

## Texas Update – March 2009

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### HEALTH CARE ACCESS FUND BILL TO BE HEARD IN HOUSE PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE TUESDAY MARCH 31

TACHC's top priority legislation, House Bill 1876 by Representatives **Warren Chisum** (R-Pampa) and **Richard Raymond** (D-Laredo) will come before the House Committee on Public Health on Tuesday March 31. The bill which creates the Health Care Access Fund, consolidates and expands loan repayment for health professionals who practice in areas of greatest need, and provides additional state funding for FQHC operations, has been creating quite a buzz around the Capitol. It's also been generating significant media coverage after a press conference held by Rep Chisum on Monday March 23 to promote the bill. Check out some of the coverage at [www.healthaccessfortexas.org](http://www.healthaccessfortexas.org). Thanks to health center directors David Vliet of Austin, Henry Salas of Gonzales, and Janet Donath of Houston who participated in the event.

Thanks also to all the additional Representatives who have signed on to the bill due to YOUR advocacy efforts. Additional joint authors are Representatives **John Davis** (R-Houston), **Veronica Gonzales** (D-McAllen), and **Chuck Hopson** (D-Jacksonville). Representatives **Ana Hernandez** (D-Houston), **Carl Isett** (R-Lubbock), and **David Farabee** (D-Wichita Falls) have all signed on as co-authors to the bill.

Stay tuned for action alerts about HB 1876 in the coming weeks, in particular when the bill comes to a vote on the House floor. The committee hearing is merely the first in many challenging steps to get this legislation passed, and WE WILL NEED EVERYONE'S HELP!

### FQHC Incubator Reauthorization Bill Also To Be Heard

The bill to reauthorize the FQHC Incubator program will also be heard by the Committee on Public Health on March 31. HB 1169 by Representative Armando Martinez (D-Weslaco) continues the Incubator program and expands its purpose to allow DSHS to provide on-going start up dollars if Federal grant funds for centers starting new sites or services don't materialize in the expected timeline. Companion legislation in the Senate, authored by Senator Jane Nelson (R-Grapevine), received a positive reception from the Senate Health and Human Services committee in February.

### The Texas Budget and the Federal Stimulus Package – Many Questions

Here the end of March, both the House and the Senate are finishing up the first round of budget negotiations before their appropriations bills are debated on the floors of the respective houses. As is usually the case, each body has developed a budget that differs widely from the other. This year, the

Federal Stimulus dollars are creating budgetary challenges that each body is addressing differently. The controversy around adopting Federal stimulus dollars into the current state budget is the concern that if entitlement programs, or other service programs are maintained or expanded with stimulus dollars, those programs may have to shrink at a later date when the stimulus funds go away. In Medicaid, \$5.45 billion in stimulus funds are available to the state through a more favorable Federal matching rate. Advocates are pushing that these additional dollars be reinvested into the health care system. After each body passes its version, there will be a clearer picture of how these funds ultimately will be used.

\*\*Budget note specific to FQHCs: FQHC Incubator funding is intact at \$5 million per year in both the House and the Senate.

### **House Human Services Considers Proposals to Shore Up and Expand CHIP, Children's Medicaid, and the Failing Eligibility System**

On March 19, House Human Services Committee Chairman Patrick Rose (D-Dripping Springs) heard 27 bills all related to children's health coverage, outreach, and improvements to the state eligibility system which still struggles to meet the needs of Texas families. The major themes of these bills were expanding children's Medicaid eligibility to twelve months, restoring the Medicaid medically needy program, expanding CHIP income eligibility to 300% of the Federal Poverty Level (up from the current limit of 200% FPL), CHIP buy-in proposals for higher income families, programs to increase outreach for eligible but not enrolled children, and improvements to the state eligibility system. TACHC supported all proposals for expanded children's coverage, with a priority placed on twelve months continuous eligibility for Medicaid children.

### **Changes in Family Planning Billing for the Women's Health Program**

FQHCs providing services in the Women's Health Program (WHP) will have access to all family planning evaluation and management (E/M) codes for billing beginning April 1. Up until now, FQHCs were limited to four codes – two visit codes (99204 and 99214) and two IUD codes – for billing in the WHP. Now, FQHCs will be able to use, and be reimbursed for, the most appropriate E/M code for that visit, within the confines of WHP benefits. Click [here](#) for more information or check out the TMHP homepage – [www.tmhp.com](http://www.tmhp.com) under "TMHP News." TACHC is still pursuing questions related to billing for IUDs and will update you when more information is available.

### **Title V- Maternal and Child Health Block Grant to Conduct Community Listening Sessions**

The Office of Title V and Family Health of the Texas Department of State Health Services is required to complete a statewide needs assessment every five years in order to receive federal funding through the Title V Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Block Grant. All the state maternal and child health priorities and activities are derived from the results of the Title V 5-Year Needs Assessment. The assessment is expected to identify the prioritized needs for: (a) preventive and primary care services for pregnant women, mothers and infants, (b) preventive and primary care services for children and adolescents and (c) services for children with special health care needs.

To help with this needs assessment process, the Public Policy Research Institute of Texas A&M University has been commissioned to facilitate community listening sessions throughout the state during the four months of **March to June, 2009**.

The facilitators are seeking community members and health providers, along with other key stakeholders to participate in these meetings and provide input on the community health challenges and successes relating to the MCH/Children with Special Healthcare Needs populations. Meetings will be conducted across the state, with the first meetings scheduled for Austin on March 31. Check the TACHC website for the times and locations of future meetings.

**Please forward this message to your friends and colleagues and ask them to [CLICK HERE](#) to register as a health center advocate.**