



For Immediate Release

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**Information on Prescription Drugs Hard to Find, and Choices More Limited Under
Medicaid Reform
*Changes Pose Challenges for Consumers***

WASHINGTON – Consumers are facing an array of challenges related to accessing prescription drugs under the State of Florida’s Medicaid Reform pilot program in Broward and Duval counties, according to research conducted by Georgetown University’s Health Policy Institute.

Consumers have great difficulty obtaining the information necessary to select a health plan that provides coverage of their most-needed medications, researchers found. And only one plan, which operates in both Broward and Duval counties, offers a list of covered drugs that is equivalent to the previous State of Florida Medicaid program.

The findings were released today in an issue brief – *Uncertain Access to Needed Drugs: Florida’s Medicaid Reform Creates Challenges for Patients* – part of the researchers’ ongoing evaluation of the state’s Medicaid changes. The research was commissioned by the Jessie Ball duPont Fund, which is based in Duval County.

“Medicaid Reform was supposed to empower consumers to make wiser choices and improve health care in Florida,” said Jack Hoadley, health policy analyst and author of the current brief. “But consumers are not being given access to the information they need to make wise choices. And the offerings from which they may choose are less comprehensive than what they had before.”

Florida’s Medicaid Reform plan began Sept. 1, 2006 with a pilot program in the two urban counties and is scheduled to expand to three more rural counties later this year. The Florida reform program is being viewed by some as a model for state and national Medicaid reforms.

The researchers encountered significant stumbling blocks when attempting to access the Preferred Drug Lists for the various health plans operating under reform in the two counties. Preferred Drug Lists are important because they tell consumers which prescription drugs the plan will cover without appeals, which can be tedious and time-consuming. The Choice Counselors hired by the State of Florida were unable to provide the lists, many of the plans

demurred when asked to provide the lists, and the lists generally were not easy to find on the plans' web sites.

After obtaining the lists through various means, a comparison of the plans' coverage revealed that only one of the plans provides drug coverage of the scope provided under the state's existing Medicaid preferred drug list. These limitations pose special hardships on people with mental illness and other disabilities.

"The consumer has a hard time getting the information they need to know and when they do get it, they find they have fewer choices than before," said Joan Alker, co-author of the report.

The issue brief is one in a series of briefs to come from the Georgetown University researchers evaluating the implementation of Florida's Medicaid changes. It is available online at <http://hpi.georgetown.edu/floridamedicaid>.