



## NEWS RELEASE

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## UTAH RANKS 10<sup>TH</sup> WORST NATIONALLY IN RATE OF UNINSURED CHILDREN

*More Than 1 in 8 Utah Children Lacks Health Insurance Coverage, and the Economic Downturn Is Likely to Drive This Number Even Higher*

There are 107,000 uninsured children in Utah, one of eight (12.8 percent) children in the state, according to a new report released today by Families USA, the national organization for health care consumers. The report, based on new Census Bureau data, reflects the three-year period 2005-2007 and therefore does not reflect the worsening economic situation in 2008.

The Families USA report, titled “Left Behind: Utah’s Uninsured Children,” spotlights the following facts about uninsured children in the state:

- 107,000 children are uninsured in Utah—more than one out of eight, or 12.8 percent of Utah’s children. Those numbers place Utah 10th nationally for the percentage of children in the state without health insurance.
- Utah’s uninsured children come from working families. In Utah the vast majority of uninsured children—90.9 percent—come from families where at least one parent works, and more than three-quarters—or 78.6 percent—live in households where at least one family member works full-time, year-round.
- 55.5 percent of Utah’s uninsured children come from low-income families (families with incomes below twice the poverty level, or \$35,200 for a family of three in 2008) who are likely eligible for Medicaid or CHIP.

(more)

Last year, Congress voted to re-authorize the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), which would have expanded health coverage throughout the nation to approximately 4 million uninsured children.

Although Congress passed the legislation with broad bipartisan support, the legislation failed when President Bush vetoed it.

“The children’s health legislation vetoed by the President would have provided much-needed relief to uninsured children in Utah and across the nation,” said Ron Pollack, Executive Director of Families USA. “Unfortunately, the minority of Congressional members who voted with the President made it impossible to override the veto.”

The CHIP program is now scheduled to expire on March 31, 2009. As a result, the reauthorization of CHIP will be one of the earliest policy issues facing the next Congress and President.

In 2007, more than 44,700 children in Utah received their health coverage through CHIP.

Due to the current economic downturn, Congress is likely to consider providing higher federal matching funds to the states for the Medicaid program – the other key health safety net program for children from low-income families. Nearly half of Utah’s Medicaid enrollees are children. However, Utah’s Medicaid program is under assault. Utah Medicaid was severely underfunded going into this economic downturn and ill-prepared to handle the nearly 9% enrollment growth since beginning of 2008. Exasperating the situation has been the state’s decision to cut the program to help balance the state budget. While enrollment in Medicaid has increased, the state has trimmed \$33 million from the program’s budget and eliminated critical services for adults like physical therapy, occupational therapy, and eyeglasses. Unless Congress steps in to help with increased funding for Medicaid, further cuts to the program are likely.

“Increased federal matching funds to the states for Medicaid is of enormous importance,” said Lincoln Nehring, JD, Medicaid Policy Director at the Utah Health Policy Project. “Utah Medicaid is facing a \$20 million shortfall due to increased need for the program. Since the beginning of the year, Utah Medicaid has added 13,000 Utahns to its rolls and 3,000 in the last month. Thus Medicaid finds itself in a familiar economic counter-cyclical bind: as the economy continues its downward spiral, the state is left with diminished revenues to pay for increase in need for Medicaid,” adds Nehring.

“Utah’s Congressional delegation, particularly Senator Hatch and Representative Matheson have shown great leadership in helping Utah’s working families provide their children with health coverage,” Nehring said. “Utah families are in desperate need for our delegation to step up once again and fight to pass CHIP reauthorization and for a temporary increase in the Medicaid federal match rate.”

The Families USA report is available online at: <http://www.familiesusa.org/assets/pdfs/uninsured-kids-2008/utah.pdf>

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