



CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE

A Voice for Washington's Children, Youth & Families

For Immediate Release

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New law ensures comprehensive, affordable health coverage for every child in Washington

Washington plan among best in the nation for kids

March 13, 2007 (Seattle) – Governor Chris Gregoire today signed into law a bill that places Washington at the forefront of the nation in ensuring all children can get comprehensive, affordable health coverage. The bill includes targeted expansions of public insurance programs, funding for outreach to eligible families and measures to give children access to quality care with a regular doctor.

“This is a landmark bill for the health of children in Washington state,” said **Paola Maranan, executive director of the Children’s Alliance**. “This legislation isn’t just about coverage; it also includes important measures to make sure children can get in to see a doctor and get quality care. After years of working to get children the health coverage they deserve, all of us are proud of the leadership Washington is taking to make sure children have the healthy foundation they need to succeed.”

Key features of the bill include:

- Several health coverage programs will be consolidated into a single, unified program of comprehensive benefits, including medical, dental, vision and mental health.
- The state’s health care budget will accommodate all children in families up to 250% of the Federal Poverty Level who enroll, ending the need for waiting lists.
- The legislation opens up public insurance to all families who need it on a sliding-scale basis. Families between 200% and 300% of the Federal Poverty Level will pay monthly premiums based on income, while families with greater incomes will be able to buy into the program at full cost after January, 2009.

- The legislation invests in proven outreach strategies to ensure that responsible parents have access to accurate information about available children’s health coverage options and the enrollment process.
- The bill directs DSHS to simplify the application and renewal process through mechanisms such as online applications to reduce the number of children who “churn” on and off public-supported health coverage programs.
- Quality improvement measures and targeted provider rate increases aim to provide coordinated regular care for children through “medical homes.”
- This bill declares goals for nutrition and physical activity standards in K-12 public schools and creates a legislative school health task force to ensure that Washington’s schools are healthy environments for the health and development of children.

The estimated cost to the state is \$30 million over the next two years. However, the money saved in unneeded hospitalizations and emergency room visits will go a long ways toward offsetting the increased upfront cost of covering children. As an example, the cost of treating one ear infection in an emergency room is enough to cover a child on Medicaid for an entire year.

“This legislation makes smart investments that will save taxpayers money in the long run; it also will save children’s lives,” Maranan said. “Covering children pays off.”

Passage of the children’s health bill places Washington at the forefront of states working to combat rising uninsurance rates by crafting smart health coverage programs for children.

“With passage of this legislation, Washington State is a leader in children's coverage,” said **Cindy Mann, executive director of the Center for Children and Families at the Georgetown Health Policy Institute in Washington, D.C.** “This new law expands eligibility and helps to assure that children will have access to quality health care in a medical home. The state’s action demonstrates that covering all children is within reach. It also underscores how important it is for lawmakers in Washington, D.C. to support these enormously valuable children's coverage initiatives through a strong reauthorization of the State Children’s Health Insurance Program, which provides for a federal contribution to the cost of covering children enrolled in state programs.”

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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 120 organizational members, and more than 7,500 individual members statewide.

For a [list of member organizations](#) and to learn more about the Children’s Alliance, go to: www.childrensalliance.org