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FINANCING STRATEGIES FOR MEDICAID REIMBURSEMENT OF MATERNAL DEPRESSION SCREENING BY PEDIATRIC PROVIDERS

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The healthy development of young children can be affected significantly by maternal depression. Infants and young children of depressed mothers can experience a range of problems including lower activity levels, fussiness, problems with social interactions, and difficulty achieving age-appropriate developmental and cognitive milestones.¹ Maternal depression is one of the most common yet unrecognized, undiagnosed, and untreated complications of pregnancy. Approximately 10 to 20 percent of women experience depression either during pregnancy or in the first 12 months after delivery.² Among mothers with young children, between 12 and 47 percent experience the condition.³

Pediatric providers (e.g., pediatricians, family physicians, and nurse practitioners) can play a key role in early intervention for maternal depression. In fact, many pediatricians believe it is their responsibility to recognize depression in mothers of young children.⁴ Nearly all mothers come in contact with pediatric providers numerous times, particularly during the first year of their child's life, through well-child and other pediatric visits. Early screening of pregnant women and mothers for depression is an important strategy for identifying women who may need further assessment, treatment and follow-up.

In a recent national survey, nearly one in four responding state agencies (mental health, Medicaid, and maternal and child health) reported that they encouraged pediatric providers to screen for maternal depression and an equal number were planning to do so in the future.⁵ As states place greater emphasis on this issue, state program administrators and policymakers may want to examine how various federal programs, such as Medicaid and the Title V Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant, can support state efforts. Since Medicaid covers over one-third of all U.S. births to low-income pregnant women,⁶ it is an important source of support for maternal depression screening, assessment, and treatment. Illinois is the only state we identified that has a proactive state policy regarding reimbursement of pediatric providers for maternal depression screening through Medicaid (see below).