



AGENDA FOR CHILDREN

A VOICE FOR LOUISIANA'S CHILDREN

LOUISIANA WINTER 2005 covering kids™ & families

This newsletter is supported through a generous grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. (www.rwjf.org)

Louisiana's Tammi Fleming showcases Kingsley House Walkers & Talkers program for President Bush and the nation!

Tammi Fleming and her team of outreach workers have enrolled 4,000 children in the last 6 years. They have canvassed neighborhoods throughout New Orleans to find families whose children would be eligible for free health care coverage through LaCHIP or Medicaid. Going door-to-door to speak with parents in their own homes has been successful in helping families. An important service unique to this project assists families in obtaining the necessary documentation and verifications. They also help families navigate the system, get linked to a primary care doctor and stay enrolled in the program. This model of outreach was featured recently by President Bush as an example of the work he is looking to fund and replicate with his outreach proposal called the 'Cover the Kids' Program, to enroll all eligible children into their state children's health insurance program. More on the President's initiative on Page 2.

RENEW LaCHIP Card by PHONE!

You can now renew your **LaCHIP/Medicaid** card by phone, ANYTIME, day or night - even weekends. Now the process is easier because of a new phone service that began January 1. You can call the hotline for free at **1-877-252-2447** and answer several questions through the automated service. Or you can still also renew by filing out the 'renewal' form mailed to your home or simply call the analyst who manages your case when it's time to renew. It's that EASY!!!

Louisiana receives millions for LaCHIP

Unspent federal funds have been redistributed to all states who used their previous allotment to cover their uninsured child population. Louisiana's share is \$10.7 million and it will be used to enhance efforts to further reduce the number of children without health insurance. Strong support from Governor Blanco to find and enroll all eligible children has resulted in an increase of almost 33,000 since the March 2004 Health Summit. Now, over one half of Louisiana's children receive health care services through Medicaid. Yet, it is estimated that some 50,000 eligible children remain who have not enrolled for coverage. This suggests that outreach should not be discontinued.

Efforts can be further enhanced by better coordination between state agencies and community based groups seeking to enroll all eligible families. Look on the last page of this newsletter for state and local outreach contacts in your community. Consider joining the regional health care consortia in your area to be apart of the Governor's health care reform efforts. For information visit the website www.dhh.state.la.us

IMPORTANT UPCOMING EVENT

Governor's Health Care Reform Panel Meeting

Thursday March 17, 2005
8-3:30pm

**Baton Rouge Marriott (old Hilton)
5500 Hilton Avenue**

For more information visit

www.dhh.state.la.us

NEWS * YOU * CAN * USE

Income Levels Increase

Income limits for LaCHIP and LaMOMS will increase on 4/1/05 as the federal poverty level is adjusted. New levels listed below.

Persons in Family Unit	Annual income (200%)
1	\$19,140
2	\$25,660
3	\$32,180
4	\$38,700
5	\$45,220
6	\$51,740
7	\$58,260
8	\$64,780

State Pledges to Expedite Applications for Pregnant Women

State workers have dramatically cut the processing time for **LaMOMS applications**, in some cases to less than one week. This enables greater opportunities for women to get vital prenatal care services. Some **Parish Health Units** have out-stationed workers to help women get enrolled when they come in seeking services. These efforts reflect the state's strong commitment to creating meaningful and sustainable simplifications.

Federal efforts for OUTREACH called 'Cover the Kids'

The new federal budget calls for \$1 Billion to be used at the community level for outreach to get all eligible children enrolled in state and federally sponsored health care coverage programs, such as LaCHIP. Watch the Covering Kids website for more details in the coming weeks.

www.lacoveringkids.org

State Officials Come Together for Kids to discuss ways to better **coordinate and simplify** opportunities for families to get and stay enrolled in LaCHIP/Medicaid. Superintendent Cecil Picard of the Department of Education is working with Dr. Jimmy Guidry from the DHH on the Coordinated School Health Plan to better integrate outreach and retention into all public schools. DHH Secretary Cerise was also in attendance and shared his commitment along with the Governor's for more strategic coordination efforts between Medicaid and other state departments. One exciting example is a possible joint application with the Food Stamps Program, of the Department of Social Services (DSS). Adren Wilson, the Assistant Secretary of DSS spoke about his agency's efforts and is excited about collaborations to ensure that families get into programs to get the services they need.

Covering Adults - Louisiana is one of eight states that have been awarded a federal State Planning Grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration, HRSA, to develop strategies to cover our uninsured population. Under this grant the state will; collect and analyze data regarding the uninsured, establish a Technical Advisory Committee, recommend action steps to the Governor's Health Care reform Panel to submit to the Governor and the Legislature, and prepare and submit a report to the federal Department of Health and Human Services on Louisiana's findings and plan for covering the uninsured. A website for this project is in development through the Louisiana Department of Health & Hospitals.

National SCHIP Crisis : ALL STATES ALERT

Featured State - Mississippi: Last summer CKF reported about the severe Medicaid crisis facing our neighboring state, Mississippi. Restrictive policies that began January 1, 2005 include a return to face-to-face interviews for clients seeking state sponsored health care coverage. Applicants must have an interview at the initial application and at renewal time which occurs every six months. Advocates at the Children's Defense Fund, Regional Office located in Jackson, see this policy as reversing simplifications that were needed to keep families enrolled and will further restrict families from even entering programs. They are however optimistic that despite this new barrier, families who do come in will have greater opportunities to learn more about accessing care, the importance of primary care and the benefits of having a medical home.

'Medicaid under Fire'

The NOT-SO-BAD NEWS: The federal budget released in early February may result in further reductions in federal funds to Louisiana as reported by Department of Health and Hospital (DHH) Secretary, Dr. Fred Cerise in a report issued by DHH on February 14, 2005. However Dr. Cerise states, “There is some good news. Several key areas in which we are concentrating that will require federal approval were not cut in the Bush proposal. This includes our plan to request approval to use Medicaid funds to help low-wage earners purchase their health premiums, funding to create more community health clinics and the continuation of funding for children’s health insurance”.

The BAD NEWS: While it is still too early to fully assess the impact as the budget process is far from over, discussions at the national level suggest the administration is proposing striking changes to the fundamental structure of Medicaid. ‘Modernizing Medicaid and SCHIP’ (called LaCHIP in Louisiana) will include \$60 billion in Medicaid cuts over the next ten years as a means of ‘controlling’ growth that is deemed unsustainable. Also being proposed are expansions of complex waiver programs that are designed to give states greater flexibility to ‘further increase coverage among low income individuals and families without additional costs for the Federal government’. Advocates warn to be skeptical of these, as mechanisms for reductions in benefits to certain populations, enrollment caps, adding premium costs and more, which ultimately mean states take on greater share of funding for these programs. This can also be viewed as a federal spending cap, which is not a new concept but strongly opposed by the National Governor’s Association and other health care advocates.

Reasons for ‘REFORM EFFORTS’ : The need to control Medicaid costs is not new. Rising costs have been of concern for the last few decades. It is generally understood that growth in Medicaid has been because of two broad trends—increases in health care costs that are affecting the whole US health care system, including the private sector, and the aging population. Eligibility or benefits expansions have not contributed to significant Medicaid growth for some time. Only 30% of Medicaid costs goes for coverage of low-income children and pregnant women.

Possible Impacts of Medicaid Restructuring: If adopted the proposed changes would weaken state’s ability to finance the growing health care costs which could lead to reductions in programs available, more restrictive eligibility, benefits, etc... Federal funding caps could inhibit use of advances in information technology that is vital to efficient administrative needs. Ironically Medicaid administrative costs are generally lower than the private sector. Eligibility systems improvements and better coordination among government departments can make these programs more efficient for clients and tax-payers. Other areas that would suffer would be program integrity activities and children's outreach initiatives.

NEXT STEPS: The House and Senate are developing their own budget proposals right now called the budget reconciliation process. Watch for important details to be released in the coming weeks. You can stay informed and send commentary in many ways. Stay in tuned with your local Covering Kids & Families Coalition or visit the Agenda for Children website for links to ‘Alerts’ on these issues, and contacts for your elected officials . www.agendaforchildren.org

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Louisiana Covering Kids & Families (CKF) at Agenda for Children is part of a national effort sponsored by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to increase the number of people who benefit from state/federal health care coverage programs, thus reducing the number of uninsured. The Louisiana project supports 6 regional and a statewide coalition working to ensure that all eligible people get enrolled and maintain their coverage. Visit www.lacoveringkids.org