

Texas Update – December 2008

Happy Holidays!

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Children's Medicaid Enrollment Projected to Drop by 72,000 in January

The [Austin American Statesman](#) reported this week that the Health and Human Services Commission is expecting an enrollment drop of 72,000 children in the Medicaid program next month. CHIP enrollment is expected to decline by 7,000. The majority of the decline in Children's Medicaid is concentrated around Houston – the part of the state that saw the worst effects of Hurricane Ike. The Commission is still researching the cause of this considerable drop – they hope to know in the coming days whether they should take further action, such as extending coverage for families, until the issues are resolved. Given the continued problems with the state's eligibility system, advocates are concerned that many of these children lost their coverage wrongfully. Keep an eye out for updates on this issue – particularly those of you in Houston who serve these kids.

Advocacy Update for the 2009 Legislative Session

It's getting closer every day – the Texas legislative session is around the corner, and we want to thank several centers who have already made contacts with legislators to discuss the health center legislative priorities – Medicaid reform, primary care workforce, and investment in health centers:

Brownsville Community Health Center - Brownsville
Cactus Health Services – Sanderson
Community Action Corporation of South Texas – Alice
Community Health Development – Uvalde
Frontera Health Network - Eden
Good Neighbor Healthcare Center – Houston
La Esperanza Health and Dental Centers – San Angelo
Los Barrios Unidos Community Clinic – Dallas
Pasadena Health Center – Pasadena
Presidio County Health Services – Marfa
Shackelford County Community Resource Center - Albany
United Medical Centers – Eagle Pass
Vida Y Salud Health Systems – Crystal City

We greatly appreciate the efforts of these centers – keep up the good work! Now we need to be hearing from more of you. Early January is a great time to be making initial contacts with your representatives while they are thinking about the session ahead but likely still at home in the district.

And remember to reserve your room for the ***TACHC Policy and Issues Forum in Austin, February 2-3, 2009 at the Omni Hotel Downtown***. Registration, a draft agenda, and lead assignments for coordinating Capitol visits will be out just after the new year. You can reserve hotel rooms now by calling 1-800-THE-OMNI.

Addressing the Primary Care Workforce Shortage a Widespread Theme for 2009

While Texas health reform in 2007 was focused on insurance coverage, the state is clearly moving in the direction of ensuring an adequate primary care workforce to meet the health care demand throughout Texas. Several other groups are also discussing ways to encourage providers to practice in underserved areas. The Texas Medical Association has developed a loan repayment proposal that expands the existing loan repayment program for physicians. The Texas Dental Association also recently released a [report](#) that calls for incentives to encourage dentists to practice in underserved areas. And, HHSC, as part of the Frew settlement, has created a loan repayment program for doctors and dentists who agree to serve a certain number of Medicaid children in their practices. TACHC is working with all of these groups to create the strongest coalition possible to address the primary care workforce shortage.

HHSC Releases [Report Estimating Costs of Services to Undocumented Immigrants](#)

In accordance with Rider 59 of the Texas Appropriations bill, the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) released a [report](#) to the U.S. Congress on the costs of services and benefits provided to undocumented immigrants in Texas. The report estimates that in FY 2007, Texas Emergency Medicaid and the Texas Family Violence program provided approximately \$81.2 million in services, with the bulk of the cost (\$80 million) borne by the Medicaid program. Public hospitals are estimated to have provided \$596.8 million in FY 2006.

HHSC Finalizes the Termination of its Contract with the Texas Access Alliance

The Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) this month reached a final agreement worth more than \$100 million to the state to end its contract with the Texas Access Alliance for eligibility support services. Under the agreement, the Alliance will forgo \$70.9 million in payments for services provided to the state, will pay \$20 million in cash and will provide a \$10 million credit against future work performed by Maximus. In a statement, HHS Executive Commissioner Albert Hawkins said, “We had two primary goals in winding down this contract, and we achieved both of them. We successfully transitioned the work to other vendors and back to the state without disrupting services, and we've negotiated a final agreement that protects the interests of taxpayers.” The decision to use a private contractor to handle initial intake for people seeking services from the state was controversial from the start. Critics noted shortcomings in the Alliance’s performance and blamed the arrangement for a sharp drop of children enrolled in CHIP and children’s Medicaid. Problems still exist with the Texas eligibility system. Commissioner Hawkins indicates that the state has made significant progress in this area while there is still more work to be done. Health center outstationed eligibility workers remain more important than ever in providing benefit services to patients.

New Study Ranks Texas 46th in the Nation for Health Indicators

A new study released this month by the United Health Foundation ranks Texas 46th in the nation for an overall health score. That rank is down from 37th in 2007. The drop in rank is attributed to an increase in the percentage of children in poverty (up 14%) and an increased prevalence of smoking among all Texans (up 8%). The study notes that Texas's strengths include a low rate of cancer deaths and moderate smoking prevalence, but note the state's weaknesses our limited access to primary care, high percentage of uninsured, high percentage of children in poverty, and high incidence of infectious disease. Check out the Texas fact sheet for more information.

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