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New Study Shows Innovative Santa Clara County Health Program Closes Gap in Health Care for Children

Healthy Kids Program Is Model for 27 More Programs Across California

In the first comprehensive study of its kind, a research team led by Mathematica Policy Research found that Santa Clara County's Healthy Kids program—a health insurance program for children in low and middle income families—is closing a major gap in health care for county children. The Healthy Kids program is a model for 27 other counties in the state.

Since it was launched in 2001, Healthy Kids has insured nearly 30,000 children in Santa Clara County. The study focused on children in households with incomes below 250% of the federal poverty level and found that before enrolling in Healthy Kids, these children spent most of their lives uninsured: almost half (45 percent) had never had health insurance coverage of any kind, nearly two-thirds (63 percent) had had no health insurance during the six months before enrolling, and 13 percent had coverage only for emergency care.

Enrolling in Healthy Kids has a dramatic impact on children's access to health care:

- Once enrolled in Healthy Kids, the proportion of children with a regular doctor nearly doubles, from 50 percent to 89 percent.
- Healthy Kids greatly increases the proportion of children whose parents are very confident that they can get care for their children when needed (from 43 percent to 75 percent).
- The proportion of children receiving any doctor visit in the past six months (well child, sick child, or specialist) nearly doubles, from 30 percent without Healthy Kids to 54 percent with Healthy Kids.
- Healthy Kids reduces by more than half—from 22 percent to 10 percent—the proportion of children who needed physician care in the prior six months and did not get it.

The study also showed that Healthy Kids children are also far more likely to see a dentist for basic preventive care, fillings, and extractions. The proportion of children who had a cavity filled or tooth pulled in the prior six months tripled, from 15 percent without Healthy Kids to 44 percent with the program. Sixty-one percent of children with Healthy Kids had a preventive dental checkup in the prior six months, compared to 23 percent without.

Healthy Kids, a component of the Santa Clara County Children's Health Initiative, provides health insurance coverage to county children in households with income below 300 percent of the federal poverty level (\$58,000 for a family of four) who are ineligible for the two major state insurance programs for children, Medi-Cal and Healthy Families, because of their immigration status or because their family income is too high.

"Healthy Kids children are far more likely to receive needed medical and dental care on a timely basis, which may contribute to improvement in their health and reduce their medical and dental care costs over time," said Chris Trenholm, Ph.D. from Mathematica Policy Research, the lead investigator for the evaluation team. "Better health can mean better results in school."

The study compared the health care experiences over six months of children in households with incomes below 250% of the federal poverty level who had been enrolled in Healthy Kids for a year with the health care experiences over six months of a similar group of children newly enrolled in the program.

The study also provides the first detailed look at the program's recipients: 73 percent of Healthy Kids children are from two parent families and more than 90 percent live in a household with a parent who is working. Healthy Kids families have solid roots in the community: 43 percent had lived in the county for more than three years at the time of enrollment in the program. Only 19 percent had lived in the county for less than six months at the time of enrollment.

Results from the first phase of the evaluation of the Santa Clara County Children's Health Initiative, released in June 2004, showed that the creation of Healthy Kids also benefits children not enrolled in the program. The Children's Health Initiative coordinates a broad outreach campaign for all children that has boosted enrollment among children eligible for other programs. With this outreach campaign, Santa Clara County enrolled 28 percent more children in Medi-Cal and Healthy Families in the two years after Healthy Kids was launched. As a result, the initiative brought an additional \$24.4 million in state and federal health care dollars into the county in 2001 and 2002.

The effectiveness of Healthy Kids at delivering care and enrolling more children is expected to lead to long-term improvements in children's health, because children who regularly visit a physician have fewer adverse health care events. Untreated health problems can often result in costly emergency room visits and hospitalizations.

"Providing health insurance for children pays off now and later," said Leona Butler, CEO of the Santa Clara Family Health Plan. "It also provides tremendous peace of mind for parents and allows them to focus attention on other parts of their children's lives." Californians are in agreement on the need to increase coverage—a recent poll conducted by Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin & Associates showed that a significant majority of California voters want to expand health coverage to all children.

Santa Clara County's Healthy Kids program is at the leading edge of a trend among California counties to create programs to supplement existing state programs so that nearly all children are eligible for health insurance. Following Santa Clara's lead, nine other counties have already implemented similar programs. Along with Santa Clara, these programs currently insure more

than 71,000 children who were not eligible for any public program before—a figure expected to grow significantly as 18 other counties plan their own Healthy Kids programs.

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The Santa Clara County Children’s Health Initiative (CHI) is an innovative effort to expand health insurance coverage for children in the county. CHI has two parts: the first is a new insurance product, Healthy Kids, for children in families under 300 percent of the federal poverty level who are not eligible for the existing state programs, and the second is a comprehensive outreach campaign that finds uninsured children and enrolls them in the appropriate program. The evaluation of the Santa Clara County Children’s Health Initiative was funded by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and was conducted by Mathematica Policy Research and its subcontractors, The Urban Institute and the University of California at San Francisco. More detailed information on the evaluation of the Santa Clara County Children’s Health Initiative can be found at www.Mathematica-mpr.com/health/chi.asp.

Mathematica, a nonpartisan research firm, conducts policy research and surveys for federal and state governments, foundations, and private-sector clients. The employee-owned company, with offices in Princeton, NJ, Washington, DC, and Cambridge, MA, has conducted some of the most important studies of health care, education, welfare, employment, nutrition, and early childhood policies and programs in the United States. Mathematica strives to improve public well-being by bringing the highest standards of quality, objectivity, and excellence to bear on the provision of information collection and analysis to its clients.

The David and Lucile Packard Foundation is a private family foundation created in 1964 by David Packard (1912–1996), cofounder of the Hewlett-Packard Company, and Lucile Salter Packard (1914–1987). The Foundation provides grants to nonprofit organizations in the following program areas: Conservation and Science; Population; and Children, Families, and Communities. The Foundation makes national and international grants and also has a special focus on the Northern California Counties of San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, and Monterey. Foundation grantmaking includes support for a wide variety of activities including direct services, research and policy development, and public information and education. The Foundation does not make grants intended to influence legislation or support candidates for political office. Foundation assets were approximately \$5.3 billion as of March 31, 2005. General program grant awards totaled approximately \$217 million in 2004. The Foundation has a grantmaking budget of approximately \$200 million in 2005.