

A breath of fresh air: Childhood Asthma Leadership Coalition launches

August 29 2012

Today the George Washington University School of Public Health and Health Services (SPHHS) announced the launch of the Childhood Asthma Leadership Coalition, a multi-sector group of advocates and experts dedicated to raising awareness and advancing public policies to improve the health of children who suffer from asthma.

Asthma is the single most common chronic condition among [children](#). Approximately 7.1 million children suffer from asthma, a number that has been rising over the past decade. SPHHS and its partners – the Merck [Childhood Asthma](#) Network, Inc. (MCAN), the nation's only organization focused solely on childhood asthma; and First Focus, a bipartisan children's [advocacy organization](#) – have established the Childhood Asthma Leadership Coalition to address this growing public [health](#) challenge, which disproportionately affects low-income and minority children.

"In some communities, an estimated 40 percent of all children are living with asthma," said Katie Horton, R.N., M.P.H., J.D., a lead investigator on the project and a research professor within SPHHS's Department of Health Policy. "Using findings from evidence-based research, the Coalition hopes to identify real-world solutions to curtail the rising rates of asthma and help keep kids with asthma healthy."

Asthma is a disease that affects the airways of the lungs and causes wheezing and breathing difficulties. Certain factors that trigger asthma, such as [genetic predisposition](#) or a history of allergies, may not be

amenable to change. But key risk factors that may cause or exacerbate [asthma symptoms](#) – such as exposure to [tobacco smoke](#), allergens and irritants found in [indoor environments](#), and outdoor air pollutants – can be addressed through [policy interventions](#) in homes, schools and other places where children live, learn and play.

Since reducing the burden of asthma on children and families requires a multi-pronged approach to address many underlying factors, the new Coalition includes a cross-section of experts from a variety of fields including housing, environmental health, health care delivery, health economics and public policy.

"Asthma is the leading cause of missed school days. The Childhood Asthma Leadership Coalition's work is important because keeping kids with asthma healthy gives them a better chance to succeed in school and life," said First Focus President Bruce Lesley. "This Coalition will play a critical role in informing the policy decisions that affect kids with asthma," he said.

By working collaboratively, the Coalition aims to accelerate prevention and improve the diagnosis, treatment, and long-term management of childhood asthma through targeted state and federal efforts. In particular, the Coalition intends to work with leaders from the multiple federal agencies charged with implementing the new Coordinated Federal Action Plan to Reduce Racial and Ethnic Asthma Disparities to develop concrete, actionable policy solutions that reduce the burden of asthma for children living in low-income and medically-underserved communities.

The Coalition will also address barriers that prevent children from accessing the healthcare services they need to control and manage asthma. Children with asthma need a stable source of health insurance and access to health care providers in their communities that can offer

case management and health education. However, an estimated 9 percent of children with asthma have no health insurance, and many more live in regions without adequate access to quality care. These gaps in coverage and accessibility leave children vulnerable to frequent asthma attacks, emergency room visits and hospitalizations.

The Affordable Care Act offers many new opportunities for children to receive high quality clinical care, case management and health care education, and to become enrolled in Medicaid and private insurance. The Coalition will highlight these and other opportunities to ensure children with asthma get the coverage and care they need to keep their disease in check.

"MCAN looks forward to sharing with the Coalition what it has learned from years of implementing science-based childhood asthma management programs in some of the country's most at-risk communities," said Floyd Malveaux, M.D., Ph.D., Executive Director of MCAN and former Dean of the College of Medicine at Howard University. "We don't know everything about childhood [asthma](#), but we know enough to be helping more children and their families. This Coalition is a big step in the right direction."

Provided by George Washington University

Citation: A breath of fresh air: Childhood Asthma Leadership Coalition launches (2012, August 29) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-08-fresh-air-childhood-asthma-leadership.html>

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