



CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE

A Voice for Washington's Children, Youth & Families

For Immediate Release

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13,000 children now waiting for health care

Latest data shows growing wait list for underfunded state program

January 26, 2006 (Seattle) – The state has now received 17,125 health insurance applications for a recently restored state program that has funding to cover only 4,300 children in the first half of this year. ([For county-by-county application numbers, see attached document](#)). That means nearly 13,000 known children—all of them living in poverty—will have to wait until at least July 2007 to get regular health care.

The waiting list for the Children's Health Program, which covers immigrant children not eligible for Medicaid, represents the most glaring lapse in a year that stemmed the rising uninsurance rate for children in Washington State.

“Lotteries are not for kids,” said Jon Gould, deputy director of the Children's Alliance. “Thousands of concerned parents have filled out the necessary paperwork to get healthcare for their children only to find out they've lost in a lottery for children's health coverage. Children's health care is too important to be left to chance.”

Restoration of the Children's Health Program represented one of several wise policy choices made last year, as outlined in a Children's Alliance report being released today. The report, [“Responding to the Crisis: Full Health Coverage for Washington's Children”](#), outlines immediate and long-term policy steps that need to be taken in order to ensure that all Washington children have health insurance coverage. At present nearly 100,000 children in our state lack health coverage. Enrolling every child eligible for a public insurance program would take care of two-thirds of them.

While lawmakers restored the Children's Health Program last year, they provided only enough funding to cover 8,800 children over the next 1½ years. As a result, the state pulled random applications from those received by the deadline, awarding coverage to less than one-third of the children in the lottery pool.

“We know who these children are and where they are,” Gould said. “It is within the state’s means to erase the waiting list and deliver health coverage to 13,000 children now.”

The cost of covering all eligible children who apply this biennium is \$20 million.

The new report also notes that Governor Christine Gregoire and state lawmakers took several wise steps last year to reverse a 3-year drop in children’s health coverage in our state. As a result of poor policy choices made in the early part of this decade, more than 50,000 children lost public health coverage. Actions taken last year effectively restored much of this coverage. The next step, says Children’s Alliance health policy associate Liz Arjun, is to ensure that all children who are eligible for public health programs are enrolled.

“We know there are tens of thousands of low-income children around the state who are going without health care because their families either don’t know about or think they aren’t eligible for programs like Medicaid and the Children’s Health Program,” Arjun said. “Last year the legislature set the laudable goal of covering all Washington children by 2010. We have four years and 100,000 children to go. Getting every eligible child enrolled will get us more than two-thirds of the way towards our goal.”

The Children’s Alliance is recommending that lawmakers act this year to erase the waiting list for the Children’s Health program, invest in outreach, centralize eligibility determination and outlaw monthly premiums for children’s Medicaid coverage with the goal of full medical coverage for all children by 2010.

“Health care delayed is health care denied—families need help today,” Gould said. “Failing to act this year will result in increased costs in the future as children end up in emergency rooms and hospitals for conditions that could have been taken care of through regular doctor visits.”

“Responding to the Crisis” summarizes the policy decisions enacted between 2002 and 2004 that resulted in 50,000 children losing public health insurance as well as the steps taken last year that finally turned the tide. It is a follow-up to “[Condition Critical: Washington’s Preventable Children’s Health Crisis](#)”, a comprehensive review of gains and losses in children’s health coverage that was released in December 2004.

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For more than twenty years, the Children’s Alliance has advocated for children, youth and families in Washington. The Alliance has 128 organizational members, and more than 6,500 individual members statewide. For a [list of member organizations](#) and to learn more about the Children’s Alliance, go to: www.childrensalliance.org