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500,000 California Children Could Lose Access to Healthcare Coverage

Governor Schwarzenegger is expected to sign a \$24 billion package of budget “solutions” on July 28th that includes \$15.5 billion in cuts and \$4 billion in revenue shifts, but no revenue raising options. Health and human services alone will sustain about \$2 billion in cuts through the 2009-10 budget.

The Healthy Families Program, which covers nearly one million low-income children between 100-250% of the federal poverty level (\$21-\$53,000 annually for four), will suffer a \$124 million cut, about one-third of its state funding.

The cut will force California to disenroll hundreds of thousands of children from Healthy Families and follows the enrollment freeze that went into effect on July 17th, 2009. MRMIB, the agency that manages Healthy Families, approved the freeze on June 29th. While First 5 California Commission passed a resolution that would allow them to provide financial support for health coverage for kids, they have not yet specified the amount of assistance.

In the one week after the freeze went into effect, 7,000 children were placed on a waiting list for Healthy Families. MRMIB has said that the freeze could prevent 350,000 children from gaining access to health coverage. The \$124 million cut will mean that at least 500,000 children altogether could lose access to coverage.

These cuts come at a time when the Healthy Families Program is experiencing record breaking enrollment numbers. They will also result in California losing hundreds of millions of dollars in federal matching funds. For every dollar cut in Healthy Families, the state is denied two dollars in federal matching funds for our health system and our economy. With a \$2 for \$1 match

from the federal government for every dollar the state spends, this is another example of irresponsible policy.

Both the Governor and Republican legislators made it clear during the budget negotiations that they would not even consider raising taxes on tobacco or oil extraction or closing tax loopholes. When it came down to tax increases for the wealthy or healthcare and education for children, California’s kids got the short end of the stick. They will be paying the price not just for the economic downturn but also the structural failure of our legislative system. Eventually we will all pay the price for the Governor’s short sightedness as money is pulled out of the healthcare industry, cities, schools, local economies and workers in California are pushed to the unemployment line. Community Health Councils and its coalitions will continue to ask the Governor to protect and fund the Healthy Families Program.

National Health Reform

Community Health Councils continues to monitor the progress and developments occurring on national health reform in Congress. To date, the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee; the House Tri-Committee (Ways and Means; Energy and Commerce; Education and Labor) and the Congressional Tri-Caucus have all drafted language describing measures of reform. The Senate Finance Committee is also expected to release a draft in the near future. Although President Obama had hoped Congress would have a bill passed by the August recess, this now seems unlikely. A number of items are up for debate, including the creation of a public plan option, mandates for employers as well as individuals, cost-saving measures by reducing Medicare payments, and imposing additional taxes for high-income earners.

CHC is analyzing the various drafts and preparing a letter that addresses the strengths and shortcomings of each proposal, as well as a list of non-negotiable items that must be included in order for health reform to be successful in California and Los Angeles County. The letter will be made available to coalition members for support sign-ons. As Congress prepares for its August recess, everyone is encouraged to schedule a district visit and weigh in on health reform.

Building Healthy Communities in South Los Angeles

In February 2010, The California Endowment will launch *Building Healthy Communities*, a 10-year strategic plan to improve health systems and the physical, social, economic and service structures that support healthy living and healthy behaviors in California. The Endowment has identified 14 communities throughout California to partner with and fund, including South Los Angeles in the South Figueroa Corridor/Vermont-Manchester neighborhoods covering the 90037 and 90044 zip codes. This initiative is the first time a major foundation is making a large-scale, long-term investment in our community providing new opportunities for community collaboration and policy change.

The Foundation has invited each community to take the next several months to develop a plan for the change they want to see. The planning process for South Los Angeles will kick off with the launch of *Building Healthy Communities* on Saturday, August 15th from 9am to Noon at the Expo Center, 3980 South Menlo Avenue, Los Angeles 90037.

The launch will mark the beginning of the community planning process and provide an overview of opportunities for participation. This will include the organization of an area-wide committee to oversee the planning process and ten-year initiative. The planning committee will include broad representation from area residents, community, faith-based organizations and the business sector within the South Figueroa/Vermont Manchester Corridor.

Affordable housing, good jobs, safe schools, clean air, parks and playgrounds, walkable streets, markets with fresh fruits and vegetables, and strong social networks are crucial to a healthy California. Become part of this effort by joining us on August 15th to advance your vision of a healthier community in South Los Angeles.

For more information, please contact Korie White at 323.295.9372 x228 or at Korie@chc-inc.org

County Moves to Increase Healthy Food Options

With four hundred vending machines in LA County facilities up for contract renewal, District 2 Supervisor Mark Ridley Thomas has asked that 100% of the options they offer be healthy foods, rather than the 33% currently

stipulated. The 100% requirement would be consistent with the State of California's Nutritional Guidelines.

The motion, put forth jointly with Supervisor Michael Antonovich on July 7th, cites the 2009 Los Angeles County Public Health Department *Key Indicators of Health* report showing "disturbing statistics related to the rising chronic disease burden prevalent across the entire County" and the "unhealthy eating patterns of our communities." Data show only 15% of adults consume the recommended servings of fruits and vegetables a day, while over 40% of adults eat fast food at least once a week.

Obesity cost Los Angeles County nearly \$12 billion in healthcare expenses and lost production in 2006, according to a study by the California Center for Public Health Advocacy available at <http://www.publichealthadvocacy.org/costofobesity.html> . Removing sugary snacks from vending machines is one measure the County and State have taken to try to reduce the numbers of obese children and adults. The County's Chief Executive Officer working with "all appropriate departments" is looking at additional measures to incorporate a consistent standard of healthy-food options in County-sponsored events and procurement activities.

Action on the vending machine motion is pending a report by staff on recommendations to the Board of Supervisors within 60 days.

Upcoming Events

Town Hall Meeting: the New Martin Luther King Hospital. Saturday, August 1st 9-11:30am. Join LA County Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas and The Empowerment Congress for an update on efforts to open MLK Hospital. MLK Multiservice-Ambulatory Care Center in the H. Claude Hudson Conference Center. 12021 S. Wilmington Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90059. Light refreshments. RSVP to 213.743.7200 or at <http://ridley-thomas.lacounty.gov/MLKRSVP.htm> .

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ...
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