



Keep SCHIP Strong

With reauthorization of the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) required by September 30, 2007, Congress can move closer to the widely-shared goal of ensuring that all of America's children have health care coverage. Despite swimming upstream against rising health care costs and declines in employer-based coverage, SCHIP and its larger companion program, Medicaid, have reduced the uninsured rate of low-income children by a third. However, as the latest census numbers show, the number of uninsured children has increased over the past two years. Consequently, more needs to be done to cover the more than nine million uninsured children, the vast majority of whom are in working families and yet still lack access to affordable coverage. A host of child health advocates agree Congress should, at a minimum:

- **Provide funding to cover at least 4 million uninsured children.** Congress should strengthen its commitment to the federal-state partnership that has led to SCHIP and Medicaid's success. With sufficient new SCHIP and Medicaid funding over five years, states will be able to maintain their existing SCHIP programs, and avoid the tragedy of children losing health care coverage because the federal government did not maintain the commitment made in 1997 when SCHIP was created. This level of funding also will allow the country to move forward by enrolling 4 million of the uninsured children already eligible for Medicaid and SCHIP.
- **Offer states new options to expand coverage.** Despite the attempts by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to limit eligibility by capping the federal poverty level, states should have additional flexibility and financial support to expand coverage to more children. This flexibility should include a state option to cover pregnant women through SCHIP without relying on waivers.
- **Extend new tools and financial support to states seeking to enroll more eligible children.** With close to seven in ten uninsured children now eligible to enroll in Medicaid or SCHIP, the single most important step the country could take in covering children is to eliminate the remaining barriers that keep eligible children from gaining or retaining public coverage. Some new options to simplify enrollment will help. Congress should also offer states targeted, financial support if they are successful in boosting the percentage of eligible children enrolled or in maintaining high take-up rates already achieved.
- **Promote care that fosters children's healthy development.** Simply providing children with an insurance card is not sufficient; it is vital that the coverage can be used to gain access to the range of services needed for healthy development. Congress should establish a new child health quality initiative that reflects children's unique health care needs as well as a commission to study barrier to access.