Which Children Are Not Getting Their Needs for Therapy or Mobility Aids Met? Data From the 2009–2010 National Survey of Children With Special Health Care Needs

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Background. Pediatric rehabilitation therapy services and mobility aids have an important role in the health of children with special health care needs, and the Affordable Care Act (ACA) may increase coverage for these needs. Identifying the prevalence of and factors associated with therapy and mobility aid needs and unmet needs prior to the full implementation of the ACA will be useful for future evaluation of its impact.

Objective. The purpose of this study was to identify the prevalence of and factors associated with caregiver perceived needs and unmet needs for therapy or mobility aids among children with special health care needs living in the United States.

Design. A cross-sectional, descriptive, multivariate analysis was conducted.

Methods. The 2009–2010 National Survey of Children With Special Health Care Needs was used to identify a nationally representative sample of children with special health care needs with needs for therapy (weighted n = 2,603,605) or mobility aids (weighted n = 437,971). Odds of having unmet needs associated with child and family characteristics were estimated.

Results. Nearly 1 in 5 children with therapy needs had unmet needs, and nearly 1 in 10 children with mobility aid needs had unmet needs. Unmet needs were most strongly associated with how frequently the condition affected function and being uninsured the previous year.

Limitations. Data were caregiver reported and not verified by clinical assessment. Survey data grouped physical therapy, occupational therapy, and speech therapy; analysis was not discipline specific.

Conclusions. This evidence serves as a baseline about the future impact of the ACA. Pediatric rehabilitation professionals should be aware that children with special health care needs whose condition more frequently affects function and who have insurance discontinuity may need more support to meet therapy or mobility aid needs.