

Texas Update - April 2006

In this issue:

- Integrated Eligibility System Rollout Delayed
- New CHIP Outreach Program
- Legislators' Responses to CHIP and Medicaid Enrollment Drops
- Preliminary Results from the CHIP Family Survey
- Health Center Week Reminder
- Registry link for New Advocates:
<http://votervoice.net/groups/tachc/?registeronly=true>

HHSC Delays Expansion of Integrated Eligibility System

In response to drastic enrollment drops in Medicaid and CHIP, the Health and Human Services Commission has delayed its expansion of the Integrated Eligibility and Enrollment (IEE) System for 30 days. Executive Commissioner Albert Hawkins determined that "call center operations and technical performance" must be improved before the system can be expanded.

Indeed. From November to February, nearly 79,000 children dropped from the Medicaid rolls. According to a press release from HHSC, CHIP enrollment for April is down to 292,681, from roughly 302,000 children in March. HHSC reports that about 5,000 children were dropped from the CHIP program for failure to pay the newly instituted enrollment fee. A statement from the Center for Public Policy Priorities reports that weekly contractor status reports show high call abandonment rates and long hold times mark call center performance. "As of March 26, 39% of all calls were dropped, and callers were on hold an average of 22 minutes."

The new eligibility system was scheduled to expand to 20 Hill Country counties this month. Clients in the current pilot area, Travis and Hays counties, will not be affected by the delay - the pilot will continue to operate on these areas. On May 1, Commissioner Hawkins will evaluate whether the rollout to the Hill Country should occur at that time or whether it should be delayed further. HHSC staff report that the Commissioner will not recommend further rollout until they are satisfied with call center performance.

More good news - Aurora LeBrun of HHSC reported that of the 6280 children who were disenrolled from CHIP for eligibility system error or failure to pay enrollment fees, 80% are now back on the program.

\$3 Million CHIP Outreach Program to Begin in May

The new outreach program, reported in last month's update, will begin May 1 with a mass media campaign including a series of English and Spanish radio ads, television spots in the Dallas, Houston, and Rio Grande Valley areas, advertisements in bus stations and on buses, and in minority publications. Coming soon, there will be a new website, www.chipmedicaid.org, to help both families and community based organizations receive

more information on applying for and renewing CHIP and Children's Medicaid benefits. Likely, this website will have links to yourtexasbenefits.com, where clients can apply for benefits online, although at this point, the exact interaction of the two websites isn't known.

Legislators are Taking IEE Matters into Their Own Hands

At a recent House Appropriations Health and Human Services Subcommittee hearing, House members asked for an honest reckoning of the CHIP and Children's Medicaid enrollment drops. House members not a part of the subcommittee joined the hearing including Appropriations Chair Jim Pitts and Vice-Chair Vilma Luna, Business and Industry Chair Helen Giddings, and Representative Sylvester Turner of Houston.

In an effort to help his community members gain any benefits they may have lost, **Representative Turner is holding a public meeting on CHIP on Saturday May 6, 2006 in Houston at the George Brown Convention Center from 10 am to 4 pm.** He has asked the Health and Human Services to provide eligibility workers at the meeting to process renewals. The Texas Access Alliance is also scheduled to be onsite providing online connectivity for the processing. Additionally, Houston HHSC regional office staff will be available as resources.

Preliminary Results for the CHIP Family Survey

In response to CHIP and Children's Medicaid enrollment drops, HHSC promised to survey families who failed to return enrollment packets. The Commission recently released preliminary results for 280 of the projected final sample of 450 families whose CHIP coverage was not renewed.

- **89 percent of families whose CHIP coverage was not renewed stated that they had submitted their renewal packets.**
- One-third of the disenrolled families said their children currently have insurance coverage, either through employers, Medicaid or privately-purchased policies.
- 84 percent recall receiving a renewal packet, and 86 percent recall receiving one or more letters about their renewal.
- 88 percent agreed that the program made the renewal forms easy to fill out. **However, while roughly half of the families said the renewal process was "as easy as it could be," half said the process was "much more difficult" or "somewhat more difficult" than it needed to be.** *From the results that have been distributed, it is unclear what "as easy as it could be" actually means.*
- 63 percent said they were told their packets had missing information. Of those, 88 percent said they responded by providing the information requested.
- **When asked whether the renewal packet asked for too much documentation, 38 percent strongly agreed or agreed.**

The final report of these findings is expected in May 2006.

Planning for Community Health Center Week - August 6-12, 2006

It's not too early to begin thinking about National Health Center Week, August 6-12. Keep an eye out for materials from NACHC and TACHC that can help you plan events. It's a great time to bring your elected officials - including the candidates! - out to the clinics to showcase the work you do. Just remember, if you're inviting one candidate, be sure to invite them all!

Feel free to forward these updates and ask your friends to be a health center advocate! New advocates can register at:

<http://votervoice.net/groups/tachc/?registeronly=true>