



April 3, 2009

Senate Finance Committee
Colorado State Capitol
200 East Colfax
Denver CO 80203

Re: Continuity of care important for children

Dear Senator:

With more and more families losing health coverage through lost jobs, Colorado must ensure that our most vulnerable children and families are cared for.

Just being eligible for Medicaid does not mean families and children are actually enrolled. In fact, more than 78,000 children are currently eligible but not enrolled in Medicaid or its partner program, the Child Health Plan Plus, CHP+, which covers children in the next income tier. One of the most common reasons that eligible families cease to be enrolled is due simply to failing to keep ahead of the cumbersome re-enrollment process.

“Continuous eligibility” – where children are able to stay enrolled in Medicaid for a period of 12 months - like coverage by most private insurance policies - has long been a policy recommendation from child health advocates and health care researchers across the country and here in our state as well. According to the research, Colorado data show that Medicaid recipients average 8.6 months of enrollment. Kids move on and off the program with changes in their family’s income, causing some kids to cycle between Medicaid, CHP+, and being uninsured for parts of the year. This is costly, not only to families and children, but to health care systems as well.

According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Colorado ranks low - 43rd in the nation, in fact - when it comes to insuring children. Even worse, we are dead last in the nation at insuring *poor* children. There are many things we could do to improve our processes, but the easiest one is this: once kids are enrolled, keep them enrolled.

Kids can “fall off” Medicaid for a number of reasons. For example, even a slight increase in a family’s income from January to February means a child could become ineligible only a few months after they get enrolled. Even if their income drops again in March, they’ve

already been dis-enrolled and must reapply. For many families with unsteady work, the population most in need of Medicaid, income could fluctuate each and every month. There is no guarantee that when a Medicaid child shows up at his doctor's office, her Medicaid card would be valid.

Families who experience gaps in insurance coverage suffer from many of the same bad health outcomes as those without coverage. For example, the more times that a child goes on and off insurance, the more likely they are to go without needed care or medications. The end result is more kids in an emergency room receiving more expensive care. These inefficiencies lead to ineffective care that ultimately costs us even more money.

In addition to the challenges facing families that go in between coverage and no coverage, doctors, too, are reluctant to accept new Medicaid children. In part, that is because there's no guarantee that once they invest the initial services it takes to get a previously uninsured child up to date on shots, exams and screenings, that child would ever come back.

The good news is there are signs we are moving toward an improved system. House Bill 1293, the Colorado Health Care Affordability Act, addresses this issue by creating this type of continuity of care through extending the assurance of coverage for Medicaid enrollees to 12 months. This proposal also addresses a needed increase in coverage for kids beyond its current levels and for all parents and childless adults living below the poverty level. For kids in families for whom health insurance is unaffordable, this is an important and necessary lifeline.

We encourage you to support this bill.

Sincerely,

All Kids Covered Leadership Team

- Colorado Children's Campaign
- Colorado Coalition for the Medically Underserved
- Colorado Covering Kids and Families
- Metro Organizations for People

AARP

Autism Society of Colorado

Colorado Access

Colorado Association for School-Based Health Care

Colorado Center on Law and Policy

Colorado Children's Campaign

Colorado Children's Healthcare Access Program

Colorado Coalition for the Medically Underserved

Colorado Community Health Network

Colorado Consumer Health Initiative

Colorado Covering Kids and Families

Colorado Department of Health Care Policy and Financing

Colorado Medical Society

Colorado Voices for Coverage

Colorado Association of School Nurses

Denver Area Labor Federation

Every Child Matters Colorado

Exempla Saint Joseph Hospital

FRESC: Good Jobs, Strong Communities

Kaiser Permanente Colorado

Mental Health America of Colorado

Metro Organizations for People

National Council of Jewish Women Colorado Sector

North Colorado Health Alliance

Oral Health Awareness Colorado!

Principals in Philanthropy

Rocky Mountain Youth Clinics

Rural Communities Resource Center

School Medicaid Program and School Based Medical Assistance Programs for Aurora Public Schools

St. Therese MOP

Tennyson Center for Children

The Business Health Forum

The Children's Hospital

