

## **Texas Update – March 2006**

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

### **Crisis in the Integrated Eligibility System – Significant Enrollment Drops in CHIP and Children’s Medicaid**

Many of you have seen recent news reports and updates from TACHC regarding the significant enrollment drops in both the CHIP and Children’s Medicaid programs. According to HHSC enrollment estimates for the month of March, CHIP enrollment has dropped over 16,000 children since December 2005. Since November 2005, Children’s Medicaid has dropped over 78,000 children from its rolls. In the Children’s Medicaid program, Travis County has lost more than 10% of its clients – more than any other urban county in the state. Given that Travis is one of two counties where the new Integrated Eligibility and Enrollment System (IEE) has rolled out, this enrollment drop suggests major problems with the new system. TACHC and several community health centers were among over 250 advocacy organizations that signed a petition requesting that the state suspend CHIP policy changes to prevent further CHIP enrollment loss and to convene a community stakeholder workgroup to address further problems in children’s health coverage during this transition.

#### Why is CHIP enrollment dropping?

While the answer is not completely clear, several factors are contributing to the problem. There has been a less than smooth transition to Accenture, the IEE vendor and operator of the new eligibility call centers. Backlogs related to processing Katrina Medicaid applications and other transition issues could be contributing to the problem. Additionally, the CHIP program has had two major policy changes in this period. First, CHIP enrollment fees went into effect for the first time. HHSC has admitted that it made a mistake and did not properly inform families of this change. As a result, eligibility for about 6,000 children has been extended for an additional 60 days. Second, renewals under the ACS contract did not require income or asset documentation unless the information had changed. Now clients are required to provide income verification for renewals as an active process, whether the families’ incomes have changed or not. CHIP renewal applications that did not include income documentation would have been denied for missing critical information. HHSC is sending a second missing information reminder letter to about 7,500 families.

#### What explains the Medicaid enrollment declines?

Again, HHSC does not have a clear answer for this question. The new eligibility contractor currently is responsible only for processing NEW Medicaid applications while HHSC regional

staff is responsible for all renewals. Like CHIP, Medicaid applications are being denied for lack of information in renewal cases. But in addition, HHSC acknowledges that staffing shortages at local eligibility offices may be exacerbating the problem.

State eligibility workers know that their offices are downsizing as the Integrated Eligibility System rolls out. Eligibility workers are leaving their positions or transferring to other state programs such as Child Protective Services. HHSC has dramatically increased the number of temp workers it has hired to cover the positions left by regular-status state employees. As a result, there are many more inexperienced eligibility staff processing applications, and it takes these temporary staff longer to process applications.

### ***What is HHSC doing about all this?***

#### Client Survey

Many families in both the CHIP and Children's Medicaid programs failed to send in a renewal packet at all. HHSC is commissioning a comprehensive client survey to understand why.

#### Enhanced Outreach Program

As a result of the enrollment drops, HHSC is planning an enhanced outreach program to raise awareness about these programs and the application and renewal procedures. This program will include:

- Strong grassroots effort to reach the families of school children and those in day care
- Paid media campaign with an emphasis on Spanish-language radio and other publications that serve minority communities
- Earned media campaign with an emphasis on weekly newspapers, morning TV shows, and Spanish-language TV stations
- Development of public-private partnerships as appropriate to enhance the state's effort

The project will be implemented in three phases:

1. A spring campaign to better inform the public of recent changes to the CHIP re-enrollment process and availability of CHIP and Children's Medicaid.
2. A fall campaign to coincide with the start of school
3. An ongoing public awareness effort that will continue throughout FY 2007.

This expanded outreach effort should help get better information out to families so they can complete their renewal applications correctly. There is hope that this may help stem the tide of enrollment drops.

#### Staff Retention Program

While they don't have very many details at this point, the state is working on a staff retention plan to help prevent experienced workers from leaving well before the rollout hits their area. But as the state changes to the new system throughout the coming year, this problem can only increase.

### ***Result of the Petition?***

Despite the 250 organization petition urging HHSC to halt the IEE rollout until the problems are solved, however, HHSC maintains that halting the rollout at this point would only increase and prolong the current issues.

### **CHIP Dental**

Delta Dental is still working to collect provider enrollment contracts from FQHCs. TACHC negotiated an FQHC specific contract that is more relevant for your organizations. You should have seen several emails lately regarding this issue. If you need more information on how to get enrolled as a CHIP dental provider, please contact Katie Parker (512-329-5959) at the TACHC office as soon as possible. The CHIP dental benefit is scheduled to begin April 1. See the attached fact sheet for an explanation of the restored CHIP dental benefit.

Unfortunately, it seems, no big program can come off without a few glitches. There has been a printing problem with some dental cards that were sent to beneficiaries. HHSC is aware that on 45,000 cards, the date of birth of the member and the effective date of the benefit were transposed. Delta Dental has already reprinted the cards and is in the process of mailing them now.

### **2005 UDS Data**

Thanks to all of you who sent TACHC your 2005 UDS reports! With the information you provided, we created an updated fact sheet with the most recent information. Many of you saw these new fact sheets in your legislative packets for the NACHC Policy and Issues Forum earlier this week. Please let us know how your visits went! In the meantime, you can download a copy of the fact sheet from the TACHC website at:

<http://www.tachc.org/Programs/Advocacy/Overview.asp>

### **School Finance Special Session to Begin April 17**

Governor Perry has announced that the next special session on Texas school finance will begin next month. The Texas Tax Reform Commission has been holding public hearings across the state on this issue. This week, the Commission released its final report, along with legislation that is sure to be debated at the Capitol in April. You can find downloadable copies of these documents at [www.ttrc.state.tx.us](http://www.ttrc.state.tx.us).

**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>