



2012 CALIFORNIA POLICY AGENDA: INNOVATION AT WORK FOR AMERICA'S CHILDREN

The Children's Partnership (TCP) is calling for leadership in the government, corporate, and nonprofit sectors to ensure all of California's children—especially those at risk of being left behind—have the resources and opportunities they need to become healthy, productive adults. In 2012, our work will focus on raising awareness and securing change in Sacramento to achieve the following critical goals for California's children.

Access to Affordable, High-Quality Health Care

Health insurance helps children get the care they need, stay healthier, miss fewer days of school, and be better prepared to learn. Yet nearly a million children remain uninsured in California, 695,000 of whom are eligible for health coverage programs today. These children are eligible for Medi-Cal and the Healthy Families Program (CHIP), but face barriers to enrollment. California's new Health Benefit Exchange promises additional enrollment opportunities for families by 2014. In addition, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) protects children with pre-existing health conditions from being denied coverage by health plans, allows youth up to age 26 to stay on their parents' coverage, and offers subsidies that can result in coverage for more young people.

In 2012, TCP will work to:

- Support effective implementation of the Affordable Care Act in California so that children have access to high-quality care that covers their health needs, including comprehensive physical, dental, vision, and mental health services, especially for those children in low-income and other underserved communities;
- Maintain and strengthen the Healthy Families and Medi-Cal Programs, the foundation for delivering care to children under ACA, by ensuring adequate resources to enroll all eligible children in the Healthy Families Program (HFP) and in Medi-Cal; maintaining Medi-Cal coverage for children with no cost-sharing; and protecting children from unaffordable premium and cost-sharing increases in the Healthy Families Program;
- Establish a cost-effective, efficient system for eligibility determination, enrollment, transition, retention, and renewal for children in Healthy Families, Medi-Cal, and the Exchange;
- Establish a comprehensive essential benefits package specific to the needs of children, applicable across all plans;
- Promote the use of information technology to improve health outcomes and create a consumer-friendly, efficient health care experience for families;
- Shore up the safety net for children who are ineligible for subsidized health coverage programs, but unable to afford private insurance; and
- Ensure that Californians are aware of new rights and coverage options.

Improve Health Outcomes through Innovative Technology Solutions

Health information technology (HIT) has the potential to transform the way health care is delivered, received, managed, and paid for in the United States. As this electronic revolution accelerates, there has been little public discussion about how it can improve care and outcomes for the nation's children. At this time of technological innovation, it is critical that all children benefit from these technologies, with special attention to those in low-income, geographically isolated, and other underserved communities.

In 2012, TCP will work to:

- Ensure that California maximizes access to federal HIT funds—through ACA, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), and other avenues -- and uses these funds to address children’s unique needs;
- Promote the role of the consumer in managing the exchange of information that relates to their own health and health care, with particular attention to ways in which this information can improve health outcomes for children;
- Remove barriers to electronic information exchange to improve delivery and coordination of services for particularly vulnerable children, such as those in foster care and those with special health care needs, including through the launch of a pilot effort in Ventura County; and
- Extend the reach of telehealth to provide health care services to children by promoting comprehensive telehealth policies and promoting the application of telehealth in schools, childcare centers, and other sites where underserved children spend time.

Improved Access to Needed Dental Care

Seventy-one percent of California’s children experience tooth decay by the time they reach the third grade. A primary reason for such poor dental health among children is the lack of dental care. The need for dental care for children will continue to grow, especially when 1.2 million additional children in California gain dental coverage in 2014 when the Affordable Care Act takes effect. However, a new insurance card will not translate into needed dental care unless California has the workforce available to treat its children. Now is the time to employ innovative workforce solutions to meet the current and growing demand for children’s dental care.

In 2012, TCP will:

- Raise awareness about the unmet dental care needs of California’s children and the value of expanding the dental team to meet those needs; and
- Work with a broad range of stakeholders to design and promote a policy solution that expands the capacity of the dental team to ensure high-quality dental care for children where they live.

Proficiency in 21st Century Skills

Computers, broadband, and the Internet can open up new opportunities for youth and provide them with the necessary skills to take advantage of educational and economic opportunities in a digital economy. To fully realize these opportunities, children must have access to affordable digital tools at home and in school; and parents and teachers must be equipped to use technology to support children’s educational achievement and to direct children’s Internet use toward safe, educational, and enriching opportunities.

In 2012, TCP will work to:

- Educate policy-makers about proven models for improving student performance and increasing parent involvement through wise deployment of technology;
- Secure forward-looking policies and sufficient resources to ensure every child grows up with a home and school technology connection and can become proficient in 21st century skills; and
- Leverage public and private sector initiatives to provide parents the technology training and tools needed to support children’s education.

More Information

The Children’s Partnership looks forward to working with policy leaders and partner organizations to achieve these goals for children. For further information, contact Kathleen Hamilton, Director, Sacramento Governmental Affairs, at (916) 706-2917 or khamilton@childrenspartnership.org.