



TENNESSEE PRIMARY CARE
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NEWS RELEASE
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Community Health Centers Laud Expansion of Health Insurance for Children

Tennessee - The Tennessee Primary Care Association (TPCA) applauds Congressional passage of the Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act of 2009 (SCHIPRA 2009). The legislation will expand CoverKids, Tennessee's children's health insurance program, and enable health centers to improve and expand primary care services to children.

"On behalf of Tennessee's Community Health Centers, we thank our leaders in Congress for responding directly to the health care needs of our children," said Kathy Wood-Dobbins, CEO of the Tennessee Primary Care Association. "The SCHIP reauthorization expands coverage for low-income and uninsured children in Tennessee. About 32,000 children are currently enrolled in the state's CoverKids program. This bill will improve access to health care for the 125,000 children in Tennessee still without coverage. In these uncertain and very troubling times for our economy, keeping families and children healthy is the right medicine for our state."

President Obama signed the legislation into law today. The bill passed the Senate last week by a bipartisan vote of 66 to 32, and cleared the House by a bipartisan vote of 289-139. "This bill creates a prospective payment system in SCHIP, the CoverKids program in Tennessee, similar to the system already in place under TennCare for services provided by federally qualified health centers and rural health clinics. This allows Tennessee's Community Health Centers to provide and expand primary care services to more children while maintaining their high quality of care and financial stability," said Wood-Dobbins.

The legislation also allows for funding of outreach efforts to enroll children who meet the requirements. "The Tennessee Primary Care Association's members have already been actively enrolling eligible kids in the SCHIP/CoverKids program and will work in partnership with the state to ensure every eligible child whose health care home is a community health center is enrolled in CoverKids," said Wood-Dobbins.

Tennessee's Community Health Centers provide primary care services regardless of a patient's ability to pay and are strategically located in areas where private medical care is scarce, nonexistent or not easily accessible, such as an urban community or a rural county. They have 140 sites providing primary health care services across the state. They have experienced a steady increase in their patient base, an average of about 10 percent each year. In 2007, Tennessee's health centers served over 285,000 people, 94 percent of them living below 200% of the poverty level and nearly 40 percent of them uninsured.

Tennessee Primary Care Association (TPCA) is a nonprofit corporation connecting Tennesseans with a health care home, especially the medically underserved. Since its inception in 1976, TPCA committed to 1) identifying unmet needs and gaps in service access, 2) developing systems of care, 3) advocating for resources, and 4) promoting awareness of Community Health Centers. Membership includes non-profit primary care clinics across the state operating over 140 sites providing comprehensive medical care.