



CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE

A Voice for Washington's Children, Youth & Families



For Immediate Release

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Insurance rate for Washington kids remains stable

U.S. Census data show that increase in children covered by public programs makes up for loss of employer-based health insurance.

September 10, 2009—Data released by the U. S. Census Bureau this morning show that 93.2 percent of children in Washington State had health coverage in 2008, the same rate as in 2007.

The rate remained the same only because an increase in the number of children enrolled in public coverage made up for the loss of employer-based coverage. The number of children covered under employer-based plans dropped to just under 60 percent in 2008, compared with 65 percent the prior year. At the same time the percentage of children on public insurance jumped to 36.7 percent, from 30 percent in 2007. Overall, about 107,000 Washington children lacked health coverage in 2008.

“What this data show us is that public coverage in Washington, the Apple Health for Kids program, is making up for a loss in employer-based coverage in our state,” said Lori Pfingst, Assistant Director of Washington Kids Count. “If families did not have the option of a public insurance plan, we would have seen a significant drop in coverage rates for Washington children.”

Early this year, the Washington State Legislature maintained funding for the Apple Health for Kids program and preserved comprehensive coverage for children in families making up to 300 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.

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“We can all be very proud that we as a state have been able to keep children covered as the economy went south and as employers cut back or eliminated coverage for families,” said Jon Gould, Deputy Director of the Children’s Alliance.

“Our leaders in government deserve a great deal credit for maintaining the commitment to cover all kids by 2010. Governor Chris Gregoire and legislative leaders such as Senate Majority Leader Lisa Brown, Senator Chris Marr, House Speaker Frank Chopp and Representative Larry Seaquist all fought to make sure families would have an insurance option for their children when they really needed it.

“We encourage state policymakers to continue current efforts to find and enroll eligible kids until every child in our state is covered.”

The most recent state data show that 452,385 children in Washington were enrolled in public children’s health coverage programs in April 2009, up from 409,383 children enrolled in April 2008 and 370,830 in April 2007.

“The census data released today captures only the very beginning of the effects of the recession,” Pfingst said. “We would expect the number of children on employer-based plans to further erode in the second half of 2008 and in 2009 as unemployment increased. Additionally, current trends show more businesses cutting back on family coverage or increasing the employee contribution for such plans significantly.”

Nationally, the new Census report shows that the number of uninsured children in the United States is at the lowest level since 1987. In 2008, there were 7.3 million uninsured children, a decline of 800,000 from 8.1 million in 2007. (See the Center for Children and Families blog, [Say Ahhh!](#), for more information.)

The health reform debate going on in the U.S. Congress has not yet settled on how children’s coverage will be handled under a reformed health insurance system, although plans to date would put children above 133% or 150% of the Federal Poverty Level, depending on the plan, in an insurance exchange along with their parents. Advocates for children are urging our representative in Washington, D.C. to ensure that any health reform package includes safeguards to ensure that families continue to have the kind of comprehensive coverage available under Apple Health for Kids.

“Apple Health for Kids works; the census data show that,” Gould said. “Health reform is critical to both children and their parents. As Congress works out the details, Washington State offers an example of how to ensure that children get the health coverage they need to develop and thrive.”

In two weeks the Census Bureau is scheduled to release data from the American Community Survey (ACS), which is conducted in a different manner and will include more

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recent data and county-level data. The ACS does not, however, include historical data for comparison. In addition, the Washington State Office of Financial Management releases its population survey every two years, which includes uninsurance rates. The population survey has historically shown lower uninsurance rates than the census data. The next release is scheduled for late 2010.

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