

Healthy Kids Mendocino looks to CalKids

Thousands of children in Mendocino County are uninsured, but it doesn't have to be that way.

CalKids -- an outpatient insurance program implemented by Healthy Kids Mendocino in May of 2006 -- picks up where Medi-Cal and Healthy Families leaves off.

"We build on Medi-Cal and Healthy Families, by broadening the income limits," Anne Molgaard, executive director of FIRST 5 Mendocino, one of the founders of the Healthy Kids Mendocino program, said in May when the CalKids program was launched.

CalKids is a health insurance product that covers children ages 0 to 19 with a family income up to \$60,000 a year, for a family of four, Molgaard said then. To qualify for Medi-Cal a family of four can earn up to about \$25,000 per year; for Healthy Families a family of four's income can't exceed \$40,000 a year, she said.

So many choices, yet many children remain uninsured.

"We think there are 1,500 to 3,000 uninsured children in the county and that is our target for the Healthy Kids Mendocino program," said project coordinator Kristen Gardner. "We think 300 to 600 are not eligible for Medi-Cal and Healthy Families and therefore we can put them onto CalKids," she said, noting the number of enrollments in the program thus far is higher than expected. does that make sense?

"We projected enrolling 100 to 125 children into CalKids in the first year. We have actually enrolled 135 children in the first six months," she said.

Now it's time to get the rest of the uninsured children, insured.

"For the sake of all these children's health it's important to get them insured, which besides keeping them healthy, makes them more successful in school. It also has economic benefits, such as their parents miss less work. The other economic benefit is that the children who get on Medi-Cal and Healthy Families draw a lot of state and federal funds into the county's healthcare system," she said.

Local health care providers, service providers, schools, employers, community members, elected representatives, faith community representatives and others have supported the Healthy Kids Program. The project was founded by FIRST 5 Mendocino, Alliance for Rural Community Health, and the Department of Public Health. Grant funding has been provided by California HealthCare Foundation and The California Endowment, according to Gardner.

The Healthy Kids Program was allocated \$90,000 by the Mendocino County Board of Supervisors in Fiscal Year 2006-07, Gardner said. "Funding like this allows us to continue enrolling children at high speed. In many counties there are long waiting lists of children deemed eligible for the program. We will work hard to avoid that in Mendocino County," she said, noting others in community have also donated funds.

According to Employee Benefit Research Institute "almost 70 percent of California's uninsured children are in families where the head of household works full-time, all year."

For more information about the local program or to donate to the cause call Healthy Kids Mendocino at 463-KIDS (5437), or visit www.HealthyKidsMendocino.org.