

AACF helps Arkansas kick-off National Cover the Uninsured Week

Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, in conjunction with Arkansas Center for Health Improvement, Community Health Centers of Arkansas and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) joined hundreds of communities around the country in spotlighting the 45 million Americans, including 8 million children who are living without health insurance. In Arkansas, there are more than 450,000 children and adults without health insurance.

A news conference held Monday, May 02, 2005, at College Station Community Health Clinic featured several speakers including: Representative Tommy Roebuck; State Senator Tracy Steele; Kevin Ryan, JD, Associate Director at Arkansas Center for Health Improvement and Assistant Professor at the UAMS College of Public Health; Sipp Mouden, Executive Director of Community Health Centers of Arkansas; and Rhonda Sanders, Director of Health Policy at AACF.

A proclamation signed by Gov. Mike Huckabee declaring May 1-8 as Cover the Uninsured Week in Arkansas also helped kick off the week.

As part of the events highlighting the uninsured, two reports were released by RWJF.

The first report: "Characteristics of the Uninsured: A View from the States" analyzes data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention showing that a significant number of working Americans in every state do not have health care coverage, including nearly 226,000 in Arkansas. Nationally, at least 20 million working adults do not have coverage. In 8 states, at least one in five working adults is uninsured. In 39 other states, including Arkansas, at least one working adult in every 10 does not have health care coverage. The report further reveals that in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, between one-fourth and one-half of all uninsured adults were unable to see a doctor when needed in the past year because of cost, including nearly 178,000 uninsured adults in Arkansas

To view the report in its entirety click on the following link:
<http://covertheuninsuredweek.org/media/research/SHADAC2005.pdf>

The second report released by RWJF: "Uninsured Americans with Chronic Health Conditions" is an analysis of government data that shows millions of uninsured adults in the U.S. suffer with chronic illness and have medical needs that are unmet. Nearly half (45 percent) of non-elderly uninsured adults report having one or more chronic health problems. More than 15 million uninsured adults in the U.S. have diabetes, heart disease, asthma, or another chronic condition. The analysis documents that millions of these chronically ill adults forgo needed medical care or prescription drugs due to cost, leaving them at serious risk for increased health problems.

To view the report in its entirety click on the following link:
<http://covertheuninsuredweek.org/media/research/Urban2005.pdf>

AACF helping lead the fight to cover Arkansas' children

AACF has worked diligently for the past seven years to improve access to health insurance for children in Arkansas. In late 2004, AACF released a report: "Covering Kids in Arkansas: Are We Successful" that details the success of ARKids First.

To view the report in its entirety click on the following link:

http://www.aradvocates.org/_images/pdfs/Covering%20Arkansas%20Children.pdf

In 1996, prior to the ARKids First program 19.4 percent of the children in the state were uninsured. As of 2002 we have reduced that uninsured rate to 11 percent. Even more dramatic of a shift has been seen in children living in household under 100 percent of poverty. In 1996, 28.9 percent were uninsured and in 2002 only 15 percent were uninsured.

While these reductions in uninsured children are evidence of the hard work and cooperation of many organizations and state leaders there is still much to be done. Eleven percent of the children in Arkansas still lack health insurance. That means they lack the ability to pay for dental care, eye glasses, well-child check-ups and acute health care needs. Children who are cut-off from health services early in life never receive simple corrective care that allows them to perform better in school and they never learn to utilize precious health resources to develop healthy lifestyles and avoid the chronic diseases that plaque the many citizens of our state.

Providing health insurance to our children is a major priority; however, we must recognize that the environment a child lives in is just as critical to their overall health. According to a recent report released by the State Health Access Data Assistance Center at the University of Minnesota, 54 percent of uninsured adults have at least one child living in the household. This means that many children in our state have a higher risk of having a caregiver that is seriously ill or disabled because their caregiver cannot access health care they need to detect and treat disease in its early stages.

Building a brighter future for our children goes far beyond what we provide directly to the child. We must build healthier families and communities. Sick and diseased communities cannot raise healthy achieving children. Providing access to health services is an integral part of how we will ultimately improve the quality of life for Arkansas citizens. To do this though will take all of us working together, pooling our resources, ideas, and efforts. I challenge each of us to do this!

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