

40 Years after Creation, Medicaid Continues Improving and Saving Lives

(LITTLE ROCK) – This week the nation celebrates the 40th birthday of Medicaid. It was signed into law on July 30, 1965. And 40 years later it is providing 605,000 Arkansas residents with access to life-saving and life preserving health care.

In Arkansas, Medicaid has kept many low income adults and children from becoming uninsured. The state's Medicaid and SCHIP programs provide coverage too approximately:

- 350,000 children who receive health care through Medicaid and ARKids,
- 63,000 senior citizens,
- 69,000 people with disabilities,
- 123,000 parents and pregnant women.

“Medicaid and ARKids First have markedly reduced the number of uninsured children in Arkansas. The state's uninsured rate has fallen to 11 percent, which is below the national average,” said Rhonda Sanders, director of health policy at Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families (AACF). “Arkansas is a leader on the national front working to ensure access to needed and cost saving preventive care.”

One major factor in that reduction was the creation of ARKids First in 1997.

“The impact of ARKids First on the state is phenomenal,” said Rich Huddleston, executive director of AACF. “Gov. Huckabee and legislators are to be commended for their efforts in the creation and continued support of such a vital program.”

Statistics show that the infant mortality rate in Arkansas, at 15.4 percent in 1977, has declined steadily and significantly to 8.3 percent in 2002. Arkansas Medicaid contributes directly to this positive health outcome by providing prenatal care to low-income pregnant women.

Sanders says for the past 40 years Medicaid has filled a health care void left when there was a significant loss in private insurance.

“Between 2000 and 2003, the share of low-income adults and children with job-based insurance fell from 32.4 percent to 26 percent. Medicaid responded to the challenge and without Medicaid coverage, more than 86,700 additional low-income adults and children would have become uninsured,” said Sanders. “We all benefit when people get basic health care and are able to work, be productive and raise healthy families.”

Sanders says this is why it is critical that our state and federal leaders work to ensure that Medicaid remains strong and effective providing health care for our most vulnerable children and families.