

Agenda Report

TO: PASADENA CITY COUNCIL AND PASADENA BOARD OF EDUCATION **DATE:** January 11, 1999

FROM: CYNTHIA J. KURTZ, CITY MANAGER AND
VERA J. VIGNES, SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

**SUBJECT: JOINT COLLABORATION ON ENSURING CHILDREN'S
HEALTH COVERAGE THROUGH THE HEALTHY
FAMILIES/MEDI-CAL FOR CHILDREN PROGRAM AND OTHER
INSURANCE SOURCES**

RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that the City Council and the Board of Education take the following actions:

- 1) Adopt and endorse a common logo as the uniform symbol for community-based initiatives to provide affordable health coverage to uninsured children in the Pasadena Unified School District (PUSD);
- 2) Direct staffs to develop a public education, outreach and enrollment campaign to increase awareness, disseminate information and enroll children and families into available insurance programs;
- 3) Direct staffs to investigate potential financing to expand outreach and enrollment assistance strategies; and
- 4) Direct staffs to track legislation and advocate for enactment of policy which improves the design, implementation and evaluation of the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) or the Healthy Families Program.

BACKGROUND:

The Healthy Families Program is an outstanding opportunity to provide health coverage for Pasadena's uninsured children. The Healthy Families Program was initiated in California in July 1998 following the passage of Federal legislation enacting the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) in 1997. SCHIP provides over \$24 billion in Federal dollars over a ten year period to the states for the provision of health care

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coverage for uninsured children. A state match is also required. According to the 1998-99 California State Budget, only \$104.3 million in State and Federal funds will be spent although the maximum possible allocation for the year is \$1.2 billion.

After five months of implementation, the Healthy Families/Medi-Cal for Children program is far short of meeting its goals. Through November 1998, it is estimated that only 39,000 have been enrolled statewide. Data on Pasadena enrollment is unavailable at this time; however, one in four kids in Pasadena is estimated to be uninsured. The number of uninsured children in California is estimated at 1.7 million, of which 400,000 are eligible for the Healthy Families Program, while another 668,000 are eligible for Medi-Cal. The remaining 672,000 represent children whose families are above the income levels or who are undocumented immigrants.

The Healthy Families Program and its administration are complex. Initially, a 28 page joint application was required in order for families to qualify for either Healthy Families or Medi-Cal. Linking Medi-Cal and Healthy Families in one application was expected to result in increased enrollment and attainment of enrollment goals. In response to criticisms, a simplified four page application has been developed. The 4 page prototype is being tested this month and, if approved, will replace the original application this year.

Other public sector and private sector programs are also available to provide coverage for the uninsured. Attachment 1 outlines the Federal income guidelines for different programs. The Status Report on the Implementation of Healthy Families in Pasadena, Attachment 2 (November 25, 1998) provides more background on the program.

Successful implementation of the Healthy Families/Medi-Cal for Children Program at the local level faces many barriers, including: (1) a lengthy and confusing mail-in application; (2) fear of legal and financial penalties due to immigration status which may result from application and receipt of assistance; (3) social stigmas associated with the Medi-Cal program; and (4) inadequate and poorly financed outreach strategies. Planning and advocacy at the State and local levels is necessary to improve the program operation and outcomes.

Despite the high concern about the program design and administration, there is a concerted, collaborative effort in Pasadena to ensure successful outreach, enrollment, and local implementation of the Healthy Families Program. The Children's Health Access Task Force is organizing and coordinating strategies which will assure that the families of eligible children in the Pasadena Unified School District have access to health insurance coverage. The City of Pasadena Public Health Department (PPHD), Pasadena Unified School District (PUSD), and Young and Healthy (Y&H) have played key roles in the development and leadership of this initiative in Pasadena. Other principal players include Kaiser Permanente, Huntington Memorial Hospital, the Family Community Council, and the Ecumenical Council. Altogether, fifteen community based organizations have

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participated in the partnership, and the Task Force meets monthly to network, plan, and develop ideas to actively increase the number of insured children in Pasadena.

Some measures of success have been achieved in Pasadena due to the committed efforts of the members of the Children's Health Access Task Force. The Task Force is engaged in coordinating several activities to enroll low-income families in the Healthy Families Program or other health insurance options available to the underinsured. These activities include education and outreach campaigns to reach people who may be eligible, training of application assistants located at several sites throughout the community, development of outreach materials, designing methods to track and monitor progress, and identifying and addressing community barriers.

PPHD, PUSD, and Y&H consider access to health coverage a priority and have committed organizational resources to assist eligible families to take advantage of emerging health insurance options. These agencies view their involvement in the Task Force as an extension of their agency missions. Although systematic, comprehensive data collection is not yet in place, some accomplishments to date as reported by these organizations are listed below:

PUSD

- PUSD hired an insurance outreach worker in September 1997 who sees parents of uninsured children who are referred by school nurses. Parents are screened to assess eligibility for Medi-Cal, Healthy Families and other insurance plans..
- School staff are educated about the various health insurance programs including, Expanded Medi-Cal and Healthy Families. District Community Assistants for elementary schools are trained as application assistants for Healthy Families, and one staff is dedicated full time to assist parents in applying for health coverage.
- PUSD provides space for outstationed eligibility workers at several different school sites and provides space, telephone, desk and clerical support at Rose City Family Center.
- PUSD has assisted with 135 applications since July 1998 of which 16 have been enrolled in Healthy Families and 69 are pending; and has enrolled 95 families in Medi-Cal, 61 families in CaliforniaKids, and 3 families in Kaiser Cares for Kids during FY 1999.

PPHD

- PPHD has 11 trained assistants, 4 of whom are regularly assisting families with Healthy Families/Medi-Cal for Children applications.
- In January, PPHD will sponsor training for 2 WIC employees who will assist families with applications at Villa Parke and the Pasadena Community Health Center satellite.
- PPHD has submitted a proposal for a Medi-Cal Outreach grant to cover enhanced outreach activities for targeted low-income individuals who may be eligible to receive

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Medi-Cal and will be coordinating an intensified program for planning, community education and awareness, and identification and follow-up of eligible individuals.

- Since September 1998, PPHD has screened and/or assisted with 152 applications; 10 of 29 completed Health Families applications have resulted in enrollment and 19 are still pending approval.

Y&H

- Young and Healthy employs a full-time "master trainer" who has provided training to at least 15 community agencies and 13 sites around Southern California.
- Young and Healthy has published brochures and flyers in English and Spanish and disseminated materials broadly through mailings and handouts.
- Young and Healthy trained 25 push cart vendors who have distributed 3,500 information packets.
- Through December 30, 1998, Young and Healthy assisted with completing 68 Healthy Families applications, 33 Medi-Cal applications, 136 CaliforniaKids applications, 11 Kaiser Permanente Cares for Kids applications and 2 AIM applications.

Through local leadership, collaboration and commitment, progress in Pasadena will continue and the number of uninsured children will decrease. Partners in this effort will tackle strategies for more training and use of skills to assist families with applications; heightened public awareness and education about the benefits offered under the Healthy Families/Medi-Cal for Children Program; expanded outreach at sites where people congregate and are comfortable; more effective outreach and follow-up with families to ensure completion of application process; and improved local tracking and evaluation.

Recommendations

Four recommendations are made to confirm the resolve of the City of Pasadena to promote health insurance coverage for all of Pasadena's children and to assure successful local implementation of the Healthy Families/Medi-Cal for Children Program.

- 1) Adopt and endorse a common logo as the uniform symbol for community-based initiatives to provide affordable health coverage to uninsured children in the Pasadena Unified School District (PUSD). The Children's Health Access Task Force has developed a logo and slogan to represent the goal of this community. The logo can serve as a unifying image for all activities related to improving health insurance coverage in this community. Widely used, the logo can serve as symbol of unity of focus and commitment, as well as help end the differentiation which elevates one insurance program over another.

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- 2) Direct staff to collaborate on a public education, outreach and enrollment campaign to increase awareness, disseminate information and enroll children and families into available insurance programs. In addition to notices which will be distributed to all families of all students at PUSD, The Children's Health Access Task Force is sponsoring the mass posting of announcements of the campaign "To Insure a Healthy Future". The announcements will feature tear off post-its containing phone numbers (PPHD, PUSD, and Young and Healthy) to call for more information. Six-foot "thermometers" will be placed outside the PUSD Hudson office and at the Pasadena Community Health Center to illustrate and track progress in insuring Pasadena families. Resources are being sought to cover the cost of a third "thermometer" which the Task Force would like to display at City Hall. The City of Pasadena can be even more proactive in helping to create public awareness and education by: (1) publishing advertisements and articles in In Focus which describe this community-wide effort; (2) staff training for the Neighborhoods Connections Program of the Human Services, Recreation and Neighborhoods Department so they will be familiar with the insurance programs. Staff can then facilitate getting information about the Healthy Families Program and other resources published in the neighborhood newsletters, arrange presentations by outreach workers at neighborhood association meetings, direct families to community resources who can help them apply, and identify neighborhood leaders who could also become trained assistants; and (3) prepare a letter for joint signature by the City and PUSD to endorse and urge agency "retraining" and commitment to the goal of increased health access through assisting residents to gain insurance; and (4) co-sponsor special meetings in designated geographical areas hosted by Council members where community members can be informed and get questions answered about the insurance options available.
- 3) Support efforts to secure financing to expand outreach and enrollment assistance strategies. The planning, administration and implementation of community outreach strategies requires resources beyond the basic operational budgets of most participating organizations. In-kind support and leveraging existing resources has enabled the activities to date. A more comprehensive and organized community effort will require additional funding. The lead agencies invested in assuring children's access to health care will be pursuing grants and donations to support this work. The City of Pasadena can be supportive by providing letters of support for grant applications and by local advocacy to appeal to local businesses and foundations who may be able to invest in the collaborative work. The City of Pasadena could also review possible allocation of CDBG funds for planning and administration of local strategies to insure children and families.
- 4) Direct staff to track legislation and advocate for enactment of policy which improves the design, implementation and evaluation of the State's Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) or the Healthy Families' Program. Finally, the City of Pasadena

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can support policy changes to ensure successful enrollment, implementation and operation of the Healthy Families Program. Health policy experts and advocates across the State have identified 26 changes to current law which would improve the effectiveness of the Healthy Families Program. The City of Pasadena's interests would be served by directing its legislative analysts to lobby for and sponsor legislation which improves the ability of Pasadena to reduce the number of uninsured children.

FISCAL IMPACT:


Fiscal impacts to the City and PUSD should be assessed by each agency.

Respectfully submitted,



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