

Officials to launch new children's health insurance initiative

BY STACEY SHEPARD, Californian staff writer
sshepard@bakersfield.com | Monday, Oct 27 2008 6:16 PM

Kern County Supervisor Michael Rubio will announce a new program today aimed at increasing the number of uninsured Kern children who are enrolled in low-cost healthcare programs.

More than \$600,000 in First 5 Kern funds will be designated to pay individuals at health clinics and family resource centers who successfully enroll or renew applications for children that qualify for the Medi-Cal, Healthy Families and Healthy Kids programs.

About 27,000 Kern children have no medical insurance and most qualify for Medi-Cal or Healthy Families, according to Rubio.

Funding to enroll children in insurance programs was previously provided by the state but eliminated in budget cuts several years ago, Rubio said.

On top of that, the state recently made it more difficult for children to remain insured by requiring a renewal application every six months instead of annually, he said.

The county program is the first of its kind in the state to provide incentives to workers who assist families with the reapplication process.

"We've found funding to maintain the insurance for all these children," said Rubio.

Rubio, a First 5 Kern commissioner, created a task force two years ago to determine how to help uninsured children following state funding cuts for enrollment outreach.

The Children's Health Initiative and the Kern County Department of Public Health collaborated in the effort.