

LaCHIP enrollment blitz underway

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About 95 percent of children eligible for the Louisiana Children's Health Insurance Program are now being served, but it's that remaining 5 percent which concerns state officials.

In northeast Louisiana, there are about 4,000 children who could have insurance through LaCHIP, but for whatever reasons, they are not enrolled.

LaCHIP representatives will travel throughout the region this week as part of their "uninsured outreach blitz" to get more children signed up for healthcare through LaCHIP.

U.S. Rep. Rodney Alexander was in Monroe Monday drumming up support for the program, which this year is celebrating its 10th anniversary. Alexander was a member of the Legislature when it authorized the creation of the program in 1998.

Alexander knows that many of LaCHIP supporters were not pleased with his decision last year to vote against extending the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP).

SCHIP is the federal program that directs money to states to provide health insurance to uninsured families and children.

"SCHIP was what was passed and handed down to the states, but it was up to the states to develop a program to fit the needs of each state," Alexander said.

He admits there was some difficulty in promoting the program to citizens and other lawmakers when it was first being developed.

"It was hard to do simply because it was something new, yet we passed the LaCHIP program, and it has been a model for this nation," Alexander said. "I saw in the last proposal of expanding SCHIP to do more than its original intent. I saw it as a vehicle that was about to destroy a successful program in the state of Louisiana.

"If we at the national level want to debate a program to cover adults then let's debate that program, but don't disguise it as a children's health insurance program. That's exactly what the SCHIP expansion was doing."

Alexander said there are too many children's programs in the United States that serve more adults than children. He did not want to see that happen with LaCHIP.

"I think that would have destroyed the children's health insurance program as we have known it in the state of Louisiana," Alexander said.

During the past 10 years, the state has done well in covering uninsured children, Alexander said. But it must do a better job in going out and finding the children who are eligible but not enrolled.

"We don't know whether it's apathy or lack of education, but we do know that there are many out there today who could have access to quality healthcare

but are not receiving it," he said. "It's our job to go out and make sure we get those."

Children's Coalition director Lynda Gavioli said the best way to keep children healthy is to begin providing adequate healthcare early, starting with prenatal care.

"We must ensure that Louisiana's children, no matter what their circumstances, have the chance to grow and become healthy adults," she said.

According to the 2007 Louisiana health insurance survey, the number of uninsured children and adults has steadily declined over the past two years.

However, uninsured rates for children continue to remain high in north Louisiana, with the highest in East Carroll Parish at 8.2 percent. In Ouachita, 4.6 percent of children remain uninsured as of 2007. In 2005, that number was 7.7 percent.

This week, the Children's Coalition of Northeast Louisiana will hold its enrollment blitz to enroll uninsured children in LaCHIP. The enrollment campaign will be held in the 12 surrounding parishes through May 2.

Geniece Piercy, Region 8 LaCHIP coordinator, said residents may think their children are not eligible for LaCHIP, but in many cases they are eligible.

To learn more about LaCHIP and eligibility, call 362-3279, or 1-877-252-2447, or visit online at www.lachip.org.