



“Voltage Drops” in Children’s Health Care

Barriers That Impede Children’s Access to Quality Health Care

RAND RESEARCH AREAS

- CHILD POLICY
- CIVIL JUSTICE
- EDUCATION
- ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT
- HEALTH AND HEALTH CARE
- INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
- NATIONAL SECURITY
- POPULATION AND AGING
- PUBLIC SAFETY
- SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
- SUBSTANCE ABUSE
- TERRORISM AND HOMELAND SECURITY
- TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

The U.S. health care system is at its best when responding to acute health crises, such as heart attacks. But the system falls short when it comes to providing the kind of protective, preventive care children need: care that helps parents anticipate future needs, monitors problems as they arise, and coordinates needed services.

A new study by RAND researchers identifies six areas in the pediatric health care system where major barriers—termed “voltage drops” by several leading health services researchers—lead to a breakdown in delivery of adequate quality care. The study also provides a framework for establishing distinct, achievable objectives to improve health care for children.

The table below describes these voltage drops and summarizes policy recommendations. The authors emphasize that the benefits of expanding access to care will be realized only if the quality of care is addressed.

Voltage Drop	Implications	Recommendations
1. Many children lack access to insurance coverage: 25 percent may be without coverage for some part of the year.	Children’s coverage depends largely on parents’ ability to obtain employer-based insurance. Public insurance funding is vulnerable, and many children are ineligible. Uninsured children are less likely to have well-child visits, other office visits, hospitalizations; they disproportionately visit emergency departments.	Shore up and protect Medicaid/SCHIP. Widen eligibility. Improve market-based approaches to increasing access to private insurance.
2. Many barriers prevent enrollment in available insurance plans.	Barriers to enrollment include lack of parental awareness of public programs and eligibility; lack of perceived value of insurance; administrative obstacles; and cost of private insurance, when available.	Increase federal funding and mandate limited state cost-sharing. Increase outreach efforts and family coverage. Help with purchase of private family coverage; strengthen safety net system.

Continued on back

This product is part of the RAND Corporation research brief series. RAND research briefs present policy-oriented summaries of individual published, peer-reviewed documents or of a body of published work. The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit research organization providing objective analysis and effective solutions that address the challenges facing the public and private sectors around the world. RAND’s publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors. RAND® is a registered trademark.

© RAND 2004

3. Access to insurance does not guarantee access to needed services and providers.	Some children are underinsured; cost-sharing may be substantial; not all plans provide same benefits, especially for well-child care.	Assess extent of underinsurance; incentivize insurance plans to limit cost-sharing for well-child visits and other preventive care.
4. Children often lack access to a consistent source of primary care.	Frequency and continuity of well-child care help ensure adequate well-child care but vary widely; affected by parental race/ethnicity, language barriers, education, income, employment stability, type of insurance plan.	Strengthen coordination of community health care systems, organizations and providers. Fund pilot programs to identify most effective methods for achieving this coordination.
5. Many primary care physicians lack systematic ties with providers of specialty services to whom they can refer patients when needed.	Most children, particularly those with special needs, require referrals to specialists at some point. Needs for such services often exceed use of and access to those services.	Implement more “medical home programs” that consolidate primary care and specialty referral services with a seamless, comprehensive care model.
6. Quality of health care delivered to children varies widely.	Access to services is beneficial only if quality is high. Adoption of evidence-based practice guidelines lags, resulting in quality gaps that threaten safety and effectiveness of care (too little, too much, or inappropriate care).	Build and enforce quality standards through economic incentives, report cards, and accreditation mechanisms. Educate providers in quality improvement techniques and provide measures and feedback systems. Develop a child health services infrastructure that supports quality.

RAND

Corporate Headquarters

1776 Main Street
P.O. Box 2138
Santa Monica, CA
90407-2138
TEL 310.393.0411
FAX 310.393.4818

Washington Office

1200 South Hayes Street
Arlington, VA 22202-5050
TEL 703.413.1100
FAX 703.413.8111

Pittsburgh Office

201 North Craig Street
Suite 202
Pittsburgh, PA 15213-1516
TEL 412.683.2300
FAX 412.683.2800

New York Office

215 Lexington Avenue
21st Floor
New York, NY 10016-6023

Council for Aid to Education
TEL 212.661.5800

New York External Affairs
TEL 212.661.3166
FAX 212.661.9766

RAND-Qatar Policy Institute

P.O. Box 23644
Doha, Qatar
TEL +974.492.7400
FAX +974.492.7410

RAND Europe Headquarters

Newtonweg 1
2333 CP Leiden
The Netherlands
TEL +31.71 524.5151
FAX +31.71 524.5191

RAND Europe—Berlin

Uhlandstrasse 14
10623 Berlin
Germany
TEL +49 (30) 31.01.91 0
FAX +49 (30) 31.01.91 9

RAND Europe—Cambridge

Grafton House
64 Maids Causeway
Cambridge CB5 8DD
United Kingdom
TEL +44 (1223) 353.329
FAX +44 (1223) 358.845

www.rand.org



HEALTH

CHILD POLICY
CIVIL JUSTICE
EDUCATION
ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT
HEALTH AND HEALTH CARE
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
NATIONAL SECURITY
POPULATION AND AGING
PUBLIC SAFETY
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
SUBSTANCE ABUSE
TERRORISM AND
HOMELAND SECURITY
TRANSPORTATION AND
INFRASTRUCTURE

This PDF document was made available from www.rand.org as a public service of the RAND Corporation.

This product is part of the RAND Corporation research brief series. RAND research briefs present policy-oriented summaries of individual published, peer-reviewed documents or of a body of published work.

The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit research organization providing objective analysis and effective solutions that address the challenges facing the public and private sectors around the world.

Support RAND

[Browse Books & Publications](#)

[Make a charitable contribution](#)

For More Information

Visit RAND at www.rand.org

Explore [RAND Health](#)

View [document details](#)

Limited Electronic Distribution Rights

This document and trademark(s) contained herein are protected by law as indicated in a notice appearing later in this work. This electronic representation of RAND intellectual property is provided for non-commercial use only. Permission is required from RAND to reproduce, or reuse in another form, any of our research documents for commercial use.