

Back-to-School message: Parents can get health coverage help as they prepare kids for school year

This year's national Back-to-School Campaign will kick off on August 4 with a Washington, D.C. news conference. The purpose of the Back-to-School Campaign is to reach parents and caregivers as they prepare their children for the school year with the message that health care coverage is an important component of being ready for school. Designed to garner earned media through staged events, Back-to-School can be customized at the local level to reach a variety of audiences. This year's theme will again be, "Put health coverage at the top of your Back-to-School list".

Last year, more than 1,800 events took place in all 50 states and Washington, D.C. Events ranged from news conferences and enrollment days to health fairs. Corporate partners included Wal-Mart, H&R Block, CVS Pharmacies, Albertsons and Acme Markets, Eckerd and Jewel Osco. Pennsylvania events included an Enrollment Day in York, a news conference in Pittsburgh, and giveaways in Greene, Fayette and Washington counties, and in Philadelphia.

This year's plans include the YWCA of Bucks County's celebration of the enroll-

ment of its 2,000th child.

In Pennsylvania, the key message is: "In Pennsylvania, a family of four can earn up to \$45,000 a year or more and qualify for low-cost or free health coverage. Call 1-800-986-KIDS to find out more."

Online technical assistance is widely available. Customized letters to the editor, op-ed pieces, fact sheets, and drop-in articles with Pennsylvania-specific information are available on PPC's web site, www.papartnerships.org. Additional templates for media advisories, community calendar announcements, news advisories and news releases are available at the Covering Kids web site, www.coveringkidsandfamilies.org, under the Back-to-School link. Covering Kids and Families' media partner, GMMB, also provides materials that can be ordered online at the Covering Kids and Families Web site or by contacting Barbara Preston, the Northeast Regional coordinator for Back to School, at 202-572-2915; barbara.preston@gmmb.org.

One cautionary note: The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has issued a reminder that Back-to-School activities may not involve any candidate running for office in this year's election. Candidates are forbidden from participating in or even attending any Back to School event.

Activities under Back to School can involve a lot of effort or little. Regardless
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of what you undertake, we ask that you let us know what you are planning (see the "Tell us" form), and we offer our assistance in planning and materials.

There are several ways to think about Back-to-School:

- Activities that focus primarily on submitting materials to the media, such as letters to the editor, op-ed pieces, and drop-in articles.
- Activities that focus on attracting media coverage such as news conferences, media-friendly outreach or enrollment events, business partnerships, or kick-off events announcing the Back-to-School period.
- Activities that focus on informing and engaging your individual members, such as newsletter articles, opportunities to participate in local Back-to-School activities, sample ideas for outreach efforts through members' offices and sites, and the availability of materials through Covering Kids and Families and the Department of Insurance.

PPC offers these additional suggestions to Statewide Covering Kids and Families Coalition members:

- If you are a membership organization, ask your members to distribute or post fliers or brochures in their settings during this Back-to-School period.
- If your members provide direct services to families, ask them to host an outreach or enrollment event or take the 100 Percent Pledge to make sure all of the children they serve have health coverage. Announce the pledge in a news conference or news article.
- Place an article about Back-to-School and health coverage programs in your newsletter.
- Join with other coalition members to host a news conference in your region.

For more information, contact Ann Bacharach, 717-236-5680, ext. 111; annbach@papartnerships.org.



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News and resources

- Watch for a new white paper on lessons that Covering Kids and Families pilot sites have learned in overcoming language barriers and developing effective outreach efforts. The paper will be available online in July, at www.papartnerships.org, or by contacting Ann Bacharach at annbach@papartnerships.org.

Save the dates: Covering Kids and Families Coalition meetings, 2004

All meetings will be at the Harrisburg Hilton, One North Second Street, Harrisburg.

- Wednesday, September 8, 2004
- Wednesday, December 1, 2004

For more information, contact Covering Kids and Families Project Director Ann Bacharach, 717-236-5680, ext 111; annbach@papartnerships.org.

Tell Us Your Back-to-School Plans!

As you plan your Back-to-School campaign efforts, please take a moment to let us know what you're doing. The information helps us determine where Back-to-School efforts are underway, share ideas, and inform the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation about Pennsylvania's efforts.

Contact Name: _____

Title: _____

Organization: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____

ZIP: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Event date(s): _____

Description (site, partners, audience, etc.): _____

Please return this form or e-mail this information to Ann Bacharach, Covering Kids and Families Project Director, Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, 20 N. Market Square, Suite 300, Harrisburg, PA 17101; annbach@papartnerships.org; fax 717-236-7745.

Back-to-School 2004

- Find sample materials, timelines, step-by-step instructions, and helpful hints at www.coveringkidsandfamilies.org.
- Questions? Contact Ann Bacharach, 717-236-5680, ext. 111; annbach@papartnerships.org.

COMPASS: Online renewals and community partner help

COMPASS adopted two new features in May, allowing families to renew health coverage and other benefits online, and letting community partners using the Power User E-Signature version to E-sign and to assist in verifying income, resources, expenses, and pregnancy for families applying for health coverage and Food Stamps.

COMPASS renewals

Families will receive a mailed renewal packet when it is time to renew their Medicaid, CHIP, adultBasic, Food Stamps, TANF, Long Term Care, and Waivers benefits. The packet will contain a letter telling the family that they can renew by mail or through COMPASS. If the family wants to renew by mail, they need to use the paper renewal form and envelope that is included in the packet. If the family wants to renew through COMPASS, they must follow the instructions on the letter.

To renew Medicaid benefits through COMPASS, the family has to enter the Social Security number of the person whose name is on the letter, plus other information that is included on the letter. For CHIP renewals, applicants will be asked to provide a number from the letter called a "unique form identifier". Some of the COMPASS renewal screens will be pre-populated with the names and birth dates of the members of the household and the household address. Families will be able to change this information if it is not

correct. Families will also need to complete the information included on the rest of the renewal screens.

When the family has completed the information and electronically submitted the renewal form, they will sign the signature page and send it, along with any other information listed, to the address of the County Assistance Office (CAO) or the CHIP or adultBasic contractor.

TANF and some Food Stamps cases also require a face-to-face interview to complete the renewal process. For those cases, the appointment date and time will be provided in the renewal packet.

More community partner assistance

Community partners can now E-sign an application on behalf of families seeking the range of benefits available through COMPASS, when the family shows proof of identity.

Community partners can also assist in verifying income, resource, expense, and pregnancy information for families applying for health coverage (Medicaid, CHIP, and adultBasic) and/or Food Stamps. The community partner will then E-sign the application, copy the verification information, and send the copies to the CAO or the CHIP or adultBasic contractor within 10 days. The family does not have to send anything by mail unless other verification is needed, such as unpaid medical bills or disability information.

Policy changes align Medicaid and CHIP procedures

As of June 1, 2004, several policy changes have been implemented in Medicaid and CHIP to better align the application and verification process and procedures.

Previously, Medicaid required income verification documents to be dated within 30 days of the application while CHIP allowed documents to be as much as 90 days old. The new policy allows documents to be within 60 days of the date of the application.

CHIP has allowed families to prove their income using just one pay stub. Medicaid will now also allow one pay stub as proof if it is "representative" of the family's income.

Medicaid will now allow depreciation of some assets in determining eligibility, as CHIP has. This generally applies to families using an income tax return as part of their income verification but can apply to other families with self-employment income.

In July, CHIP will implement new renewal forms and notices to families. The forms will be mailed to families 90 days in advance of their ending date and will allow families to return the form by mail, to renew over COMPASS (see related article, above), or in some cases, renew over the phone by calling their insurer. The notices have been tested and reviewed for literacy appropriateness.