

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-19-481](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

The EPSDT benefit is key to ensuring that Medicaid beneficiaries aged 20 and under receive periodic screening services, such as well-child screenings, and diagnostic and treatment services, such as physical therapy and eyeglasses, to correct or ameliorate conditions discovered during a screening.

GAO was asked to examine the extent to which Medicaid beneficiaries aged 20 and under receive health care services under the EPSDT benefit. Among other things, GAO examined (1) what is known about the provision of EPSDT services based on CMS-required annual state reporting, and (2) CMS oversight of the EPSDT benefit. To do this, GAO analyzed annual state reporting data from fiscal years 2010 through 2017, the most current year data were available; CMS documentation; and federal internal control standards. GAO also interviewed CMS officials and Medicaid officials from 16 states selected, in part, on the variation in number of beneficiaries and geographic diversity.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making six recommendations to CMS regarding its oversight of the EPSDT benefit, including collecting appropriate blood lead screening data; taking action, if needed, after assessing the appropriateness of performance measures and targets for EPSDT; and evaluating states' performance in meeting CMS's EPSDT targets. CMS agreed with three recommendations, but disagreed with three others regarding performance measures and targets. GAO maintains that these recommendations are valid, as discussed in this report.

View [GAO-19-481](#). For more information, contact Carolyn L. Yocom at (202) 512-7114 or yocomc@gao.gov.

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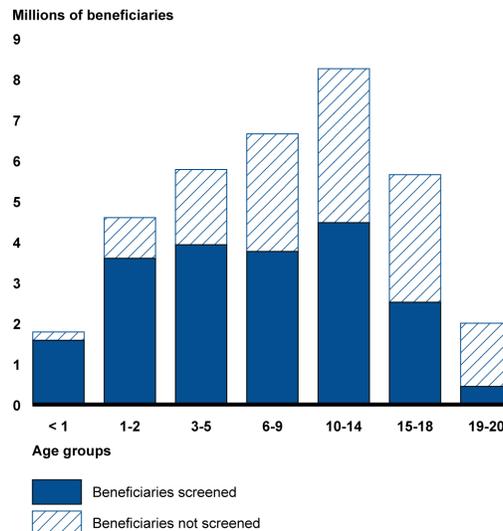
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Additional CMS Data and Oversight Needed to Help Ensure Children Receive Recommended Screenings

What GAO Found

Approximately half of all Medicaid beneficiaries aged 20 and under received screenings and services recommended under the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT) benefit in fiscal year 2017, but nearly as many did not. For example, GAO's analysis of state-reported data found that about 59 percent of all beneficiaries (20.2 million) who should have received at least one recommended well-child screening received one. About 48 percent of beneficiaries aged 1 to 20 (18.3 million) received a preventive dental service in fiscal year 2017. Older beneficiaries tended to have lower rates of screening.

Number of Medicaid Beneficiaries Receiving and Not Receiving Well-Child Screenings in Fiscal Year 2017, by Age Group



Source: GAO analysis of Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment data for fiscal year 2017. | GAO-19-481

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), the agency that oversees Medicaid, including EPSDT, has taken steps to improve the quality of information that states report about the provision of EPSDT services. CMS has also set some EPSDT performance measure targets for states; yet, the agency has not taken other steps to oversee the EPSDT benefit, such as

- collecting the data necessary to evaluate whether states are complying with CMS's policy for beneficiaries to receive a blood lead screening;
- taking action, as needed, based on assessments of the appropriateness of some performance measures, such as well-child screening measures; and
- using state-reported information to regularly evaluate states against CMS's EPSDT targets, or assisting states in planning improvements to meet the targets.

Absent these steps, CMS's oversight is limited and beneficiaries may not be receiving appropriate EPSDT services when they need them.