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HHS Awards States $106 Million in Grants for Thinly Veiled Data Collection Initiative

Citizens’ Council for Health Freedom: Government Planning to Visit Homes of Babies and Toddlers, But to What End?

ST. PAUL, Minn.—Through an Obamacare initiative, Health and Human Services recently announced that it will award $106.7 million in grants to 46 states to support an early childhood home visitation program.

HHS says the goal is to “ensure that young families have the option to participate in a program that promotes their children’s healthy growth and development.” But one leading patient privacy advocacy group says the project is actually a thinly veiled attempt to collect the private medical data of America’s youngest residents.

Citizens’ Council for Health Freedom (CCHF, www.cchfreedom.org), a Minnesota-based national organization dedicated to preserving patient-centered health care and protecting patient and privacy rights, says the home visits will really serve as a massive data collection project.

“Undoubtedly every mother would like help with her newborn infant, but how many mothers would be willing to submit their children and family to a comprehensive parenting, child health and home environment evaluation by a government employee?” asks CCHF president and co-founder Twila Brase. “Home visiting—originally sold as a child abuse prevention strategy—is actually a family surveillance system. Under the guise of child health and development, state employees observe family relationships and physical surroundings within the home to determine the quality of parenting, the use of health care services, compliance with immunization schedules and the safety of the home. This information is then entered into a government database for tracking and ongoing assessment of these families.”

The HHS/Obamacare grants will go to 46 states, the District of Columbia and five jurisdictions as part of the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program established by the Affordable Care Act. With the grants, states will be able to “continue and expand voluntary, evidence-based home visiting services to women during pregnancy and to parents with young children up to age five,” according to the HHS announcement yesterday.
Additionally, Brase adds, the home visiting program has been touted as a mechanism for finding and preventing child abuse—but who defines child abuse? One family learned that lesson the hard way. Although the Frankford family was not involved in home visiting, *Frankford v. Missouri Division of Family Services* (MDFS) is just one example of the bias that can occur. According to a March 1997 Rutherford Institute Litigation Report, Phil and Crystal Frankford were “investigated after their child fell and sustained minor injuries. Even though a doctor ruled out child abuse, MDFS placed the Frankfords on the state registry of abusers after finding that a piece of broken furniture in their home created a danger to the child.”

“*Abuse is not a clearly defined term, which is cause for concern when government officials or employees enter the homes of unsuspecting parents.*” Brase says. “If government officials and their employees told parents that they are entering the home to look for child abuse and reporting observational and other data on their family to state and federal government officials, would parents agree to the visit? I don’t think so.”

*CCHF* has long opposed initiatives such as these, calling home visiting projects “cradle-to-grave tracking.” One concerned Congressman, the late Rep. Henry Hyde, stated several years ago that home visiting was “big brother intervention as we have never seen before.” Furthermore, Brase adds, home visits are voluntary, but families who say “no, thanks” could be under suspicion for not allowing the government into their home to ask questions about their newborn or toddler.

Questions and answers during these home visits will be stored and tracked, including information about “the number and characteristics of families receiving services,” “assessments of families” such as “household characteristics, participant characteristics, risk factors for abusing or maltreating children, home visits/services ... outcomes ... and termination information,” according to the Alabama Physician’s Resource Council in a comprehensive report on home visiting. With the HHS grant money, 45 other states could also initiate home visiting programs that will track and store this same information.

“The government touts early childhood home visits as a way to ensure healthy children,” Brase says, “but the visits actually put families in a fish bowl, and their parenting styles, family choices and even their home environment are recorded, tracked and stored for government use and analysis. Big government has already found a way into too many facets of our lives. American families should be warned not to welcome them into their homes.”

Celebrating its 20th year, *Citizens’ Council for Health Freedom* is a patient-centered national health freedom organization based in St. Paul, Minn. *CCHF* exists to protect health care choices and patient privacy. *CCHF* sponsors the daily, 60-second radio feature, Health Freedom Minute, which airs on more than 150 stations nationwide on the American Family Radio Network and 90-plus stations on the Bott Radio Network. Listeners can learn more about the agenda behind proposed health care initiatives and steps they can take to protect their health care choices, rights and privacy.

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