Reducing Vaccine Underuse:
A $53 Billion Opportunity

Vaccine underuse represents a significant source of wasteful health care spending. The causes of vaccine underuse are complex and systemic, resulting from shortages, exemptions from vaccination requirements, provider financing issues and health disparities.

THE PROBLEM

Scope of Vaccine Underuse
• One of every five children is not completely up to date on recommended immunizations.3
• More than one in 10 parents uses a vaccination schedule for their children other than the U.S. Recommended Immunization Schedule, including delaying some shots and refusing others.4
• Twenty-five percent of children lack full protection against vaccine-preventable communicable diseases.5
• Coverage levels for adolescents and adults are well below Healthy People 2010 targets.6
• Avoidable Deaths: For each birth cohort of children immunized, 14 million cases of vaccine-preventable diseases (VPD) are avoided and 33,000 VPD-related deaths are averted.7
• Influenza: 36,000 deaths annually in the elderly are due to the flu or its complications.8

Costs of Vaccine Underuse
• Financial Cost: $10 billion in annual direct health care costs.9
• Societal Cost: $43 billion in annual indirect costs.10

Causes of Vaccine Underuse
• Shortages: Interruptions in production and supply, higher-than-expected demand, and the time lag between the initial development and production contribute to vaccine shortages.11
• School Exemptions: Exemptions from school immunization requirements, often easily obtained, have risen over the last decade.12
• Provider Financial Barriers: The product-related costs of vaccine supply acquisition and maintenance and inadequate reimbursement for administering vaccines to children can be prohibitive.13
• New, Costly Vaccines: The number of new vaccines has increased in recent years, and newer vaccines are substantially more expensive than “traditional” vaccines.14
• Public Opinion: Increased concern regarding the supposed link between vaccines and autism, despite studies refuting the relationship, has led some to refuse vaccinations.15
• Income: Childhood poverty is a major risk factor for under-immunization.
• Race and Ethnicity: Immunization rates for Hispanics (47 percent) and Blacks (52 percent) are significantly lower than for Whites (65 percent).16
• Age: Adolescents and adults in general have lower vaccination rates than children.17

SOLUTIONS

• Invest in Research and Development
• Promote Medical Home Models
• Increase Timely Immunizations of Children
• Enhance Medical Leadership
• Encourage Market Entry
• Revise Funding Models
• Promote Vaccine Registries and IT

Continued on back
Innovations in vaccine development, the promotion of medical home models of care, increasing the immunizations of children and encouraging entry into untapped markets can significantly increase the appropriate use of vaccines.

These interventions increase access to the appropriate use of vaccines and help to lower the costs of vaccine administration and distribution.

Learn more about ways to Bend the Curve in health care costs at: www.nehi.net/bendthecurve