



How plans can help children overcome barriers to vision care

Vision care is a crucial part of Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment (EPSDT)

One in 4 school-aged children have some form of vision problem¹ – but fewer than 15% of preschoolers receive a vision care exam from an eye care professional.² Nearsightedness, lazy eye and misalignment of the eyes can create long-term consequences if they're not treated, from vision loss to lifelong struggles at school, work and home.³

Medicaid can be an important resource to help many children get the vision care they need, but only if their families get the right assistance to help them overcome significant barriers.



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1 "Children's Eye Health: 5 Powerful Eye Statistics Every Parent Should See"; 2020 On-Site; 2020onsite.com; March 2021.

2 "School-Aged Vision: 6 to 18 Years of Age"; American Optometric Association; aoa.org; accessed June 2022.

3 "Vision Loss Fact Sheet"; CDC; cdc.gov; April 2022.



How vision health affects children

Good vision is critical for a child's success. In fact, 80% of learning in the first 12 years of a child's life comes through the eyes.⁴ Healthy eyesight is the cornerstone of educational, social, communication and extracurricular success, while poor eyesight has been proven to limit performance well into adulthood.⁵

Untreated vision disorders can negatively affect education levels, employment options, even social interactions. Unfortunately, they can sometimes be misdiagnosed as learning disabilities or attention deficit disorders. Early and accurate diagnosis of vision impairment can boost self-esteem, elevate reading comprehension, improve test scores and even reduce or eliminate behavior problems.⁵

It's clear why vision care is so important for children – but not every child has equal access to vision care.



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4 "Children's Eye Health: 5 Powerful Eye Statistics Every Parent Should See"; 2020 On-Site; 2020onsite.com; March 2021.

5 "Increasing Access and Reducing Barriers to Children's Vision Care Services"; American Public Health Association; apha.org; Oct 2020.

Barriers to vision care

Social determinants of health (SDOH) are the conditions in places where people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship and grow. Because not everyone has the same SDOH – because everyone has different opportunities, wealth and even access to their wider community – these conditions are also key indicators of inequalities in health care. Certain SDOH have been shown to increase the risk of poor health outcomes, including vision loss.⁶

In low-income homes, children are more likely to have vision loss that remains untreated. In fact, a child living below the federal poverty line has almost double the risk of being visually impaired compared to a child at 200% of the federal poverty line or higher.⁷ With issues facing low-income families like difficulty paying medical bills, transportation issues and trouble finding a doctor, vision issues can remain untreated.

Here are just some of the factors that can play a role in vision loss:⁸

- Lower income families are less likely to get preventative care, including a vision care exam, or afford eyeglasses
- People with less than a high school degree are less likely to have had an eye care visit in the last year than people who have a degree
- Neighborhood safety can affect stress levels, physical activity, weight management and blood sugar levels, all of which can lead to vision loss
- Access to care can be limited when people can't afford the cost of care, if insurance coverage isn't available, even if they don't have reliable transportation

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6 "Social Determinants of Health, Health Equity, and Vision Loss"; CDC; cdc.gov; June 2021.

7 "Increasing Access and Reducing Barriers to Children's Vision Care Services"; American Public Health Association; apha.org; October 2020.

8 "Social Determinants of Health, Health Equity, and Vision Loss"; CDC; cdc.gov; June 2021.

Navigating vision care needs

Reducing and eliminating these disparities in access to care are vital to reaching health equity.⁹ Medicaid can begin to eliminate those disparities, since children enrolled in Medicaid receive full coverage for many services that detect and address vision problems, including regular check-ups.¹⁰

But coverage alone isn't enough. Education is key. Medicaid members may have lower health literacy and not be aware of the importance of an annual vision care exam and the impact it can have long-term on their child's education and overall well-being. Many Medicaid members may not realize that vision care for children is a fully covered benefit in their plan under the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment (EPSDT) program.

Even when a member understands the covered vision benefits for their child, their circumstances can make it difficult to actually access it. It's important for plans to take a holistic approach to their Medicaid members to help children get the treatment and care they need.

The tactics below can increase awareness of the availability of vision care and its importance and incentivize families to take advantage of their benefits.

OUTREACH

Many families covered under Medicaid may not know that their children are eligible for vision screening as part of the EPSDT benefits program. In fact, the cost of identifying and correcting vision (that is, vision care exams and eyeglasses) is covered.¹⁰ Check your state's EPDST guidelines to see what exactly your state offers, then focus on outreach to meet members where they are. Use mailers, email, text or even phone calls to let your Medicaid members know what's available and help them schedule an exam for their child.

Some Medicaid plans offer a coordinated approach with a Navigator who works with the member to schedule the vision care exam, and coordinates transportation if needed. Navigators connect with the vision care provider to give an overview of the member's needs prior to the appointment. EyeMed's navigation program can integrate with a health plan's Care Coordination program.



Reducing and eliminating these disparities in access to care are vital to reaching health equity⁹

9 "What is Health Equity?"; CDC; [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov); April 2022.

10 "Vision and Hearing Screening Services for Children and Adolescents"; Medicaid; [medicaid.gov](https://www.medicicaid.gov); April 2022.

EDUCATION

Children whose vision impairments are not treated don't perform as well in school and can experience developmental problems. On average, these children have a higher chance of delayed motor, language, emotional, social and cognitive skills, all of which can have lifelong consequences.

In addition to making sure members know their children are covered, it's equally important to make sure they know why complete vision care exams are necessary. By communicating the long-term effects of poor vision, the member may be more likely to take action. Health plans can use those same methods of outreach – mailers, emails, texts and phone calls – to educate members about why their children need vision exams.



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INCENTIVE

When families live far away from an in-network doctor or they don't have reliable transportation, access is an issue. Consider using incentives like a bus voucher or Uber gift card to reduce the cost and encourage them to take their children to get a comprehensive vision exam.

Knowing the barriers to vision care is the key to helping families overcome them. Children with vision disorders are statistically less likely to receive treatment, especially if they face barriers to care. Knowing they could face lifelong struggles without the vision care they need, it's important that plans and providers make sure families are taking advantage of the benefits they have.

