



Children's Health Fund

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DO CHILDREN FARE BETTER UNDER SENATE HEALTH BILL THAN THEY WOULD UNDER HOUSE VERSION? NEW CHILDREN'S HEALTH FUND REPORT CARD SAYS 'Yes' – BUT THE CONCERNS STILL LINGER

On Senate Bill; CHF Lauds the Mandate for Universal Coverage for Children but Criticizes Reimbursement Rates

New York, NY (November 23, 2009) – Children's Health Fund (CHF), a national organization that advocates for and provides clinical care to disadvantaged and medically underserved children, today issued a Report Card that graded the child health provisions in the Congressional Health Reform bill that has begun moving its way through the United States Senate.

“First and foremost, we applaud the Senate on producing this historic health reform bill which will provide tens of millions of currently uninsured Americans access to secure health insurance coverage,” said Irwin Redlener, MD, President Children's Health Fund and Professor of Clinical Population & Family Health, Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health. “Prior to the release of the current bill, we established six questions with a grading system from A to F that would help us to determine the benefits of the overall bill to children, particularly those of working and low-income families. All of the questions related to the critical issue of children's access to health coverage, taking into account issues of affordability, comprehensiveness of the coverage as well as the continuation of the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), which has been a successful government safety net for nearly 11 million children. Furthermore, we examined the provisions to expand and strengthen the pediatric workforce and Medicaid reimbursement to primary care physicians,” concluded Dr. Redlener.

On whole, we found that the Senate bill makes improvements in major areas of concern over the House bill, but more must be done to protect and expand health care for children. As health reform is debated in the Senate we urge lawmakers to revisit the provisions of the bill that deal with coverage and access for children. Major differences exist between the two bills and the grades on CHF's report card reflect some of those differences.

CHF was gravely concerned with the planned expiration of the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) – the second bill that President Barack Obama signed into law when he reauthorized the program in February 2009 – after 2013 in favor of subsidies to help children enroll in private plans. While the House bill allows the program to expire

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in 2013, the Senate bill keeps CHIP alive until 2019. We applaud this provision in the Senate bill and want lawmakers to ensure that the hard-won gains accomplished by 12 years of the CHIP program not be weakened as the legislation makes its way to the President's desk.

We remain concerned about overall affordability of health care coverage for low income families in general, especially premium contributions that would charge families making 100 to 400 percent of federal poverty level between 2 to 9.8 percent of their income. However, this is an improvement over the House bill.

The Senate bill also does a better job than the House at defining and giving shape to the benefit design process for pediatric populations.

Areas of weakness in the Senate bill include the failure to improve reimbursement rates for Medicaid providers and omission of a provision to automatically enroll otherwise uninsured infants, both of which were in the House bill.

As debate begins in the Senate, CHF will continue to support passage of reform, while advocating for these changes in the bill.

CHF asked six questions of the bill and responded with a grading system from A to F. The highest grade issued was an A-minus; to the bill's provision mandating health insurance coverage for all children; CHF found that the mandate is estimated to cover 96% of the population.

The Report Card was graded by asking six questions of the Senate bill:

1. Does the proposal require that all children have coverage?
CHF Grade: A-
2. Does the proposal provide comprehensive coverage for children?
CHF Grade: B
3. Does the proposal provide affordable coverage for children?
CHF Grade: C
4. Will all children currently enrolled in or eligible for the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and Medicaid have the same or better coverage?
CHF Grade: A-
5. Does the proposal expand and strengthen the pediatric workforce?
CHF Grade: B-
6. Does the proposal sufficiently reimburse providers for the care of children?
CHF Grade: C

The Children's Health Fund (CHF), founded in 1987 by pediatrician Irwin Redlener and singer-song-writer Paul Simon, is the nation's leading pediatric provider of mobile-based health care for homeless and low-income children and their families. CHF's mission is to bring health care directly to those in need through the development and support of innovative medical programs, response to public health crises, and the promotion of guaranteed access to health care for all children. Teams of dedicated medical professionals in CHF's 24 pediatric programs in 15 states and the District of Columbia have brought essential primary care services through more than 2 million patient visits. www.childrenshealthfund.org