

Clarion Ledger Article – Sunday, June 4

### **Governor Forming New Partnerships To Promote Children's Health Insurance Program**

We must make sure that Mississippi's children have the health insurance coverage they so desperately need, and we are making that happen step by step. We have more than 85,000 children in our state who are eligible to receive health insurance benefits through the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), which provides health insurance to Mississippi's children whose parents are caught in the gap between making too much money to be eligible for Medicaid, but not enough to afford health insurance. As of January 1<sup>st</sup> of this year, only 4,000 Mississippi children were enrolled in CHIP.

We knew that the efforts being made to enroll children were not working as they should be. Many families don't know that they are eligible for the Mississippi Health Benefits Program, which includes both Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program. This is a program that provides health insurance needs to Mississippi's working families.

When Mississippi has 85,000 eligible children, and only 4,000 of them are using those services, then it is time to back up, look at the process and take a new approach to outreach and marketing of the program.

Staff members from the Governor's office joined with the Department of Human Services, Division of Medicaid, and the Department of Finance Administration to develop a new action plan and a new marketing plan for the program. While in the development stages of the plans, staff members met with community health care advocacy groups, medical professionals and concerned community members to gather their advice and input as the plan took shape.

On May 9<sup>th</sup>, we revealed a community outreach plan and new aggressive marketing and advertising campaign to support the program. The campaign materials include a new brochure that includes an application, a poster, print advertisement, several radio public service announcements and a television public service announcement.

We have found ways to simplify the application process, eliminate the waiting period and to make the information much more widely available to parents who are seeking health insurance for their children. Applications are available at county MDHS offices, local Health Department offices, community health centers, rural health clinics, Head Start Centers and some private health clinics.

Now thanks to a new partnership that has been formed between the Governor's office and the Mississippi Hospital Association, applications are available in hospitals across the state.

This new partnership will improve our efforts to reach people in all areas of our state, thus making it easier to apply for coverage. In addition to having applications available

in our hospitals, the MHA has trained professionals available to assist with the application process and to answer any questions that parents might have.

We are pleased to already be experiencing growth in enrollment figures. Mississippi now has more than 8,392 children enrolled in CHIP, which means we have more than doubled the number of enrolled children in five months.

We know that we have great strides to make, and we are continuing to develop new partnerships and plans as we provide health insurance options that make a positive difference in the lives of Mississippi families and Mississippi children.