



# Health Matters

A Health Policy Update

September 4, 2009

## Legislation Rescues Healthy Families

Advocates for children's healthcare breathed a sign of relief yesterday with the passage of AB 1422, legislation introduced by Assembly Speaker Karen Bass to generate funding for the Healthy Families Program. In a statement released after the bill's passage, Governor Schwarzenegger said he is "look(ing) forward to signing this bill for our kids."

The bipartisan agreement will raise \$97 million for Healthy Families through a temporary tax on health plans that will allow the State to draw down federal funds to keep Healthy Families going. The bill also increases monthly premiums modestly with very low-income families (those earning less than \$27,500 for a family of three) exempted from the increase.

The State First 5 Commission earlier in August generously donated \$81.4 million to help fill the Healthy Families Program shortfall, but this did not solve the entire \$194 million deficit Healthy Families faced. The shortfall forced MRMIB, the Healthy Families' administrator, to impose a waitlist on new enrollments starting in mid-July, adding over 70,000 children to the waitlist in six weeks.

To reduce program costs, MRMIB also adopted emergency regulations to modify Healthy Families. These included increasing co-pays for non-preventative health, dental and vision services from \$5 to \$10; copays for emergency room visits that do not result in hospitalization from \$5 to \$15; and limiting choices in dental service providers. The changes to premiums, copays and services will take effect in November 2009 for savings of \$16 million.

AB 1422, the California First 5 donation, and changes to the Healthy Families Program should allow MRMIB to reverse its decision to begin disenrolling children and hopefully lift the wait list so that all children eligible for Healthy Families can receive coverage.

## MLK Hospital Re-opening

The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously on August 18, 2009 to ask the University of California Board of Regents to enter into a partnership in order to re-open Martin Luther King Hospital in Willowbrook.

Under the plan, the UC system would provide physicians and medical services to reopen the hospital, but would not assume financial risk for the hospital's success. The County would contribute \$10 million per year for five years for start-up costs, \$28 million for a reserve fund, \$50 million for federal matching funds, \$13.3 million for indigent care. The plan calls for King

Hospital to reopen with 120 beds, an emergency room and a physician training program in late 2012. The Supervisors will present the proposal for partnership at the next UC Regents' meeting, scheduled for September 15-17 in San Francisco.

Community members, who showed up in full force at the August meeting, are heartened by the progress towards restoring healthcare services at the facility and are mobilizing a postcard campaign to encourage the Regents to fully commit to serving the residents and patients of South LA. The Coalition for Health and Justice will deliver these postcards to the Regents at the September meeting. For more information, contact Korie White at [Korie@chc-inc.org](mailto:Korie@chc-inc.org) or at 323.295.9372 x228.

## Support for Health in Baldwin Hills

Community members and health advocates in Baldwin Hills had much to celebrate in August as the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors and the LA Superior Court ruled in favor of community efforts to protect the densely-populated areas surrounding the Baldwin Hills Oil Field.

On August 4, 2009, the Board of Supervisors unanimously passed a motion put forward by Supervisor Ridley-Thomas that directs the Acting Director of the Department of Regional Planning to consider amendments to the Community Standards District, a set of regulations on oil drilling in Baldwin Hills. Amendments being considered include imposing controls regarding the abandonment of wells, establishing an end date for drilling, and revising the number of new wells allowed per year. Supervisor Ridley-Thomas's motion can be viewed at [ridley-thomas.lacounty.gov/Pages/Issues/baldwin\\_hills\\_drill.htm](http://ridley-thomas.lacounty.gov/Pages/Issues/baldwin_hills_drill.htm).

That same week, the Los Angeles Superior Court denied the motion put forth by the Baldwin Hills oil field operator, Plains Exploration & Production (PXP), to dismiss the four consolidated lawsuits filed against them. The lawsuits by Community Health Councils and other community-based and environmental organizations claim the County violated the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The suits seek more comprehensive environmental and health studies and stricter regulations on the oil field.

These recent events renew hope for stronger environmental protections for a healthier community. Please contact Bethany at [bethany@chc-inc.org](mailto:bethany@chc-inc.org) to learn more.

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**FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT**

**COMMUNITY HEALTH COUNCILS**

**323.295.9372 • [INFO@CHC-INC.ORG](mailto:INFO@CHC-INC.ORG)**