

## Action Step Fact Sheet 2005 Children's Agenda



### Health:

Ensure health insurance coverage for New Hampshire children by preventing reductions to Medicaid and SCHIP benefits and eligibility levels and by identifying and enrolling all eligible, uninsured children.

#### **What is the specific concern or issue affecting NH's children?**

New Hampshire has tasted victory in its quest for improving child health. There is much to celebrate. This state has become a leader for children's health coverage and serves as a model for other states. According to 2003 Census data<sup>1</sup>, New Hampshire held on to the number three spot among states for the second year in a row. Based on a two year average, New Hampshire's 5.2% uninsured rate among children ranks close to second place Rhode Island with 5% uninsured and first place Vermont with 4.8% uninsured children. Without the support of NH-CAN and numerous partners, this success would not be possible.

Unfortunately, our celebration may be short-lived. Publicly supported children's health coverage and all that we have accomplished are at risk. There is a clear and present threat in the form of budget cuts, regressive Medicaid modernization and other healthcare reforms. Given the current economic and political climate, we must take action to preserve the gains we have made and reach out to those who are uninsured but eligible.

There is much at stake in children's coverage: benefits, eligibility, family cost sharing, provider reimbursements, and potential retrenchment in efforts to coordinate outreach and simplify enrollment. Consider for a moment what a 10% budget cut might mean to the Healthy Kids program. Would 6,000 of the 66,000 children enrolled lose coverage? Would we simply eliminate the expanded eligibility groups that have provided coverage to 6,500 children through the Healthy Kids Silver program? Would a Medicaid waiver allow the State to drop mandated benefits and exceed cost-sharing limits that currently strengthen Medicaid? Would we eliminate dental benefits, mental health services, and prescription drugs in one or both programs? Would we impose cost-sharing on families with incomes above 150% of the federal poverty level (FPL) and/or raise cost-sharing on the premium based Healthy Kids Silver program, exceeding the threshold of affordability for many? Would we reduce provider reimbursements and create barriers to access? Would we eliminate simplification measures that remove administrative barriers to enrollment and retention?

These threats are real:

- Certain political leaders have publicly stated that the Healthy Kids program has expanded beyond its policy role. Such remarks hint at curtailing resources that will inevitably impact eligibility and benefits.
- The State's efforts to "modernize Medicaid" through the GraniteCare plan will replace health insurance for children with family incomes above 133% FPL with capped health savings accounts (HSA's) that do not provide full coverage. This change would affect more than 21,500 children and pregnant women. HSA's are complicated to understand, costly to administer, and generally not perceived as adequate coverage for individuals with special or chronic health conditions. The HSA product concept is relatively unproven in the private insurance market and has never been tested for public section health coverage.

- State administrators signaled their willingness to abandon the successful public-private partnership between the State and NH Healthy Kids Corp. (NHHK) which was created by the Legislature specifically to provide access to affordable health coverage to uninsured children. A proposed rules change, eventually blocked by the Joint Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules, would have removed NHHK as the program administrator.

The potential dismantling of state services and altering of the social infrastructure will have a devastating effect on children and their families. The end result will be a significant step backwards in children's health coverage. If we do not fight for the future of children's health coverage, much could be lost.

### **What are the Action Step strategies to address this issue?**

We must heighten the public awareness of the threat to children's health coverage. We must remain alert and be prepared to react to budget and other legislative or administrative proposals that would be detrimental to children's health coverage. We must engage families and community leaders in the process.

This strategy has worked before. In 2003, when increased funding was required to continue to meet the needs of uninsured children, this issue was voted in as the Health Action Step Priority. Through the efforts of NH CAN and our partners, we prevailed in our fight for adequate funding.

This issue requires increased visibility and public awareness as New Hampshire enters the new legislative session and what promises to be a very difficult budget battle. Educating legislators about health coverage for children and informing them of the gains that have been made in ensuring children's access to healthcare is critical to success. Specifically NH CAN partners can help in the following ways:

#### **Let your elected and appointed officials know how important health coverage is for kids.**

Ask candidates where they stand on children's health coverage. Let them know that the Healthy Kids program is a great investment. Remind them that every 20 cents of State funds buys \$1 dollar in health coverage and that a 10% cutback could leave 6,600 kids without health coverage.

**Advocate against policy changes that reduce eligibility levels, which in turn will increase the number of uninsured children.** Write a letter to the editor or submit a more detailed opinion editorial to state and local papers. Join the Communications and Advocacy Committee of the Covering Kids & Families Coalition or participate in its Speakers Bureau.

**Advocate against policy changes that would reduce benefits or access, thereby leaving children with unmet health needs.** Arm yourself with facts about how children's health coverage improves access to routine health and dental care, a known predictor of lower long-term healthcare expenses and positive health outcomes.

**Help educate families about the importance of engagement in advocacy.** Legislators must hear from constituents in their communities. Empower the families you serve with the knowledge that their voice will make a difference.

**Encourage medical and dental professionals, schools, childcare centers and community agencies** to advocate for children's health coverage and to assist uninsured families in enrolling in Healthy Kids.

**Join efforts with NH Healthy Kids Corp. and the Covering Kids & Families Coalition** to provide more opportunities to enroll children and simplify the enrollment process for families.

**Take a leadership role in organizing an “Every Kid Covered” campaign in your community.** Wiping out the uninsurance among children is within our reach if every community takes a leadership role in advocacy and in identifying and enrolling eligible children.

**How does this meet NH CAN's prioritizing criteria?**

◆ **How many children in NH are affected?**

Many of the nearly 60,000 children enrolled in Healthy Kids Gold, and likely all of the 6,500 children enrolled in Healthy Kids Silver will be affected by budget cuts and caps on spending. If the Healthy Kids Silver program is affected or if NHHK is removed as the program administrator, the 1,400 children enrolled in the Healthy Kids Buy-In program may lose coverage altogether. Additionally, efforts to reach out to the 17,000 uninsured children are likely to be abandoned.

◆ **What is the severity of the impact of the issue and the strategy**

The impact is broader than the loss of an insurance card because health insurance matters in a number of ways:

- Insured children receive the preventive care they need to go to school healthy and ready to learn. In turn, healthy children demonstrate improved school attendance and performance, and their parents miss fewer days of work.
- Health insurance provides kids with access to a medical home and a personal physician, which reduces costly and unnecessary emergency room visits.
- Health insurance helps to reduce cost-shifting that fuels private insurance inflation
- Health insurance reduces the burden on the financially fragile healthcare safety net.

The Healthy Kids program provides clear evidence of improved access. Based on the 2004 Family Survey Report<sup>2</sup>, children enrolled in Healthy Kids are much more likely to access preventive healthcare, preventive dental services and needed medical treatment than uninsured nonparticipating families in New Hampshire. Furthermore, Healthy Kids families are more than twice as confident they can access care when their children are sick or injured.

The survey findings indicate that:

- An uninsured child is up to 10 times more likely to not have a preventive healthcare visit in the past 12 months compared to children enrolled in Healthy Kids for 12 months or more.
- An uninsured child is up to 7 times more likely than a Healthy Kids enrollee to not have a dental check up in the past 12 months.
- An uninsured child is 4.5 times more likely to not receive needed care compared to an established Healthy Kids enrollee.
- Less than half of uninsured families are confident they can get needed care compared to 95% of families enrolled in Healthy Kids.

◆ **What is NH CAN's unique ability to create or influence change?**

NH CAN has recognized political clout and extensive reach deep into communities across New Hampshire. The direct influence of the network and its ability to engage families and community leaders must voice the public's collective commitment to preserving the gains we have made and extending coverage to the 17,000 uninsured children.

**What groups, organizations and individuals are/will be involved?**

This action step will be supported by a significant public awareness campaign that is being spearheaded by the *HNHfoundation* (formerly called the Healthy New Hampshire Foundation). NH Healthy Kids will be working with the Coverings Kids & Families Coalition, the NH Pediatric Society, NH Family Physicians, Bi-State Primary Care, the NH Hospital Association, the School Nurses Association and numerous community partners across New Hampshire.

**Your help is needed!**

Uncertainty looms on the horizon as the State leans toward significant budget cuts which will reduce critical funding for children's health coverage. All that we have tirelessly worked for is at risk. New Hampshire is a leading state in addressing the issue of uninsured children. Our approach and program design are proactive and progressive. We have made tremendous gains that are worth preserving. We ask that you join us and our 4,000 community partners – from schools to healthcare providers to social services agencies – in preserving the gains we have worked so diligently to achieve.

**REFERENCES**

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<sup>1</sup> 2003 Current Population Survey, Census Bureau:  
<http://www.census.gov/hhes/hlthins/historic/hihist5.html>

<sup>2</sup> RKM Research, Family Survey Report 2004, available at [www.nhhealthykids.com](http://www.nhhealthykids.com)