



*A Passionate Voice for Compassionate Care*

**March 2017**

## **ENSURING HEALTH COVERAGE FOR CHILDREN-CHIP EXTENSION**

### **THE ISSUE**

The State Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) provides health insurance coverage for 8.4 million children in families with low to moderate incomes. According to the Medicaid and CHIP Payment and Access Commission (MACPAC), 89 percent of children enrolled in CHIP had family income at or below 200 percent of the FPL in FY 2015. The program has played an important role in increasing the number of children with health insurance coverage and providing access to affordable and high-quality care. Since the enactment of CHIP, the percentage of uninsured children has been cut in half.

CHIP is a bipartisan program created by the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 as Title XXI of the Social Security Act, to give states the option to extend health care coverage to low-income uninsured children whose families earn too much to qualify for Medicaid but too little to afford private coverage. Like Medicaid, CHIP is a joint federal-state program administered by the states within broad federal guidelines and funded by state and federal matching dollars. CHIP, however, is a capped grant program with a fixed amount of federal funding available each year, thereby limiting the number of children that can enroll in CHIP regardless of eligibility. All states, the District of Columbia and five territories have CHIP programs.

The State Children's Health Insurance Program's funding is currently set to expire on Sept. 30<sup>th</sup>, and Congress must act by early spring to extend the program's funding. Without confirmed funding for the program, states will be forced to start sending coverage cancellation notices to families in early June. Recent analyses by MACPAC have shown that the number of uninsured children would increase significantly--1.1 million children would become uninsured if CHIP program funding is not extended. MACPAC states that "not all children currently covered by CHIP would be eligible for subsidized exchange coverage," nor would they qualify for Medicaid.

Both CHIP and the Medicaid program continue to be vital in filling the gap in health care coverage among needy children. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, CHIP and Medicaid combined now cover more than 1 in every 3 children in the U.S.

### **MINISTRY TRADITION**

Children are among the most vulnerable members of our society, and their well-being through access to health care should be our first priority. As Pope John Paul II said in *Familiaris Consortio*, "In the Christian view, our treatment of children becomes a measure of our fidelity to the Lord himself." The mission of the Catholic health ministry, in accordance with the *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services*, also calls us to be distinguished through "service to and advocacy for those people whose social condition puts them at the margins of our society and makes them particularly vulnerable to discrimination." Public health programs play an important role in ensuring

that low-income children have access to health care coverage, and by supporting them the ministry helps to fulfill our commitment to accessible and affordable health care for all.

### **CHA'S POSITION AND ACTIVITIES**

The Catholic Health Association (CHA) supports efforts to provide health insurance coverage and quality care to all of our children. Specifically, CHA supports several ways to maintain and ensure coverage for all children.

### **CHIP EXTENSION**

- Extend CHIP funding – CHA calls on Congress to extend CHIP funding this year to enable states to continue coverage of children currently enrolled in CHIP and to enroll all eligible uninsured children in CHIP and Medicaid. Funding should be extended at least through FY 2019, the date to which CHIP is currently authorized.
- "Express-lane" Enrollment – CHA supports making Express Lane eligibility permanent to maximize enrollment of eligible children and pregnant women. Express lane enrollment is an option for states to auto-enroll children in CHIP and Medicaid if they qualify for other means-tested programs such as food stamps, WIC and school breakfast and lunch programs.
- Medicaid Funding – CHA continues to urge Congress to reject cuts in Medicaid funding. Medicaid plays a critical role in the health care safety net and provides coverage to our most vulnerable individuals, including children.