) that are not subject to the ACA’s requirements for coverage of preventive services.

While coverage is broadly available for recommended vaccines, low vaccination rates—particularly for adults—are an ongoing public health problem. Nationwide, approximately 42,000 adults and 300 children die each year from vaccine-preventable diseases.³ To address this concern, the Department of Health and Human Services’ (HHS) National Vaccine Program Office developed a national strategic plan that focuses on improving protection against vaccine-preventable diseases among adults.⁴

When HHS performed a mid-course review of its strategic plan in 2015-2016, AHIP contributed to this effort by hosting a multi-stakeholder roundtable discussion addressing barriers to boosting adult immunization rates and the need to increase awareness among adults about the importance of keeping up with recommended vaccines. Following this Roundtable, AHIP published a report that highlights the perspectives of health insurance provider leaders, federal officials, public health organizations, clinicians, consumers, and pharmacies, who all agree on the need to work together to reduce vaccine-preventable diseases.⁵

Based on these stakeholder perspectives, our report recommended action steps to improve vaccine rates in the following areas: (1) facilitating integrated, team-based vaccine care; (2) leveraging health information technology to encourage patients to get vaccinated; (3) raising awareness with health care professionals and consumers; and (4) measuring and tracking progress in improving vaccine rates and reducing disparities among racial and ethnic groups.

For health insurance providers, our report outlined specific actions including:

- Working with physician practices to ensure that prevention and wellness and age-appropriate vaccines are given equal attention—similar to chronic and acute care needs—including offering vaccines during an office visit;

³ *Immunization and Infectious Diseases*, Healthy People. <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/immunization-and-infectious-diseases>

⁴ *U.S. National Vaccine Plan*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://www.hhs.gov/nvpo/national-vaccine-plan/index.html>

⁵ *Stakeholder Roundtable: Improving Adult Immunization Rates*, AHIP, August 2015. https://www.ahip.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Vaccine_Report_8.26.15-1.pdf

- Placing continued emphasis on promoting and tracking preventive services including vaccines for adults, consistent with ACIP recommendations;
- Continuing implementation of value-based incentives that reward preventive care, including adult vaccines;
- Assessing adult vaccination status during transitions of care for adults to address gaps and disparities within adult immunization;
- Raising awareness among adults about the vaccines they should receive and the available options to access them; and
- Supporting doctors to ensure they have adequate resources to administer vaccines for adults.

Conclusion

We appreciate the Committee's leadership in addressing the important role played by vaccines in advancing higher rates of immunization against preventable diseases. We stand ready to work with the Committee—while also collaborating with other stakeholders in the health care system—to improve immunization rates to protect the American people against vaccine-preventable diseases.