



CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE

A Voice for Washington's Children, Youth & Families

For Immediate Release

CONTACTS:

Jon Gould, deputy director, (206) 324-0340 x19, cell: (206) 683-2674

Ruth Schubert, senior communications manager, (206) 324-0340 x18,
cell: (206) 498-0185

Liz Gillespie, communications manager, (206) 324-0340 x17, cell: (206) 289-0593

BIG BOOST FOR APPLE HEALTH FOR KIDS ***Washington Wins \$7.5 Million Performance Bonus for Children's Health Insurance Program***

(Dec. 17, 2009) — Washington's health insurance program for children has won a \$7.5 million performance bonus from the federal government – a timely windfall that could prevent thousands of children from losing their Apple Health for Kids coverage.

The federal Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services awarded the bonuses to nine states that met enrollment targets and other conditions, such as streamlining their application and renewal procedures.

Last week, Gov. Chris Gregoire reluctantly proposed cutting \$11 million from Apple Health for Kids by lowering the income threshold to 205 percent of the federal poverty level (down from 300 percent). That would bump an estimated 16,000 kids off health coverage that has proven to be a lifeline to families struggling to make ends meet during the worst economic recession in decades. The governor quickly put Apple Health for Kids on the list of programs that she wants to maintain with additional revenues.

“The timing couldn't be better,” said Jon Gould, deputy director of the Children's Alliance. “This is no gift, it is federal funding that was truly earned by Gov. Gregoire and state lawmakers who have championed the cause of covering all children.

“Today, we call upon state lawmakers to use this funding to fully protect the Apple Health for Kids program. A performance bonus that recognizes Washington for doing a great job of making sure children have health coverage will help the state continue progress toward the goal of covering all kids by 2010.”

Cindy Mann, director of the Center for Medicaid and State Operations, the branch of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that awarded the bonuses, called Washington a leader among states that have made expanding health care for children a top priority.

“Washington’s success in enrolling eligible children in Apple Health for Kids is exactly what the Obama Administration had in mind when the president signed the CHIP (Children’s Health Insurance Program) reauthorization bill earlier this year,” Mann said. “All children need health coverage, and families rely on programs like Apple Health for Kids to help them through these tough economic times. This bonus will help Washington sustain its Apple Health for Kids program so that more struggling families get health coverage for their kids.”

Gould applauded Gregoire, House Speaker Frank Chopp and Senate Majority Leader Lisa Brown for making children’s health a priority. “No doubt, this bonus will help in the upcoming legislative session. But if we as a state are going to fully protect children’s health, our lawmakers must take a just and balanced approach to crafting a state budget – one that includes new revenue to help children and families weather and recover from the recession.”

Apple Health for Kids is Washington state’s public insurance plan for uninsured children in Washington. It was created by Gov. Gregoire and the state Legislature in 2007 to put policies in place to cover all kids by 2010 so that no child lacks health coverage.

States that compete for annual performance bonuses in future years will have to show they have continued to make progress in covering uninsured children and streamlining administration of their children’s health insurance programs.

To find out more about Washington state’s performance bonus and see quotes from Washington policymakers, go to:
<http://www.childrensalliance.org/sites/default/files/CHIPRAbonusbriefquotes12-17.pdf>.

For more information about Apple Health for Kids, go to:
http://www.childrensalliance.org/sites/default/files/Cover_All_Kids_Summary_2009.pdf.

For questions about awards other states received, contact Jennifer Ryan at the Center for Medicaid and State Operations at (410) 786-3393 or Jennifer.ryan@cms.hhs.gov.

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The Children’s Alliance is a statewide public policy advocacy organization that works at the state and federal level to ensure that all children have what they need to thrive. Current campaigns focus on health care, ending childhood hunger, early learning, and foster care. Our membership includes 125 organizations and more than 10,000 individuals statewide who are members of our Children’s Action Network. To learn more about the Children’s Alliance, go to www.childrensalliance.org. To sign up for our media list, e-mail Liz Gillespie at liz@childrensalliance.org.