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More KCHIP awareness encouraged

By Beth Musgrave
bmusgrave@herald-leader.com

FRANKFORT — Kentucky officials say they're making good on a promise to get more children covered by a state health insurance program, but a health care advocacy group says more must be done.

In a report released Wednesday, the group found that few health care providers in one Central Kentucky county knew about the Kentucky Children's Health Insurance Program.

Meanwhile, the Cabinet for Health and Family Services, which oversees the insurance program commonly called KCHIP, said it is on target to reach a goal of enrolling 35,000 new children by June 30, 2010, in either KCHIP or Medicaid.

Last September, Beshear pledged to increase the number of children enrolled in the state's health care programs by removing barriers — including a face-to-face interview — and by increasing outreach to eligible families.

Some estimates put the number of Kentucky children eligible for KCHIP at approximately 62,000. At the time of his Sept. 3 announcement, Beshear only mentioned increasing the number of children in KCHIP, not Medicaid.

But a spokeswoman for the cabinet said the overall goal of Beshear's plan was to decrease the number of children without insurance. In many cases, a child who applies for KCHIP is actually eligible for Medicaid, which serves poorer children than the KCHIP program, said Gwenda Bond, a spokeswoman for the Cabinet for Health and Family Services.

According to the cabinet, about 20,195 additional children were enrolled in KCHIP or Medicaid from Nov. 1 to June 30.

The total number of children in both Medicaid and KCHIP increased from 377,095 to 397,290 from November to June 30, but almost all of that increase was in Medicaid. The number of children that have enrolled in KCHIP increased by only 1,462.

The Friedell Committee, a non-profit citizen's group focused on improving health care in Kentucky, said in a report released Wednesday that a recent study in Anderson County found minimal awareness of the KCHIP program, which provides health insurance to children whose family income is below 200 percent of the poverty level. For a family of four, that's roughly \$44,100 a year.

For Medicaid, the income requirements are lower and depend on the ages of the eligible children.

The Friedell Committee interviewed more than 70 people in health care, social services and the faith-based community in the Central Kentucky county over several weeks this summer.

"To put it simply, people who should be enrolling children in KCHIP either did not know about the program or had little understanding of the eligibility requirements," said Laurel True, a committee member and former Secretary for the Cabinet for Health and Family Services. "In fact, no one including DCBS (The Department of Community Based Services) had the latest KCHIP informational materials available.

"If this is the case 12 miles from the state capital, you have to wonder what degree of awareness of KCHIP exists in counties across the state," True said.

The report also found that some health care providers were unsure about the differences in requirements between the KCHIP program and Medicaid.

The report recommended that the Department of Education do a better job of making sure that all schools inform families about the program. The report also recommended a central information hub to provide all agencies with updated information about KCHIP.

Cabinet for Health and Human Services Secretary Janie Miller said in a news release Wednesday that the cabinet plans to step up its outreach efforts in coming months.

The cabinet has already increased its training of community-based partners on the KCHIP application process and has increased the number of enrollment materials at local agencies.

"We plan to continue the outreach efforts that have been successful and launch new ones in the coming months, with a particular emphasis on reaching children and their families through back-to-school campaigns," Miller said.

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