

Florida Child Healthcare Coalition Participants and Friends: Critical Decision time for the Legislature

Recently there have been many good articles, editorials, and messages about the pending threat to cost effective and proven programs like - Healthy Start, Early Steps, and the lack of action on Florida KidCare bills.

Fundamental to these early intervention and prevention model programs, including access to health coverage for uninsured children, is the scientific evidence based data that confirms the importance of early brain development set during the prenatal period and early childhood. Neuroscience and public policy will shape the future destiny and potential of every child.

Legislators need to understand the following value statement.....

Improving access to health care for pregnant women and children and sustaining early intervention and prevention programs results in healthy children ready to learn and succeed in school and life.

(Note reference material below this message for Healthy Start by Carol Brady and Florida KidCare as posted by Florida CHAIN. www.floridachain.org)

Now is the time for action to galvanize all advocacy efforts and send a strong and compelling message to the Florida Legislature to act responsibly and fund the successful proven programs for maternal and child health.

Message to the the Florida Legislative Leadership:

- **Restore Healthy Start Funding in the House Health Care Appropriations Committee and do not shift the cost effective successful Healthy Start Coalitions into the Department of Health.** (State will lose \$32 million annually in additional funds leveraged by Healthy Start Coalitions compared to \$4 million savings)
- **Adequately fund the Part C Early Steps program to effectively serve children with developmental delays reduce their risk of life long disabilities, help them reach their full potential and reduce deep end costs for care in the future.**

Fortunately the 2010 budget has been favorable for the Florida KidCare program. **But, KidCare bills, SB 2082 & HB 1545, to improve and increase enrollment, provide continuity of care, and access millions more additional funds for the KidCare program are at a standstill.**

Contact:

Speaker Larry Cretul larry.cretul@myfloridahouse.gov 850 488-1450

Rep. Denise Grimsley denise.grimsley@myfloridahouse.gov 850 488-3457

Rep. Bill Galvano	bill.galvano@myfloridahouse.gov	850 488-4086
Rep. David Rivera	david.rivera@myfloridahouse.gov	850 488-7897
Sent. President Jeff Atwater	atwater.jeff.web@flsenate.gov	850 487-5100
Sent. J.D. Alexander	Alexander.jd.web@flsenate.gov	850 487-5044

Resource information:



Healthy Start Coalitions Funding, Expanded Medicaid Coverage for Pregnant Women Up for Grabs in Conference

Future funding for Florida’s Healthy Start Coalitions and expanded Medicaid coverage for pregnant women is now up to the budget conference committee. Support for both programs was zeroed-out in the budget adopted by the House last week. The Senate budget preserves current funding for the Coalitions and Medicaid.

The Coalitions, community-based non-profits, were a key component of the 1991 legislation that created a statewide initiative to reduce Florida’s infant mortality rate. The initiative also expanded Medicaid coverage for the working poor from 150% to 185% of poverty and funded Healthy Start services, increasing access to prenatal care and other services. Under the House budget, Healthy Start funding would go to the county health departments.

Loss of the \$4 million in funding for the Coalitions threatens more than \$32 million in additional funding for expectant and new families that is raised each year by the community organizations. This funding enables the Coalitions to address critical gaps in services and stretch state funding. Loss of the Coalitions also threatens local systems of care developed over the last 19 years to serve vulnerable families. Multiple community providers, in addition to local health departments, now provide prenatal care and other services to more than 56% of pregnant women and newborns in the program. Health departments throughout the state have experienced significant cuts over the last five years with many ending prenatal clinics.

The Medicaid roll-back for pregnant women, which may be prohibited if the state accepts federal stimulus funding, will affect more than 19,000 families statewide, increasing uncompensated care for prenatal care providers and delivering hospitals. Most important, it will reduce access to care, contributing to an increase poor birth outcomes.

The creation of the Healthy Start Coalitions laid the groundwork for efforts to develop public-private partnerships to implement state programs in early childhood education, foster care and work force development. Local volunteer boards assess needs and allocate state funding to meet them. These boards also ensure accountability and cost-effective service delivery. The Healthy Start programs has been recognized nationally for its success in addressing community needs and lowering infant mortality in the state.

The Coalitions and other children’s advocacy groups are urging lawmakers to retain funding for the Healthy Start Coalitions and maintain the state’s current system of care for vulnerable families.

Carol Brady, Executive Director
Northeast Florida Healthy Start Coalition, Inc.

Support KidCare Bills SB 2082 and HB 1545

By Florida Child Healthcare Coalition

Florida's KidCare Program has improved with changes in 2009, but targeted enrollment falls short and federal funds have not been maximized.

Florida ranks 49th in the nation with regards to the percentage of children who do not have health insurance. It also ranks 47th in the percentage of pregnant women who receive prenatal care in the first trimester. Florida needs to do a better job accessing federal funding for low income pregnant women and children; improving health outcomes; and saving tax dollars.

Meanwhile, Florida's Agency for Health Care Administration, AHCA, reports that there are an estimated \$200 million in state federal allocations that will be lost to other states in 2010 because we did not fully utilize the matching funds.

KidCare benefits from a generous increase in federal match under the CHIP Reauthorization Act, 2009 by the U.S. Congress. Additional financial support for performance bonus will be awarded to states that streamline enrollment and retention for children. KidCare bills for 2010 meet these bonus criteria and would bring additional funds to Florida.

Smart budget and policy choices for proven programs protect what matters for Florida's families struggling with recession, job losses, and keeping children healthy. Providing health care coverage for low income pregnant women and children gives families security while providing relief to the strain on shrinking state revenues.

Support KidCare bills SB 2082 and HB 1545 which:

- o Provide coverage for pregnant women up to 200 % of the federal poverty level. Current coverage is only to 185% FPL. *(This would reduce poor birth outcomes, high neonatal costs and life long therapies.)*
- o Provide 12 months of continuous eligibility for children age 6-19 in Medicaid like that provided for younger children and other non Medicaid KidCare programs. *(This would improve retention rates for eligible children and access to federal bonus funds.)*
- o Give presumptive eligibility for all program components under KidCare. *(This addresses the importance of continuity of care.)*
- o Allow legal immigrant children who are uninsured to enroll in KidCare. *(This would be yet another way to access federal bonus funds for Florida.)*
- o Covers children of state employees subject to appropriation
- o Provide an option for full pay for infants

These changes would, in no way, affect our budget. The costs of the provisions in these bills are absorbed within the current appropriation.

Florida Child Healthcare co-conveners: Linda Merrell LindaKids1@aol.com, Diana Ragbeer Diana@thechildrenstrust.org, Karen Woodall, fcfep@yahoo.com.