



ONE OF FOUR CHILDREN WILL LACK ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE DURING THE YEAR, NEW REPORT BY THE CHILDREN'S HEALTH FUND SHOWS

Summit in Washington D.C. exams severe health care access gap for children and seeks solutions

NEW YORK (May 3, 2007) – A new report by **The Children's Health Fund (CHF)** released today determined that more than **23.7 million children** – more than one out of every four – do not have regular, full-year access to health care services.

This health care access gap is more severe than previously believed – affecting more than twice as many children as generally estimated – because studies typically base their estimate only on children lacking health insurance for an entire year. But the analysis by CHF showed that children will fall into the health care access gap throughout the year, due to interruptions in coverage that can last weeks or months and because of an inability to access transportation to get to medical appointments.

The **23.7 million** figure, which is nearly **30 percent of all U.S. children**, includes:

- **9 million children** who currently lack health care;
- **11.5 million children** who will be without health care at times during the year;
- **3.2 million children** who cannot get to medical care due to a lack of transportation.

The report will be discussed at today's **CHF Health Care Policy Summit, "Kids First Kids Now!"** scheduled to be held in Washington D.C. The summit runs from 9 a.m. to

noon on Capitol Hill at the Senate Dirksen Office Building, Room G50, Constitution Avenue and First St. NE.

The summit, featuring **U.S. Rep. Rahm Emanuel (D-Ill.)** as the keynote speaker, will bring together health experts, advocates, health providers, public policy experts, and public officials in a national discussion on children's health care. The goal of the summit is to recommend public policy initiatives to better serve low income and poor communities and their health care providers and to look for ways to insure children get access to comprehensive health care.

Irwin Redlener, MD, president of CHF, commented, "More kids than ever are having difficulty getting the care they need – and it's not just a matter of insurance. Once again we need to make clear that this is not just a matter of doing what's right – which it certainly is. The fact is that kids with neglected health problems will have trouble in school and can end up being far less productive in life than they could be. America will pay dearly in future productivity and competitiveness for neglecting the basic needs of its children today."

The summit includes two panels. The first, "***Comprehensive Health Care for Children: What do Children Need?***" will discuss the many facets of a medical home and the challenges of providing comprehensive care for children in medically underserved areas, with a special focus on mental health care and oral health. The second panel, "***Surmounting Barriers to Care,***" will discuss how barriers, such as a lack of insurance coverage, a lack of transportation resources and shortages of pediatric health professionals impede access to medical care.

A key focus of the summit is the **State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP)**, which is up for reauthorization this year. Despite the success of SCHIP, nine million children are still uninsured. Lack of insurance serves as one of the biggest barriers that prevent children from receiving comprehensive care.

The total of 9 million children reflects those who are without insurance for a full year. But as the CHF report shows, these 9 million children are not the only ones at risk. Children often experience gaps in their health coverage, and do not have insurance for the full year. Researchers have found that an additional 14.4 percent of children (11.5 million based on the 2000 U.S. census) experience gaps in their health coverage, making the total without full-year health insurance 20.5 million children.

Having coverage still does not mean a child has appropriate access to health care services. In September 2006, CHF, with **The Marist College Institute for Public Opinion**, completed the first of what will be a series of health surveys intended determine how transportation is a barrier to child health access. CHF data showed that, according to parents, 4 percent of children – a total of 3.2 million – either missed a scheduled health care visit, or did not schedule a visit, during the preceding year because of transportation restrictions. Half of the affected families lived in rural areas. Based on these estimates, the CHF report concluded that at least **23.7 million children** in the U.S.

do not have regular, full year access to needed healthcare services, a staggering one out of every four.

The health care access gap extends beyond regular medical care. Nearly half of preschool age children have never been to a dentist. In families with an annual income under \$35,000, 64% go more than one year without a dental visit and nearly half of these children have gone five years without seeing a dentist. Insurance is a key issue, with 22% of U.S. children lacking dental insurance. Children without dental insurance – which includes a disproportionate representation of poor, minority and rural children – were least likely to get preventive dental care and most likely to have unmet needs for oral health services.

Children also lack access to needed mental health care. The U.S. Surgeon General in 2001 found that 10 percent of American children and adolescents have impaired functioning due to mental illness – and only one in five children and adolescents in need of mental health services gets help. A 2004 study of mental health needs among parents of children in an urban Head Start center found that 56% were identified with psychosocial problems that warranted intervention, but only 14% had received any mental health services during the preceding 12 months.

Dr. Redlener said this is why the renewal and expansion of SCHIP is so vital. At least \$50 billion is needed over the next five years to not only continue coverage of the 6 million children already benefiting, but to extend coverage to the majority of the other 9 million who remain uninsured. Additionally, funding should be provided to help safety net providers – community health centers and health departments – make oral health care services more available to poor children and to ensure that mental health services are covered in the same way as the “physical” elements of comprehensive medical care. Programs should also be established, similar to one operated by CHF, to guarantee availability of transportation services to families so their children can make it to their medical appointments.

The Children’s Health Fund, founded in 1987 by singer/song writer Paul Simon, and pediatrician/ child advocate Irwin Redlener, MD, is a not-for-profit organization committed to providing medical care to the nation’s most medically underserved population – homeless and disadvantaged children. To date, The Children’s Health Fund’s national network of 21 pediatric programs has treated more than 350,000 children. www.childrenshealthfund.org .

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