

# 10 Ways Your Head Start Program Can Promote New Health Insurance Opportunities

Beginning Nov. 1, 2016, Americans across the country can enroll in an affordable, quality health plan for 2017. Head Start programs can play a vital role in making sure people learn how to get coverage and help applying. In keeping with the Head Start Program 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.

Many Head Start family members — including parents, older siblings, and grandparents under age 65 — may qualify for coverage. The 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 Nov. 1, 2016 and ends Jan. 31, 2017. As always, individuals may apply for Medicaid or CHIP at any time.

If parents bought a private health insurance plan through the Marketplace in 2016, the Marketplace will automatically enroll them in their 2017 plan or a similar plan. This means that parents **don't have** to do anything and 2017 coverage will start on Jan. 1, 2017. Parents can also renew their current plan themselves or enroll in a different plan for 2017, no matter what kind of plan they had in 2016—even if automatic enrollment has already occurred.

Head Start staff should learn about health insurance opportunities, too! Health insurance can help you stay healthy so that you can take good care of yourself, your family, and the children who are counting on you.

**Here's how** Head Start programs can contribute to the outreach effort:

## Spread the Word

1. Head Start State Collaboration Offices 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 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 your Head Start centers. Connect families with the Health Insurance Marketplace Call Center to get questions answered and for help with applications. Display consumer materials from [HealthCare.gov](http://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 your Head Start website. Add [widgets and banners](#) from the Health Insurance Marketplace to your program's website.
4. Include health coverage messages when talking with Head Start families about **children's health**. During intake, while on a home visit, or in your parent newsletter, talk **about the availability of health insurance whenever staff is focusing attention on a child's health**. Head Start children may already be enrolled in Medicaid, but parents and other family members may not realize that they could qualify. For more information, please visit [www.HealthCare.gov](http://www.HealthCare.gov) or [www.CuidadoDeSalud.gov](http://www.CuidadoDeSalud.gov), or <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/health/health-care>.
5. Build on the Head Start intake process. Add information about the value of health insurance and eligibility for Medicaid and other health opportunities to recruitment, intake, and

orientation materials. Let families know how to get help applying for health coverage and plan to offer help at your Head Start program.

6. Focus on health coverage opportunities at parent meetings. Invite local navigators or certified application counselors (CACs) 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 in-person application help at the Head Start program. Local navigators or CACs 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 CACs, especially in large Head Start programs, so families can enroll in a health insurance plan at their Head Start center. These staff also **can get help when it's time to** renew coverage. Information on how to become a CAC is available at <http://marketplace.cms.gov/technical-assistance-resources/assister-programs/cac.html>.

## Promote Promising Practices

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

Visit [HealthCare.gov](http://HealthCare.gov) or [CuidadoDeSalud.gov](http://CuidadoDeSalud.gov) for more information, 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](http://Marketplace.cms.gov) for Marketplace widgets and badges and other partner materials.