

Ten Ways Your Head Start Program Can Promote New Health Insurance Opportunities

As millions of Americans become eligible for health insurance in 2014, Head Start programs can play a vital role in making sure people learn how to get coverage and how to get help applying. In keeping with Head Start performance standards, programs are required to make efforts to determine children's health status and to help parents get a regular source of health care for their children. Making sure that Head Start children and their families are enrolled in health insurance is an important way to meet these goals.

Beginning in 2014, many more Head Start family members — including parents, older siblings and grandparents under age 65 — may qualify for coverage. The new Health Insurance Marketplace is the place to find information about how to apply for coverage, including Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Open enrollment begins October 1, 2013; as always, individuals may apply for Medicaid or CHIP at any time.

Here's how State and local Head Start programs can contribute to the outreach effort:

Spread the Word

1. State Head Start Collaboration Directors and State Head Start Associations can keep local programs informed about health insurance opportunities.

Work with state agencies such as the Medicaid agency and the Health Insurance Marketplace to get current, reliable information for families on health coverage eligibility and getting help applying. The state Medicaid agency may be able to share information on where Head Start families can find application assistance in their communities.

2. Offer information about health insurance opportunities in Head Start centers.

Display consumer materials from HealthCare.gov explaining the basics of Medicaid, CHIP and coverage through the Health Insurance Marketplace. Include eligibility and enrollment information in newsletters and other take-home items.

3. Post information on the Head Start website.

Post the **Health Insurance Marketplace** widget on the Head Start Program website.

4. Include health coverage messages when talking with Head Start families about children's health.

Talk about the availability of health insurance whenever Head Start staff is focusing attention on a child's health — when you are providing immunizations, conducting dental and vision screenings, or discussing developmental milestones. Head Start children may already be enrolled in Medicaid, but parents and other family members may not realize that they now may qualify.

5. Build on the Head Start intake process.

Add information about the value of health insurance and the about eligibility for Medicaid and other health insurance eligibility to recruitment, intake and orientation materials. Let families know how to get help applying for health coverage and plan to offer help at the Head Start program.

6. Focus on health coverage opportunities at parent meetings.

Invite local health coverage experts to parent meetings to share news about new health coverage opportunities and how to enroll. Ask for a speaker who can answer questions about eligibility, benefits, access to providers and other pressing concerns.

Help Head Start Families Apply for Health Coverage

7. Partner with community organizations that help people apply.

Connect Head Start families with community health centers and health departments that are likely to be able to offer application assistance.

8. Bring application assistance on site.

Arrange for trained helpers to provide application help at the Head Start program. Helpers may have laptops; or the Head Start program may be able to make a computer station available. All states will have online applications, and people will also be able to apply by phone, by mail or in person.

9. Take advantage of available state training so that Head Start health or social service staff can offer families help.

Identify staff to become trained, especially in large Head Start programs, so families can get enrolled at Head Start and can get help when it's time to renew coverage.

Promote Promising Practices

10. Share successful ideas among Head Start programs throughout the state.

Collect strategies Head Start programs are using to inform families about health insurance and to help get them enrolled. Present in statewide training sessions and through other channels that reach Head Start agencies in other states. Include successful approaches in Head Start handbooks and consider making them standard operating procedure.

For more information about the Marketplace

Visit [HealthCare.gov](https://www.healthcare.gov), or call the Health Insurance Marketplace Call Center at **1-800-318-2596**. TTY users should call 1-855-889-4325.

Visit [Marketplace.cms.gov](https://www.marketplace.cms.gov) for Marketplace widgets and badges and other partner materials.