New Report Finds Utah’s Child Uninsured Rate is Moving in the Wrong Dire

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Why it’s happening and what we can do to counter the trend

A new report finds that Utah’s uninsured rate for children is increasing. In fact, the analysis shows the growth rate of uninsured kids in Utah is among the highest in the nation.

This is according to a new report by the Georgetown University Center for Children and Families. According to the report, the number of uninsured children nationwide increased by about 276,000 children last year, the first significant increase in a decade. An estimated 3.9 million children were uninsured nationwide in 2017.

Utah saw one of the nation’s greatest increases in the kids’ uninsured rate, with

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about 71,000 or 7.3 percent of children uninsured in 2017. That's up 12,000 children, about a 20% increase in the number of uninsured children from 2016.

So Why Are Moving in the Wrong Direction?

The report points to a few reasons for this alarming change.

- Medicaid expansion- or lack of it: States that did not expand Medicaid saw the sharpest decline in coverage between 2016 and 2017. The good news for Utah is that voters PASSED Proposition 3, the ballot initiative to expand Medicaid. But we have not yet begun enrollment (although state leaders are working towards an enrollment date of April 1, 2019).
- Federal changes to the marketplace, delays in CHIP funding: As families grapple with enrollment options for their children, the federal confusion around the ACA health insurance marketplace, and cuts to outreach and navigator funding, makes it harder for families to learn about their health insurance options. In addition, last year's long delay in CHIP funding likely furthered the confusion. This may have caused families to not enroll or re-enrolled their child in this critical healthcare program.
- Federal policies targeting immigrant communities and deterring enrollment: The federal government is creating a climate of fear for many immigrant communities, which is deterring many families from signing up for programs that they can- and should- be eligible to receive. Trump administration proposed policies and rule changes, like the proposed 'public charge' rule, are having a chilling effect, sending harmful, unwelcome messages that hurt our immigrant families.

What Can We Do to Reverse the Trend?

- Implement Medicaid expansion and the voter's will- without delays, without any restrictions, or additional barriers or requirements for enrollment or care: Making sure that Medicaid expansion begins by the anticipated April 1st deadline is one of the most effective ways to counter this trend. When parents have health insurance coverage, they bring their children along. Utah already has one of the highest rates of children eligible for CHIP and Medicaid, but not enrolled. States that expanded Medicaid in the past saw more parents and children receive health coverage.

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- Keep kids covered by simplifying eligibility and enrollment processes: Once a child is enrolled in CHIP or Medicaid, we need to make sure they stay enrolled, and do not lose health insurance coverage due to unnecessary administrative red-tape or errors, unexpected changes in status or changes. Sometimes just picking up a one-time extra shift at work can cause a parent to lose insurance. These unnecessary disruptions are also contributing to Utah's high child uninsured rate. We need to simplify eligibility and enrollment processes now so that qualifying kids can get covered- and *stay covered*.
- Counter the climate of fear affecting our immigrant families: We need to send a clear message that policies targeting immigrant families hurt everyone. Submit comments opposing the proposed 'public charge' rule. And tell your representatives and state leaders that you want a Utah where all families are welcome and should be able to get the healthcare they need to thrive.

Through sound policies and education we can begin to reduce this increase in our child uninsured number. Together we can get Utah kids' coverage back on track so that 100% of Utah kids have health coverage!

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