

SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER

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Getting health insurance to all children

Thursday, August 10, 2006

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P-I REPORTER

There are more than 8 million uninsured children in the United States, and about 115,000 of them are in Washington state.

A campaign kicked off Wednesday to get them covered before school starts because healthy children are more ready to learn, and preventive medicine is a good investment, especially for children.

Politicians, representatives from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, health care specialists, a former Miss Washington and about a dozen children were assembled to give and receive the message that free and co-payment insurance is ready and available to children.

Dr. Benjamin Danielson, a pediatrician at Odessa Brown Medical Clinic in Seattle, said people don't always understand the link between good health and education. He talked about a patient with asthma who is controlled so well that the child can play football.

He compared that case with another child who missed months of school because of untreated asthma. Insurance and health care could have helped that child live up to potential.

Help can begin with a phone call to 877-KIDS-NOW to learn about eligibility for insurance help. Even a family of four making \$50,000 annually can qualify. To make the offer even sweeter, there are agencies and experts to help guide applicants through the paperwork.

"It's easier to get a fishing license online than an insurance application," quipped Liz Arjun, health policy coordinator with the Children's Alliance. An application may be three pages or longer, and applicants may need proof of citizenship, pay stubs, a birth certificate and other papers in the application process.

Children born in this country can qualify even if their parents lack citizenship.

And once children are insured, agencies are dedicated to seeing their coverage continue.

Susan Johnson, director of the King County Health Action Plan, a public-private partnership with Public Health -- Seattle & King County and three dozen collaborating

members, said the state is doing everything possible to continue eligibility for children. Applicants must reapply for insurance every 12 months for it to continue.

Julia Lucero, a Seattle mother of three, talked about the benefits of the insurance program. Her children had been insured through her husband's employer, but lost coverage when he became unemployed late last year.

She remembered a brochure she'd picked up, and called 877- KIDS-NOW. Her children were enrolled, and help was there when her daughter had to have eye surgery several months ago.

Fred Mann of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, a New Jersey-based foundation focused on improving health care nationally, said Washington has well-organized child advocacy groups and a reputation for action that other states could follow.

That's why the foundation made Seattle one of eight targeted cities for the national "Covering Kids & Families Initiative." Although some states have closed insurance programs because of a lack of funding, Washington is prepared to cover all 115,000 currently uninsured children.

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FINDING HELP

Any parent, guardian or custodian can call 877-KIDSNOW (877-543-7669) to find ou