

Texas Update - January 2007

In this issue:

- Texas Legislature Back In Session
- TACHC Policy and Issues Forum
- Women's Health Program Approved
- HHSC's New Eligibility System Strategy
- Texas Health Center Honors
- Registry Link for New Advocates:
<http://votervoices.net/groups/tachc/?registeronly=true>

The Texas Legislature - Back in Town for the 2007 Regular Legislative Session

As all of you know, the Texas Legislature has settled back into their Austin offices for the next five months. Questions are flying as to what kind of session it's going to be, particularly after the unusual floor debate on January 9 for House Speaker. Tom Craddick kept his post as Speaker of the House, but not without weathering a serious challenge from within his party.

Here are some highlights from bills filed already this session:

- CHIP restoration (more than 60 legislators have filed or signed on to bills that would restore the CHIP program to pre-2003 levels)
- Medicaid reform
- Indigent health care reform
- Immigration issues
- Addressing the nursing shortage

Not to mention the many other bills about non-health related issues that affect our communities... And, as always, the budget will have an enormous impact on all legislative priorities. The state comptroller has certified that there is over \$14 billion in new money available for appropriation. After accounting for the legislature's previous spending commitments, however, like property tax cuts and education spending, only \$2.5 billion new funds remain for other priorities. **Good news for FQHCs:** the first draft of the budget bill includes level funding for both the Primary Health Care Program *and* the FQHC Incubator Program! It will be up to all of us to ensure that support for FQHCs in the legislature remains strong.

The TACHC Policy and Issues Forum - February 5 & 6 - Your Opportunity to Showcase Your Hard Work to Your Elected Representatives

By now you likely are aware that TACHC's Policy and Issues Forum, where health center staff from across the state come to Austin to visit with their elected officials, is just around the corner - February 5 and 6. If you haven't already registered, you can do so online at <http://www.tachc.org/About/Events.asp>. Check out the attached agenda. On Monday morning, Jose Camacho will give a detailed briefing on FQHC legislative priorities followed by "Legislative Visit Dos and Don'ts" led by NACHC Regional

Advocacy Coordinator Yvette Ammerman. By lunch time on Monday, you'll know what to say and how to say it effectively to your representatives. Please be sure to send in your legislative appointments to me at the TACHC offices if you haven't already done so:

kcoburn@tachc.org.

Women's Health Program Approved by CMS on December 21, 2006

After much uncertain waiting, the Women's Health Program Medicaid waiver was finally approved on December 21, 2006. The uncertainty is not over, however, for the many clients and providers affected by this program that rolled out on January 1. While the program is getting off to a strong start, there are still many questions about the interaction of the WHP with Title V, X, and XX and how that will play out over the coming months. FQHCs specifically still have questions about our reimbursement process, although a meeting between TACHC and HHSC to try to resolve these issues will take place early next week. We'll keep you updated... In the meantime, please keep TACHC apprised of the experiences you're having with this program at your health centers.

For those of you looking for more information about WHP, CHIP Perinatal and their interactions with Title V MCH, Title V family planning, Title X, and Title XX, be sure to attend the Monday afternoon session of the Policy and Issues Forum - key staff from DSHS and HHSC, including Joanne Talavera who handles FQHC reimbursement policy, will be on hand to present and answer questions.

HHSC Announces New Strategy to Modernize Eligibility System

In reaction to the meltdown of Texas privatized eligibility system, the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) has significantly downsized the contractor's role in integrated eligibility and enrollment. Under the original contract, the contractor, Texas Access Alliance (TAA), had a great deal of responsibility related to verifying client information. Under the revised contract, vendor staff will collect all available information and send the cases over to state workers for further action. They have also converted 900 temporary staff eligibility workers to full time employees to stabilize the workforce. These changes will reduce the value of the contract with TAA by \$356 million. Ideally, leaving more of the eligibility determination in state worker hands will reduce the unnecessary errors that are causing children to lose coverage.

Fort Bend Family Health Center Honored by Congresswoman

Her tenure was short, but not too short for Shelley Sekula-Gibbs, who took over Tom Delay's district for 7 weeks, to visit Fort Bend Family Health Center and honor them with a Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition for outstanding public service to the community. Congratulations! And, last update we reported that Janet Donath of Good Neighbor Healthcare Center in Houston was one of 20 nurses recently honored by the Texas Nurses Association as an Exemplary RN. You can find a more detailed article (with her picture!) in the December 18, 2006 issue of Nurseweek.

As always - please sign up more advocates! Register here:

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