



Legislative Link

A legislative update provided by the United Way of Florida

Key Children's Health Bills Languish

Florida ranks at the bottom of the 50 states in providing health coverage to its children. We rank 48th, with 11.9 percent of our children uninsured compared to the national rate of 7.5 percent. Florida also ranks 49th in the number of uninsured children, about 475,000.

Two barriers to accessing health care for Florida's children can be easily remedied by amending Florida's KidCare law to allow legally residing immigrant children to get into the program without having to wait five years, and allowing children to be presumptively eligible when they apply, so they don't have to wait to get health care they may need immediately. Unfortunately, bills filed to eliminate these unnecessary barriers are unlikely to pass this session.

Legally Residing Immigrant Children

In 2009, Congress gave states the option to allow children of legal immigrants to qualify for Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program, or CHIP, without the five year waiting period that applies to most public assistance programs for immigrants. Today, 21 states allow legal immigrant children to enroll in Medicaid and CHIP without waiting. Florida is not one of them.

Immigrant children legally residing in Florida are required to have lived in the country for five years in order to be eligible for Florida KidCare. Other children can enroll any time. SB 704 and HB 4023 would remove the five year requirement, allowing about 20,000 low income, legally residing immigrant children to immediately get the health care many desperately need.

Presumptive Eligibility

Low income children who apply for KidCare cannot receive health care while their application is pending, usually within 45 to 60 days. There is no provision in state law to deem a child presumptively eligible while the application is being considered, so the child can receive medical treatment, until a final eligibility determination is made.

CS/HB 689 and CS/SB 548 would grant presumptive eligibility to children under the age of 19 who apply for KidCare coverage through a qualified entity, so they would receive coverage immediately rather than waiting until their application is processed.

Unfortunately, it appears none of these bills will pass this session, perhaps largely due to inflated fiscal impact estimates provided by the Agency for Health Care Administration.

For additional information, please contact
the United Way of Florida at: (850) 488-8276.

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