



# Children's Health Caucus

*Champions for the health  
of children and youth  
across Illinois*

## **Access to Specialty Services for Children on Medicaid: Executive Summary**

- Many children and adolescents will need access to child-focused specialty care, including mental health services, regardless of whether they are designated as having 'special health care needs'.
- A child does not need to be 'sick' in order to require access to specialty services.
- Children treated by specialty providers who have training in pediatrics or child health and development have better outcomes than children who are treated by other specialists.
- 19.5% (572,200) of Illinois children have a 'special health care need'; 37% (or 211,714) are covered by Medicaid.
- Access to primary care is a cornerstone of access to specialty care.
- Illinois children enrolled in Medicaid are less likely to have access to primary care than children insured commercially. Approximately half as many children in Medicaid have a usual source of care as children insured commercially.
- Children of color comprise 48% of all children in Illinois, but 71% of Illinois Medicaid enrollees. Therefore, Medicaid access issues exacerbate racial and ethnic disparities in outcomes.
- Illinois children enrolled in Medicaid are less likely to have access to specialty care than children insured commercially, and access such care later, so that they miss opportunities for services that could potentially improve their developmental outcomes.
- Children in rural areas of Illinois continue to struggle with adequate access to primary and specialty care.
- Medicaid managed care threatens to undermine access to primary and specialty care further.
- Before transitioning children into Medicaid managed care, Illinois Medicaid spent one-third less than the national average on disabled children (\$12,534 compared to \$16,695). The pressure to reduce spending that managed care organizations in Illinois face threatens to limit Medicaid spending for disabled children further.