



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



August 12, 2011

Dear Governor:

We are writing to enlist your help in an unprecedented initiative to find and enroll an estimated 4.3 million uninsured children who are currently eligible for Medicaid or the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). These children represent a large majority of the uninsured children in the U.S., and they are missing out on health coverage that is available to them today.

Too often, children who are uninsured encounter obstacles that prevent them from becoming fully engaged in the classroom, on the playing field and in other extracurricular activities—preventing them from getting the most out of their education. That's why the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the U.S. Department of Education (ED) are working together to help enroll these eligible children through the Connecting Kids to Coverage Challenge. This initiative, led by HHS, calls on leaders at every level of government and in the private sector to help enroll all eligible, uninsured children in Medicaid and CHIP and keep them covered for as long as they qualify. We urge you to join us and to encourage your schools to participate in this effort.

A forthcoming study by the Urban Institute indicates that outreach and enrollment efforts do increase the percentage of children who enroll in health coverage. Between 2008 and 2009, the number of children eligible for Medicaid and CHIP increased by two to three million due to difficult economic times and State eligibility expansions. Despite this increase in eligibility, in part due to outreach and enrollment efforts, the total number of eligible but uninsured children declined to 4.3 million in 2009, which was lower than the 4.7 million children found to be eligible but uninsured in 2008. The participation of children in Medicaid and CHIP increased from 82 percent in 2008 to 85 percent in 2009 nationally.

Efforts to streamline Medicaid and CHIP enrollment and renewal procedures and to conduct effective outreach activities supported by the Children's Health Insurance Reauthorization Act (CHIPRA) have made a difference in extending children's coverage in the economic downturn. These efforts, with continued support from CHIPRA, will continue to play a vital role in making progress toward the goal of enrolling all eligible children.

Schools play an essential role in reaching eligible children, from young children in preschool and Head Start to teens in high school. We urge you to undertake children's health coverage outreach and enrollment activities when classes begin this fall. Below are some promising strategies you may wish to consider:

- **Use information on registration or emergency contact forms to identify children who may need health coverage.** Adding a question about whether a child has health insurance to the forms that every family completes can help identify uninsured children who may be eligible for Medicaid or CHIP. Families of such children can be notified about the programs and how to enroll. Note that any personal information maintained by a school to which the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) applies must only be used and disclosed in accordance with FERPA.

- **Enlist school athletic coaches to promote enrollment of eligible children in Medicaid and CHIP.** Coaches can provide information on health coverage programs to athletes and to the entire student body. They also can direct students to places within the school (for example, the school nurse or school-based health clinic) or in the community where their families can apply. HHS has piloted a Coaches Campaign, called “Get Covered, Get in the Game,” in seven states (CO, FL, MD, NY, OH, OR, and WI), and we can help provide technical support and customized outreach materials if you wish to undertake a similar program.
- **Implement an “Express Lane Eligibility” process with the School Lunch Program.** Most children who are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals are likely to also qualify for Medicaid or CHIP. The “Express Lane Eligibility” option allows States to rely on eligibility findings from programs like School Lunch to jump-start Medicaid and CHIP eligibility determinations. Oregon and Louisiana, for example, are collaborating with their schools to implement Express Lane procedures. Note that any information must be used in accordance with Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) Express Lane Eligibility guidance.

CHIPRA provides funding to help States close the children’s health coverage gap. Last December, HHS distributed more than \$206 million in 2010 performance bonuses to States that not only exceeded child enrollment targets, but also simplified Medicaid and CHIP enrollment procedures. States interested in applying for a 2011 performance bonus have until October 15, 2011, to do so, and there will be additional opportunities for States to apply in future years. In addition, many States, nonprofit groups, and other organizations that have received CHIPRA outreach grants are focusing on ways to engage schools in outreach, enrollment, and renewal activities. HHS will continue to share and highlight the accomplishments of these grantees and provide technical assistance to others interested in adopting promising school-based practices.

Health coverage is essential to ensuring that children get the health care services they need to grow and learn. The good news is that so many uninsured children do not need to wait for coverage because they are already eligible for Medicaid or CHIP. Your leadership can make a tremendous difference as we work together to meet the Connecting Kids to Coverage Challenge.

If you have questions or would like to be connected with others who have successfully implemented school-based enrollment strategies, please do not hesitate to have your staff contact Donna Cohen Ross at HHS at [Donna.CohenRoss@cms.hhs.gov](mailto:Donna.CohenRoss@cms.hhs.gov) or (202) 260-0509.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Sebelius  
Secretary of Health  
and Human Services

Arne Duncan  
Secretary of Education

cc: State Medicaid Directors  
State CHIP Directors  
Chief State School Officers