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## CONNECTING KIDS TO COVERAGE: *Ten Things Local Businesses Can Do*

*Millions of children in the United States are uninsured, yet nearly two-thirds of them are eligible for health coverage under Medicaid or the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). To close this coverage gap, outreach and enrollment efforts are needed. Local businesses can help spread the word about the availability of children's health coverage to both customers and employees, and help connect families with eligible children to application assistance.*

### Consider the following activities:

- 1. Target businesses that operate in communities where families with eligible children reside.** Ask owners or managers to post information about Medicaid and CHIP on store bulletin boards or place flyers in shopping bags. Make sure materials provide information about how families can apply for children's health coverage. Public address system announcements, for example, in supermarkets or department stores, can direct shoppers to in-store displays or activities related to enrollment.
- 2. Engage businesses that appeal to the groups you are trying to reach.** Think about where families with children shop, eat out, or buy school supplies. Ethnic grocery stores or restaurants, hair and nail salons, and movie theaters are just some examples of businesses that have helped with outreach.
- 3. Work with businesses that may help families address health needs.** Local pharmacies are a great place to conduct outreach on health coverage programs. Pharmacists understand the struggles families face affording medicines and they are considered a trusted source of information.
- 4. Enlist utility companies, banks and other businesses that communicate with customers regularly.** Arrange for information on Medicaid and CHIP to be included as a monthly bill stuffer. Sometimes utility companies can target neighborhoods where eligible children may live by sending special consumer bulletins to customers in specific zipcodes. Large companies may have a regular spot on local TV or radio stations. Ask them to devote some airtime to Medicaid and CHIP outreach.
- 5. Provide information to local newspapers and shoppers guides.** Local newspapers are often receptive to printing ads as a community service. Use the opportunity to advertise places where families can go to learn more about the programs and enroll their children. They may also be interested in local human interest stories. Focus on what it has meant for families in the community to get health coverage for their children or how a local organization has made special efforts to help children enroll.
- 6. Work with groups that have a broad reach into the business community.** An article in the Merchants Association newsletter or a spot on the agenda at the next Chamber of Commerce breakfast will connect you to the business community with the support of their own organization behind you. Your local United Way is also a great link to the business community.
- 7. Enlist businesses to provide children's health coverage information at the worksite.** Working parents may not get health coverage through their jobs or they may not be able to afford the cost of covering their children. Employers can provide information about Medicaid and CHIP in employee break rooms, in newsletters and in "new hire" packets. Some companies run Helplines to link workers to resources in the community, like child care. Take the opportunity to link families application help.
- 8. Reach out to businesses likely to hire teens.** Teens may have weekend or after school jobs. This is a great opportunity to provide information about Medicaid and CHIP and how to apply.



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- 9. Offer assistance to businesses affected by the economic downturn.** Businesses that have had to cut workers' hours or even close their doors are likely to have employees who need information about Medicaid and CHIP. In some communities, "Rapid Response Teams" are organized by Departments of Social Services to get information about public benefits and how to sign up directly into the hands of workers.
- 10. Make a connection with job training programs.** Reach out to career centers run by community organizations and government agencies and to community colleges that run job training programs. Provide information on Medicaid and CHIP, along with links to where families can find help applying for coverage. Such organizations may be open to allowing trainees to use their computers to sign-up on line.

### **Providing Enrollment Help in A Local Supermarket**

The Children's Defense Fund of Texas has partnered with Fiesta Mart, Inc. a Houston-based chain of grocery stores, to hold children's health insurance sign-ups assisting parents of more than 25,000 children in applying for the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and Children's Medicaid over the last ten years.

During each one-day campaign, application assistance is provided at 10-15 store locations throughout Houston. Individual stores are managed by state contracted community based outreach organizations in Houston. More than 200 Coalition volunteers have supported the sign-up events, including the Texas Department of Human Services Children's Medicaid Program, the Harris County Hospital District, AARP, the Better Business Bureau, local health and social service programs, and area high school, college and medical students.

Critical to the campaigns has been heavy media upfront, in English and in Spanish, informing families of store locations and documents needed to complete applications. CDF prepares press kits, a month in advance, that are mailed to 300 plus English and Spanish language media outlets throughout Houston with sample public service announcements and background materials on CHIP. Press releases are then sent out in a week before the drive.

Fiesta has also hosted and sponsored press conferences, publicized enrollment drives in its store circular and provided their mascot for press events and enrollment activities.