

# OPINIONS

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## COMMENTARY

# Support for Title V honors our mothers

By Michael R. Fraser

As Mother's Day approaches there's a flurry of shopping for cards and ordering flowers to honor the women who gave us life. These gestures symbolize our gratitude, but many of our nation's mothers need something far greater: sustained federal support for vital maternal and child health programs.

Each year, 40 million pregnant women, infants and children receive critical services from the Title V Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant — among the most efficient federal and state programs. Right here in Kentucky, according to 2009 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services data, more than 330,000 moms and children received services through Title V that they might not have otherwise received. Yet funding for these essential services is in jeopardy as Congress looks for ways to cut the federal budget.

Never heard of Title V? You're not

alone, but chances are you — or a mother you love — has been touched by the maternal and child health programs it supports in every state and territory.

Take prenatal care services. Title V helps improve women's health before conception to help prevent premature births. That, in turn, helps lower health care costs. It also reduces infant mortality, which has dropped 77 percent in the United States since 1950.

Title V addresses other leading threats to children's health. In the hospital nursery, Title V supports screening newborns for metabolic conditions and genetic disorders that can kill or leave babies severely disabled. It ensures continuity of care, so follow-up treatment is provided and afflicted babies don't fall through the cracks.

Title V promotes breast-feeding — one of the factors proven to help reduce childhood obesity — and healthy eating during pregnancy, through collaboration with the Women and Infant Children and other nutrition programs.

Title V also supports systems to help vaccinate youngsters against measles, mumps, rubella, polio and other childhood diseases that once claimed thousands of young lives annually and permanently disabled others.

If you have or know a child with special health care needs — such as autism, Down syndrome, cystic fibrosis or a heart condition — they also have likely received support from Title V.

This program provides essential information on these conditions, helps show where to access community services and provides assistance in locating doctors and dentists for these special-needs children.

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Title V programs help bridge the gap between home and school for special-needs children and help their mothers — and fathers — find support from other parents and professionals.

The list of benefits goes on and on. That's why cutting Title V is short-sighted. For example, premature births are estimated to cost the United States \$26 billion annually. Compare that to the \$662 million spent annually on all Title V MCH programs. That works out to just about \$2 per American — far less than we will pay if we don't invest in these preventive services now.

Congress faces the difficult task of reducing the federal deficit. Hard decisions will have to be made. Yet as Mother's Day approaches, we urge Congress not to balance the budget on the backs of our mothers and children.

This Mother's Day, let's celebrate the remarkable women who gave us life. But let's also honor them by making the commitment to maintain adequate support for Title V and the maternal and child health programs on which so many of our nation's mothers depend. Our long-term medical costs will be far lower and our families will be far healthier.

Michael Fraser heads the Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs, a national, non-profit organization that supports state maternal and child health programs.

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