



Keep kids covered: Congressional inaction threatens ALL Kids coverage for Alabama children

Federal funding for the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) has expired, and health coverage for millions of American kids is at stake. Despite a history of strong bipartisan support, Congress allowed a Sept. 30 deadline to pass without renewing federal funding for the program, which offers affordable coverage for children whose low- and moderate-income families don't qualify for Medicaid.

CHIP covers about 150,000 children across Alabama, through both ALL Kids and Medicaid. ALL Kids officials say they have enough funding on hand to maintain coverage until early 2018. But continued uncertainty in Congress may force Alabama to start sending termination letters to many ALL Kids families as soon as next month.

ALL Kids has been a huge success story for Alabama. It was the first plan in the country to win federal approval after Congress authorized the creation of state CHIPs in 1997. Alabama's uninsured rate for children at that time was 14 percent. Two decades later, that rate is less than 3 percent. It's a proud achievement that affirms ALL Kids' consistent performance as a national model program. Alabama also has benefited recently from extra CHIP funding through the Affordable Care Act (ACA). A temporary boost in federal matching funds under the ACA has meant that Alabama has not had to contribute any state money toward CHIP for the past two years. The future of this boost is another question Congress faces on CHIP's funding.

Failure to renew CHIP funding would put children and families at risk:

- Nearly 9 million children nationwide, including more than 150,000 in Alabama, receive essential health coverage through CHIP.
- Families pay a reduced, income-based premium for CHIP, which keeps health coverage in reach for families who otherwise couldn't afford insurance.
- The threat of lost coverage puts unnecessary strain on hard-working families.

BOTTOM LINE: Congress needs to lift the cloud of uncertainty over children's health coverage and renew full CHIP funding for five years.