

Legislation Re-Opens Healthy Families

On September 22, 2009, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed AB 1422 into law. AB 1422 provides financing to offset the Healthy Families Program's \$194 million budget shortfall. Authored by Assembly Speaker Karen Bass, it will prevent nearly 700,000 children from losing health insurance provided through the Healthy Families Program.

Adding to a generous donation of \$81.4 million from First 5 California earlier this summer, AB 1422 places a 2.35% tax on gross premiums for insurers who administer the Medi-Cal plans, replacing the 5.5% levy that was due to expire in October 2009. The tax will allow the State to draw down nearly \$100 million in federal funds. AB 1422 also increases copayments for emergency room visits, physician visits and prescriptions, and raises premiums from \$4 to \$7 per child beginning November 1st. The premium increase will not apply to families earning less than 150% of the federal poverty limit (\$27,500 for three).

The passage of AB 1422 means that the Managed Risk Medical Insurance Board (MRMIB) can lift the enrollment freeze imposed in July and open the program to new enrollment. Nearly 90,000 children were waitlisted between July and September as a result of the freeze.

The Governor also signed AB 1383 (Dave Jones, D Sacramento), which applies a coverage dividend fee on hospitals. As a result of the fee, California will be able to draw down nearly \$2.3 billion in federal funds to increase Med-Cal reimbursement rates and support children's healthcare coverage. California's Medi-Cal reimbursement rates are among the lowest in the country, and the bill was strongly supported by public and private safety net hospitals throughout the State. Additional legislation is needed to implement the bill, but advocates see it as an opportunity to support children's coverage.

South LA's Nutritional Resource Environment

Grocery Store Construction Comes to South LA!
Tesco, the British food retailer, will open a 14,000 square foot *Fresh & Easy Neighborhood Market* on Crenshaw and 52nd Street in South LA. Regional Director Walter Cathey made the announcement at CHC's September Food Resource Development Task Force meeting, confirming the third Fresh & Easy market in South Los Angeles after the Adams/Central and Compton locations. The Ford dealership that had been on the site has already been razed. Construction on the new store should be completed by Fall 2010.

The action follows many meetings between CHC's Food Resource Development Coalition and executives from Fresh & Easy, the Community Redevelopment Agency of Los Angeles, Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), and City Councilmembers Jan Perry and Bernard Parks. Earlier this year, CHC sponsored the first Southern California *Food Desert to Food Oasis Symposium* to promote retail food investment in South Los Angeles as a strategy to increase access to nutritious foods for better health. The opening of the Fresh & Easy Neighborhood Market demonstrates that there is major retail interest in South LA. The challenge becomes developing effective policy and financial strategies to attract healthier food retailers. The Fast Food Interim Control Ordinance, an idea inspired by the coalition's research, is one example of a strategy that can pave the way for retail investment.

Researchers Send Mixed Signals on Fast Food ICO
A recent journal article by the Santa Monica-based RAND Corporation dismisses LA's fast-food interim control ordinance as not impacting obesity. The article stated that South Los Angeles has no more fast food chains than any part of Los Angeles, including West LA, based on the number of stores. However, the study reinforces the research conducted by CHC in 2005 that showed South LA has more fast food

restaurants compared to West LA, a far healthier community, when you evaluate the number of fast food restaurants per square mile. The authors recommend that the City focus on policies that affect snack calorie sources since, the researchers assert, South LA residents' consumption of "high-calorie snacks" is "substantial."

Addressing obesity requires a comprehensive strategy: land-use policies are only one component. The RAND study appears contradictory in that it claims the ordinance "isn't a promising approach to attacking obesity," while it recognizes that "food cues in the environment ... types of food available ... are key issues that effective policies need to address." Despite the contradictory message, LA City Council members are now considering extending the fast food moratorium to include convenience stores to provide an opportunity to develop a rational plan for future development.

Using land-management policy is a long-term remedy to address health outcomes of a population. It is a relatively new public health strategy that looks beyond individual behavior and genetics and focuses on the impact of the resource environment. The RAND study failed to actually evaluate the ordinance or provide data to show whether or not it resulted in change. That suggests it may be too early to gauge the effectiveness of the moratorium.

For more information, please contact Gwendolyn Flynn, Community Health & Education Policy Director, 323.295.9372 x226 or gwen@chc-inc.org.

Martin Luther King Jr. Hospital

The Board of Regents for the University of California met in mid-September to discuss a partnership with the County of Los Angeles Department of Health Services in re-opening Martin Luther King Hospital. LA County presented an option for a possible collaboration in which the County would provide the financing while the UC system would staff the hospital with physicians. In preparation for this meeting, the Coalition for Health and Justice (CHJ) initiated a postcard campaign for the safe re-opening of the hospital. Seven hundred fifty signed postcards, many with personal notes from South LA residents, were presented to the Regents.

The next UC Regents Board meeting will be held at UCLA November 17-19, where the Board has committed to a thorough discussion of the plan, with the possibility of actively voting on the issue. Residents are invited to make their views known during the public comment period that starts at 8:30 am on both days.

CHJ continues to solicit postcards from the community and will begin mobilizing residents to attend the UC Regents Board meeting in Los Angeles. For more information, contact Korie White at 323.295.9372 x228 or Korie@chc-inc.org.

Efforts Continue in Baldwin Hills

Residents filled the auditorium at West LA College for a Town Hall meeting October 15th to voice their concerns about the Baldwin Hills Oil Field. Supervisor Mark Ridley Thomas sought community input as part of his motion to review the 2008 Baldwin Hills Community Standards District (CSD).

Personal testimonies included stories of atypical health conditions and demands for more health studies in their neighborhoods. Participants demanded the disclosure of the environmental data that PXP (operator of the oil field) calls "proprietary" and more study of property and hillside damage. Above all, residents expressed the need for independent experts to be part of the health and safety components at the field and the future CSD review team.

These latest efforts follow a year of advocacy that began after the passage of the CSD. Residents meet with the county planning department and elected officials; attend briefings and educational forums; outreach to their neighborhood associations; and participate in a Community Advisory Panel (next meeting: 10/29/09 7-9pm, Kenneth Hahn State Park Community Center, 4100 S La Cienega Blvd, LA 90056). With the Supervisor's motion and Town Hall as recent signs of progress, residents can look forward to future returns on their advocacy. To learn more about community efforts, contact Bethany Ulrich, Community Liaison, on x223 or Bethany@chc-inc.org.

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