

Californians for Healthy Kids:

Questions and Answers

What is Californians for Healthy Kids?

Californians for Healthy Kids is an unprecedented campaign backed by business leaders, educators, faith leaders, parents, health care providers, and children's advocates, all united behind the simple goal that every child in California can and should have access to affordable health insurance. Organized by the 100% Campaign (a collaboration of Children Now, Children's Defense Fund, and The Children's Partnership) and the PICO California Project, this initiative has growing support among statewide organizations and in cities and counties across California.

Why Are Your Groups Making Health Insurance for Children a Top Priority? Why Now?

Californians benefit when children are insured and can get basic health care. Polls show that the public understands this and is strongly in favor of covering all children. In addition, this goal is achievable. Ninety percent of children are already covered, so completing the job is doable and affordable. Children with insurance experience a 25% improvement in health and a 68% improvement in "paying attention in class" and "keeping up with school activities." Employers also benefit because they are looking for affordable ways to provide health insurance for the dependent children of their employees. And rising health care costs that affect us all are contained for children when they can get preventive and primary care rather than have to rely on hospital emergency rooms for medical complications that could be avoided.

How Does Californians for Healthy Kids Propose to Get All Children Covered?

We will use four strategies.

- First, we will build on the existing structures that today insure California's children: our Medi-Cal and Healthy Families programs and voluntary employer sponsored coverage. We will modernize what needs overhauling, such as the complex and needlessly costly eligibility and re-determination process in our public programs. In this way, we will leverage and more efficiently use the resources we are already investing to finish the job.
- Second, we will offer employers who cannot now afford family coverage for their workers' children the chance to "opt in" to the new program.
- Third, we will reach out to the families of all uninsured children in California to say: "Your child qualifies for health insurance." Research shows that when all children are eligible, parents are more likely to sign their kids up. The message that "any child can qualify" will help overcome the challenges California has faced in enrolling children into today's confusing and complex maze of children's health programs.
- Fourth, we will join forces with leaders in the 27 counties across California that are already offering insurance to all children or have plans to do so. They are eager to sustain their pioneering and successful efforts and want a statewide policy that enables them to do so.

Does This Proposal Do Anything About Rising Health Care Costs?

Although children's health expenditures are not a large factor in our escalating health care costs, this proposal does have features that can help keep a lid on rising costs. These include greater use of cost-effective purchasing pools, earlier identification and treatment of pediatric health problems, and targeted case management for chronic conditions that frequently occur in children such as asthma and diabetes.

Why Should California Mount a New Initiative Now in the Midst of a Budget Crisis?

Californians look for leadership and positive ideas even when times are tough. There are two reasons why this plan is achievable in these challenging fiscal times: First, the majority of money needed is available by tapping federal matching funds and using existing dollars better. Second, the proposal builds on and leverages investments that we are already making to use dollars more effectively for children's health. Finally, our plan relies on a shared approach to pay the bills—one that involves families, employers and government, rather than any one sector alone.

We start by using existing dollars better and by leveraging federal matching dollars now sitting in an account in Washington for California's use. We build in an affordable cost-sharing role for parents and for employers. Then we look to other dollars that can potentially cover the remainder, including federal funds not yet tapped and administrative savings from reducing unnecessary red tape in application and enrollment processes.

Finally, we have designed our initiative to phase in over several years, requiring limited or no new funding initially, and very modest ongoing new revenues when fully operational.

Why Is This Initiative Needed When Counties Across California Are Mounting Local Efforts?

The ten counties with local children's health initiatives and the seventeen on the drawing board are a testament to the tremendous commitment across California to insuring children. They are also proving every day that this goal is achievable. Because most of these local initiatives have cobbled together public and private funding to launch their program, they recognize that statewide policy and resources are necessary to sustain the coverage they are offering today. Some counties have already had to put enrollment caps in place because of funding constraints. The statewide effort will work in close partnership with these local children's health initiatives to incorporate the lessons they have learned and build upon their local leadership and community support.

Where Does Governor Schwarzenegger Stand?

In April 2004, Governor Schwarzenegger said: "During my administration I want to make sure that every child will be insured and has health care." Especially with the governor's interest in children and in fitness, we are hopeful that he and his senior health officials will help lead California in this campaign for healthier children. We have kept the Schwarzenegger administration informed about our plans and our policy proposals, and look forward to working with them.

Will You Be Proposing Legislation?

Yes. Now that the Campaign is organized and officially launched, we are beginning to talk with key legislative leaders who share our interests. We look forward to introducing legislation early in 2005.

What Steps Will Californians for Healthy Kids Take to Get This Job Done?

Starting today, we will mount a full court press to achieve our goal. This campaign will organize supporters in counties and cities across California, lead a high-intensity advocacy effort with state and local elected officials, and reach out to business and community leaders.

Our campaign will work closely with the Legislature, state agencies, and Governor Schwarzenegger to develop effective policy strategies. The unprecedented breadth of support to cover all of California's children will fuel us to success.

Californians for Healthy Kids is supported by a diverse and growing list of organizations. The 100% Campaign (a collaboration of Children Now, Children's Defense Fund and The Children's Partnership) and PICO California are the founding organizations of this effort. For more information, please contact Catherine Teare at 510-763-2444, Kristen Golden Testa at 415-561-2633 or Deena Lahn at 510-663-2984 or visit www.100percentcampaign.org.