

November 28, 2008

[Access to Prenatal Care]**Pertinent References in Article 8 of Arizona Revised Statutes**

Article 1, 8-1151. Findings and Declarations:

A.1. Research shows that the majority of a child's brain structure is formed **before age three** and that the years between birth and kindergarten are when children develop many of their language skills, thought processes, self-confidence, discipline and values.

A.4. All Arizonans benefit from providing early childhood development opportunities for our children. For children, such efforts give them a **healthy start** and an opportunity to succeed.

Article 1, 8-1152, Definitions:

In this chapter, unless the context otherwise requires:

2. "Early Childhood Development and Health Programs" means **programs and services provided to children prior to kindergarten and their families for the purpose of assisting child development** by providing education and other support, including **parent and family support** programs, child care preschool, health screenings and **access to preventive health services**. (Emphasis added.)

The language of the statute does not specifically exclude programs and services to pregnant women or to children prenatally. Nor is there language that specifically designates that these programs and services be funded. Regarding the first example (8-1151 A.1), the argument can be made that brain structure begins developing prenatally. The definition of early childhood development and health programs (8-1152, 2.) refers only to programs for children prior to kindergarten and their families. Preventative health services for this time period could refer to those offered prenatally.

Policy Implications of FTF Funding for Prenatal Health Care Strategies

The First Things First Strategic Plan Roadmap includes the Health goal: "FTF will collaborate with existing Arizona early childhood health care systems to improve children's access to quality health care." Within this goal, strategy #4 states that FTF will "Advocate to increase . . . **early and continuous prenatal care** through collaboration and coordination with the various state and public health agencies."

This goal and strategy is supported by background information contained in FTF's *Building Bright Futures, 2007 Statewide Needs and Assets Assessment*: "A system which promotes children's healthy development is one that recognizes that **health maintenance is a lifelong process that begins prenatally** and follows individuals throughout their growth and development. Within an integrated health care system, expectant mothers receive ongoing, regular prenatal care to support safe, healthy pregnancies. Women who do not receive early and continuing prenatal care have double the risk of delivering a premature baby. They are three times more likely to deliver a baby with a low birth weight (5.5 pounds or less). If children are born premature or with low birth weight, they face greater challenges as they grow. Fifty percent are more likely to be identified as in need of special education and to be a grade behind their age-appropriate academic level. **Early and continuous prenatal care and its relation to prematurity and low birth weight are of great concern to Arizona communities with 22% of women in 2006 not receiving prenatal care within the first trimester.**"

Based upon the language of the statute, the research on healthy births, and data related to the correlation between prenatal care and children's healthy development in the early childhood years, the FTF Policy staff recommendation is that the prenatal period of development be included within the framework of "access to preventive health services" and be permitted as an element within regional funding plan strategies - provided they do not conflict with other Board policy (See "Policy Implications of Paying Direct costs of Health Care"). Appropriate and allowable health strategies include those addressing the following: outreach and enrollment, care coordination, case management, information and referral, transportation and childcare to access health care, and advocacy.