

Op-Ed Template

CONGRESS MUST MEET CHILDREN'S NEEDS IN HEALTH REFORM

Children and families across the country have high hopes that health reform will provide the long-awaited access to quality, affordable health coverage. Early indicators that Congress and the Administration were looking out for them were evident with passage of the Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act (CHIPRA), which was signed into law with much celebration earlier this year. Now, before the ink is even dry on the new law, there are signs in Washington that the commitment to uninsured children may be eroding.

For health care reform to be viewed as a success, it must ensure everyone has access to high-quality, affordable coverage — that includes the millions of children who remain uninsured or who can't get the care they need, despite having an insurance card. Our nation has made huge gains for children through the successful CHIP and Medicaid programs, which serve as the cornerstone of coverage for many of the nation's children. Yet millions of children remain uninsured because they cannot afford coverage or because their families face red-tape barriers when attempting to sign them up. And many children, including those with an insurance card, are not receiving the care they need to help launch them on an upward trajectory toward a successful adulthood.

As we move forward on health reform, it is important to keep in mind a central tenant of reform articulated by President Obama at a recent talk Chicago, Illinois:

"My view is health care reform should be guided by a simple principle: Fix what's broken and build on what works. And that's what we intend to do."

Our organization is joining other children's advocates in calling on Congress and President Obama to do just that by addressing the following three points in health reform:

- **Do no Harm to Children.** Health reform should not turn back the clock on the progress our nation has achieved for children's health coverage. Nearly one-third of our nation's children get their health care through Medicaid and CHIP. Before making any changes to these successful programs, Congress should make sure that vulnerable children don't fall through the cracks during the transition phase and should ensure that children will receive comparable benefits at an affordable price under any new program.
- **Insure all Kids.** Six million children are eligible but not enrolled in public health coverage. Eliminating red tape and bureaucracy by simplifying enrollment would be the cheapest, quickest and smartest first step to get the lowest-income kids covered. Parents should have hassle-free ways to secure coverage for their children.
- **Cover Kids from Head to Toe** All children need coverage that meets their unique developmental needs, and provides them with the preventive services, medical care, and oral and mental health benefits needed to launch them on a better trajectory in life.