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An Act Improving Access to Breast Pumps

Access to High Quality Multi-User Breast Pumps is an Equity Issue

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What is a multi-user breast pump?

Breast pumps, used to suction milk from mothers' breasts when they cannot nurse directly, vary widely in their quality and effectiveness. Multi-user pumps are designed to allow mothers to pump both breasts at once, and to extract more milk in less time. They are used when mothers and babies must be separated on a regular basis, often due to maternal and/or infant illness, or if a medical anomaly does not allow the baby to come to the breast. Because of their cost, they are often rented and rental of multi-user pumps is not covered by the Affordable Care Act.

Cost

- Multi-user pump rental is costly, \$50-\$80 per month, and is not feasible for many.
- Mothers' own milk improves outcomes and reduces short- and long-term health care costs. 10% of babies are born preterm. In 2019, about 1700 MA babies were born below 3.3 pounds, requiring extensive NICU stays.
- Coverage of multi-user double pumps will pay for itself many times over in shorter lengths of stay, reduced infections and resulting surgeries, as well as reduced need for long term treatments and therapies prevented or mitigated by use of human milk.
- When mothers' own milk is not available, donor milk is crucial for the health of NICU babies and for support of maternal breastfeeding. Coverage for multi-user pumps is cost effective and it will mitigate the need for and expense of donor milk.

Why are they important?

Mothers' milk is more than nutrition, particularly for preterm and sick babies. It is medicine protecting against life threatening diseases, such as infections of the blood (sepsis) and intestines (necrotizing enterocolitis, NEC).

Unfortunately, mothers of preterm and sick babies face unique challenges in making breast milk, and the challenges are greater for low-income and mothers of color. NICU babies can be in the hospital for months, during which time mothers need to be pumping milk every few hours, round the clock. Use of high-grade double pumps has been shown to increase supply and sustain milk production longer, much needed for mothers who are at home while their babies remain in the NICU.

Key Facts

- Access to high quality multi-user double breast pumps is an equity issue. It is well documented that low income and families of color have high rates of preterm birth, NEC, infant mortality and long term morbidity. They are likely to be treated in safety net hospitals that do not have funds to cover pump rentals for home use.
- Low income and mothers of color are less likely to breastfeed, due to many barriers, including the cost of breast pump rentals.
- Coverage for breast pumps for NICU families is cost effective, in short and long term health care costs.

