Children’s Health Summary

In 2008, the Children’s Alliance worked in collaboration with our Health Coalition for Children and Youth (HCCY) members to maintain and defend the Cover All Kids Law, which was passed in 2007. The law makes affordable, comprehensive health coverage available to every child in the state. This year we asked lawmakers to fulfill the promise of the law and maintain their commitment to covering kids to ensure we reach the goal of having all children covered by 2010.

Background

This year the Children’s Alliance supported policies and investments necessary to realize the goal of covering all kids and promoting access to health coverage and a medical home by the year 2010. While we continue to applaud our state’s law, we know that there is much implementation work to be done to reach our goal.

In early 2007, the Children’s Alliance and HCCY members identified the various components of the Cover All Kids law that would require ongoing advocacy and strong partnerships with the state agencies in charge of implementing the law. Multiple implementation committees were established with the state agencies to develop policy changes and Legislative reports that document the implementation efforts and strategies for achieving our goals.

Throughout 2007, the HCCY members played a key role in convening and recommending policy changes to the implementation workgroups at the state level – from Outreach and Enrollment, to designing a Medical Home model for children. These reports were submitted to the Legislature just prior to the 2008 session. The Medical Home report unveiled the policies and investments necessary over a five-year span to improve access to providers and high quality services for children. The outreach report informed Legislators about the community contracts set into place in each county, and the outreach strategies on the horizon that would help educate families, enroll children, and incorporate year-round health promotion messages.

In preparation for the 2008 Legislative Session, we developed a Cover All Kids Implementation Summary for legislators and community stakeholders. The report highlights the strategies and plans for successful implementation and identifies the essential next steps. The Children’s Alliance and HCCY advocated that one of the critical next steps to improving access is to fund the evidence-based medical home recommendations included in the Medical Home report.

What Happened

Heading into session, our children’s health priority was to ensure that the investments necessary to fulfill the promise of the Cover All Kids law would be included in the 2008 Supplemental Budget. HCCY developed a 2008 Legislative Agenda to push for secure investments in the medical home model. We also continued to advocate for a commitment to fund outreach and enrollment in the 2009 session.

Early in the Legislative Session, a joint Health Care Committee Work Session was held on the Medical Home report for children. HCCY member Kirsten Wysen
and HCCY chair Dr. John Neff presented with our partners at the Department of Social and Health Services about the importance of building a state-wide health improvement system to increase access to high-quality medical care for children. Dr. Neff and Ms. Wysen presented on the HCCY 2008 legislative agenda components, research on best practices, and recommended priority investments for 2009 to promote better access to providers and health services for children in Washington.

While the medical home funding was not included in the 2008 Supplemental Budget, the Legislature did make a few significant down payments on crucial programs and policies that can help improve the health of Washington’s children. Community organizations throughout Washington championed these priorities to promote the health of children and families in our state.

The Legislature passed the Health Insurance Information for Students bill (SB 5100). This law will pilot collaborative projects in six school districts to provide health insurance information to students when they enroll in school and link uninsured children to affordable health coverage. This is a critical step to help get every child covered by 2010 and has the power to enhance the outreach and enrollment efforts around the state.

The 2008 Supplemental Budget included an additional $1.25 million in the Health Professional Scholarship and Loan Repayment program. This program provides financial support to healthcare professions employed or seeking employment in clinics that serve a disproportionate number of uninsured patients in underserved areas of Washington.

The Legislature recognized that if we are to create healthier children and families, we must take the steps to create affordable, comprehensive coverage for all Washingtonians. Lawmakers this year passed and funded Senate Bill 6333 which will study various health reform plans and initiate healthcare discussion forums around the state to identify a health reform proposal that works for Washington’s families, businesses and providers.

Finally, the Legislature recognized that we cannot create healthier children if their toys, products and clothes are making them sick. This year, Washington passed the nation’s most comprehensive Children’s Safe Products bill, House Bill 2647. Our state’s children will be protected from harmful toxins for generations to come thanks to the passage of this law. The Governor signed this bill after vetoing a section that would require the Department of Ecology to adopt rules by 2010. Instead, the Governor emphasized that it was important to focus on identifying the chemicals of high concern for children by 2009 first.

Even with this veto, the law is still the most comprehensive law of its kind in the country.

**Next Steps**

The Cover All Kids law continued to enjoy bipartisan support and strong interest in its successful implementation during the 2008 session. The investments made towards creating healthier environments for children and improving access to care are good for children and families around the state. However, successful outreach and enrollment campaigns need sustainable funding sources. In the 2009-2011 budget, we need to secure the funding for Medical Home payments and incentives as outlined in the Medical Home report. We look to the 2009 session to continue our commitment to children’s health.

**Resources**

- **Children’s Alliance**
  www.childrensalliance.org

- **Medical Home Report**
  Implementation Summary
  HCCY Medical Home Legislative Agenda
  Final Outreach Report to Legislature

- **Detailed Bill Information**
  www.leg.wa.gov

- **Looking for Health Insurance?**
  www.parenthelp123.org