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Contact: HHS Press Office
(202) 690-6343

Secretary Sebelius Awards \$40 Million to States to Find, Enroll Children in CHIP, Medicaid

HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius today announced \$40 million in grants to 69 grantees in 41 states and the District of Columbia to help them find and enroll children who are uninsured but eligible for either Medicaid or the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

"Today's awards will help fulfill President Obama's pledge to assure the health and well-being of our nation's children," said Secretary Sebelius. "With millions of Americans either out of work or otherwise struggling to make ends meet during this recession, there is an even greater urgency to bring steady, reliable health care to children in these families who may have lost their coverage."

Recognizing that millions of children are eligible for Medicaid or CHIP, but are therefore needlessly uninsured, the Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act of 2009 (CHIPRA) set aside \$100 million for fiscal years 2009-2013 expressly to help find and enroll eligible children. Of the total outreach amount, \$80 million will be given to states and other organizations, \$10 million to Tribal organizations and \$10 million for a national outreach effort. Today's awards are for a two year period ending Dec. 31, 2011, which will then be followed by a second round of \$40 million in new grants.

As called for in CHIPRA, grants were awarded to applicants whose outreach, enrollment, and retention efforts will target geographic areas with high rates of eligible but uninsured children, particularly those with racial and ethnic minority groups who are uninsured at higher-than-average rates. For example, 20 percent of the projects to be funded will target Hispanic children, with an emphasis on Hispanic teens, and 11 percent will focus on homeless children and seven percent will be aimed at Native American/Alaska Native children.

The vast majority of grantees will be using multiple, community-based approaches. One grantee in Missouri, for example, will work with a consortium of 35 churches in low-income, minority communities. Those parishioners will go door-to-door to locate potentially eligible children and then help those families apply for CHIP or Medicaid coverage. Another grantee will place self-service kiosks in community centers and Native American Chapter Houses (community halls) where there will also be staff available to help with applications if needed. One state school system will track children who receive free or reduced cost lunches and, with the families' permission, share that information with state health programs, which will, in turn, mail applications for CHIP and Medicaid to those families. The state will also provide one-on-one-assistance with those applications.

The grant awards require that recipients be able to show actual increases in enrollment and retention of children already in the programs. Both CHIP and Medicaid state agencies are to report to the Centers for Medicare & Medicare Services (CMS) the number of new enrollees and those who retained coverage that are directly attributable to the grant activities. Grantees are also to report activities they believe were the most effective in finding, enrolling and maintaining children in these benefit programs.

"No child in America should go without decent health care," said Cindy Mann, director of the Center for Medicaid and State Operations -- the group within CMS that will administer the grants. "With the funds we are awarding today we hope to reduce the number of children who do."