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BACK-TO-SCHOOL CAMPAIGN URGES PARENTS TO CALL 1(877) KIDS-NOW FOR CHILDREN'S HEALTH INSURANCE ELIGIBILITY

Report shows decline in number of kids insured through private coverage

SEATTLE – Even though the total number of Americans without health insurance has been on the rise, a new study analyzing government data suggests that the number of uninsured kids – including those in Washington State – is on the decline. According to the study, that decline can be attributed to more kids being covered under public health care programs such as Medicaid and *Healthy Kids Now!*

“The State of Kids’ Coverage” was released today by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) at an event this morning to kick off the *Covering Kids & Families* Back-to-School Campaign, a nationwide effort to enroll eligible children in Medicaid and the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) during the back-to-school season.

The report shows that in Washington, the number of children who have private health care coverage has fallen by nearly 12% -- meaning that 158,000 fewer kids have private health coverage today than they did in 1997-98. The number of kids enrolled in Medicaid and *Covering Kids & Families* increased by 35% during this time, providing more than 108,000 more kids with public coverage and demonstrating the importance of these programs as a safety net for Washington families.

Public health coverage programs have provided health care coverage for thousands of uninsured kids. But there are still more than 115,000 uninsured kids in Washington State, and many of them are eligible for low-cost or free health coverage. That is why Governor Christine Gregoire recently authorized outreach funding to find and enroll eligible children in government-sponsored health coverage programs.

The latest Census data shows that of the more than 8.3 million children who remain uninsured nationwide, more than 115,000 live in Washington. Of these, most are eligible for some type of publicly-funded health coverage. However, because of lack of information about the programs and difficulty navigating the application process, many children remain uninsured. Gov. Gregoire’s investment to tell families about available coverage -- along with RWJF’s Back-to-School Campaign -- will move Washington closer to covering all children by 2010.

“Washington will not reach our goal of becoming the Healthiest State in the Nation if our children lack health insurance,” said Greg Vigdor, president & CEO of the Washington Health Foundation. “*Healthy Kids Now!* provides a much-needed safety net for Washington’s children. Because of these programs, working parents don’t have to choose between filling the refrigerator and filling a prescription.”

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“We know that children who have health insurance are better prepared to learn in school and better equipped to succeed in life,” said Dr. Ben Danielson of Odessa Brown Children’s Clinic. “The back-to-school season is an ideal time to make sure that children have the health coverage they need.”

“Studies have shown that it is essential for children to go to school healthy in order to learn. This is one of the reasons I fought to increase spending on education and health care by \$7 billion in this year’s budget,” U.S. Rep. Dave Reichert said. “But funding health programs won’t work unless families know about them and know how to take advantage of them. That’s why we need parents to call 1(877) KIDS-NOW.”

Washington families of four earning up to \$50,000 or more may qualify for *Healthy Kids Now!*, and parents can call toll-free **1(877) KIDS-NOW** to find out if their children are eligible. For personalized help in King County, families can call The Washington Health Foundation’s Community Health Access Program (CHAP) **1-800-756-KIDS (5437)**.

"This fall we need to make sure that children in Washington state go back to school with backpacks, pencils, paper and another essential tool for learning: health care," said U.S. Rep. Jay Inslee, who served as regional director of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services from 1997-1998. "Busy parents need only make one call to 1(877) KIDS-NOW to find out if their kids qualify."

The *Covering Kids & Families* Back-to-School campaign will reach thousands of Washington families during August and September by:

- Organizing local enrollment activities to encourage parents to seek information about enrolling their eligible children in *Healthy Kids Now!*;
- Collaborating with Public Health Seattle and King County to host the 2nd Annual South King County Latina Health Fair on Saturday, September 9;
- Distributing material to potentially eligible families through 250 schools throughout Washington; and
- Working with coalition partners – a group of more than 35 statewide public and private partner organizations - to promote the **1(877) KIDS-NOW** toll-free number statewide.

Today’s report was prepared by analysts at the State Health Access Data Assistance Center (SHADAC), located at the University of Minnesota. The report analyzes data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s National Center for Health Statistics 2003 National Survey of Children’s Health (NSCH) and the U.S. Census Bureau’s 1998, 1999, 2004, and 2005 Current Population Surveys (CPS).

To view the research report, locate *Covering Kids & Families* activities, or download materials in English or Spanish, log on to www.coveringkidsandfamilies.org.

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Fast Facts:

There are more than 115,000 uninsured kids in Washington, and most are eligible for low-cost or free health care coverage through Medicaid and *Healthy Kids Now!*

Children in a family of four earning up to \$50,000 a year or more may qualify.
Eligibility is based on family size and income.

Parents should call toll-free **1(877) KIDS-NOW**
to find out if their children are eligible.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation focuses on the pressing health and health care issues facing our country. As the nation's largest philanthropy devoted exclusively to improving the health and health care of all Americans, the Foundation works with a diverse group of organizations and individuals to identify solutions and achieve comprehensive, meaningful and timely change. For more than 30 years the Foundation has brought experience, commitment, and a rigorous, balanced approach to the problems that affect the health and health care of those it serves. When it comes to helping Americans lead healthier lives and get the care they need, the Foundation expects to make a difference in your lifetime. For more information, visit www.rwjf.org.

The University of Minnesota's State Health Access Data Assistance Center (SHADAC) helps states monitor rates of health insurance coverage and to understand factors associated with uninsurance. SHADAC provides targeted policy analysis and technical assistance to states that are conducting their own health insurance surveys and/or using data from national surveys. Information can be located at www.shadac.umn.edu.

The non-profit Washington Health Foundation is leading the way in making Washington the Healthiest State in the Nation by building Healthy Systems and promoting Healthy Living—through involvement of providers, leaders and local communities in the largest civic engagement project for health in state history. For more information, visit www.whf.org.