SALT LAKE CITY — The Utah Health Policy Project is hoping to restore trust in the security of Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program after computer hackers gained access to personal information of an estimated 800,000 individuals earlier this month.

About 280,000 people had their Social Security numbers listed in state health data stolen from a computer, and others had "less sensitive" information compromised, including names, dates of birth and addresses.

The Utah Health Policy Project said many eligible families did not apply for Medicaid or CHIP before the breach, and they worry that number could increase because of concerns over the security of personal information. UHPP is a nonprofit with a goal of providing affordable, comprehensive health care coverage for all Utahns. The group teamed up with other community-based organizations and consumer credit counseling agencies to provide recommendations for state agencies on how to recover from the breach.

In a letter to be sent to the Utah Attorney General's Office, U.S. Sen. Orrin Hatch and the Utah departments of Health and Technology Services, the groups say children affected by the security breach should be able to obtain new social security numbers.

"This should eliminate risks to their future credit," the letter states. "Since they don't have credit established yet, we don't see the harm."

The groups said a long-term plan should be established to provide ongoing counseling and assistance for individuals affected by the security breach, "as this event has the potential to affect individuals' future credit standing for years far beyond the 12 months of offered credit monitoring."

A recommendation was made by the groups to create a step-by-step guide for consumers on how to apply for a credit freeze.
"Many people will not be able to navigate this process alone," the letter states. "They will need one-on-one specialized help."

UHPP noted several groups that could need additional assistance include individuals with limited or no English proficiency, individuals with mental illness or seniors or others living in nursing homes or residential facilities. UHPP recommended an advisory committee comprised of advocates from these communities should be created to work with them.

The groups said a marketing and outreach campaign, targeted to demographics affected by the security breach, should be implemented along with public service announcements to "get the message out that it is safe and important to apply for coverage."

A question-and-answer forum about the breach will be held by UHPP and other community-based organizations serving Medicaid and CHIP clients, Wednesday, May 2, at 4 p.m. in Room 125 of the Utah Department of Health. More information is available at www.healthpolicyproject.org.

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