

WHEN CHILDREN'S HEALTH MATTERS

Saint Anthony Hospital Aggressively Seeks Medicaid-Eligible Children

When it comes to enrolling children in Medicaid, Saint Anthony Hospital in Chicago has learned nothing beats face-to-face contact. In an effort to make sure children have access to healthcare, the hospital has organized an aggressive campaign of getting outreach workers into the community and preparing staff to help families fill out applications during hospital visits.

Part of Catholic Health Partners, Saint Anthony is a 184-bed facility in Little Village, a concentrated Mexican-American community on Chicago's west side. Many adults are working poor, sometimes holding down two low-paying jobs to make ends meet. Few have health insurance as an employee benefit. Many immigrants in this community are guarded about seeking healthcare.

THE BIG PICTURE

Saint Anthony's efforts are one part of a larger picture called Children's Health Matters, a nationwide initiative working to reduce the number of children—nearly 5 million—who qualify for Medicaid but remain unenrolled. The alliance was kicked off in 1997 by two St. Louis-based health systems—Carondelet Health System and Daughters of Charity National Health System—and Catholic Charities USA. With the national program in its second year, individual facilities are implementing action plans to reach enrollment goals for their communities. Systemwide, the Daughters' target is 30,000 children by June 30, while Carondelet's goal is 3,000 youngsters.

Saint Anthony, which belongs to the Daughters of Charity National Health System, began its push in March and hopes to sign up 300 to 500 children by the end of the first year, said Randy Autry, the hospital's director of business develop-

ment. "By finding ways to reach kids who aren't insured, we can give them the preventive care they need and guarantee access to healthcare," he said.

REACHING THE COMMUNITY

To make the enrollment process easier, Saint Anthony received permission to become a state-designated outstation, which allows staff members to fill out applications for children and pregnant women during their hospital visits. They forward the paperwork to the local Department of Human Services, which determines eligibility. Saint Anthony also helps people through the appeals process if their requests are denied.

For parents and guardians, the convenience of filling out enrollment forms while they are already at the hospital is crucial, Autry said. Taking time off work—and sacrificing those lost wages—to make a special trip and fill out paperwork at another site is a luxury they cannot afford.

Saint Anthony's two full-time outreach workers network with community groups—including social service agencies, public schools, nonprofit organizations, and parishes—to find qualifying children. They schedule health fairs and informational sessions after Mass at parishes. They keep in close contact with numerous nonprofits set up to provide services to needy families, including health education, vocational training, welfare-to-work initiatives, protection from domestic violence, and HeadStart programs. Contact with these community-focused nonprofits has proven to be successful, Autry said.

Saint Anthony also had employees stationed at key schools during the Chicago public school's Report Card Pick-Up Day in early November. The outreach workers and another eight trained staff members met with parents coming in for

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